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# 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](#).

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 (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.

**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.**

## ELK

Hunters should place greater emphasis on riparian forest habitats and agricultural areas throughout the district. Many of District 12's elk reside on private land, so make sure you have permission before you hunt.

GMU 460 (Snoqualmie) provides good hunting opportunities in areas of the unit. However, 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. Hunters should network well in advance to gain access to hunt these 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 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. Preseason 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 (see above) 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. Hunters should be prepared for up to a 2,500-foot elevation change and steep terrain in this unit. 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 2020 season, 10 any bull tags and 12 antlerless elk tags are available for hunters through the draw system.



Elk in GMU 485 – Photo by Mike Smith



Group of elk in GMU 454 – Photo by Mike Smith

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online here: [Elk Harvest Reports](#).

### **Elk hoof disease in Washington**

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased in southwest Washington, with some observations west of the Cascade Range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions that cause limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction – now known as treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) – suggests something different.

WDFW, with a panel of independent scientists, conducted diagnostic research that found these abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause digital dermatitis in cattle, sheep, and goats. Although this type of disease has plagued the dairy industry for decades, TAHD had never been documented in elk or any other hooved wildlife species.

Since then, WDFW has continued to work with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others through its Hoof Disease Technical Advisory Group and Public Working Group to develop management strategies for TAHD-infected elk.

## Hoof disease observations

WDFW seeks to document and respond to the diseases that affect elk health in our state. You can help by reporting limping elk or dead elk with hoof deformities.

### [Report limping elk or elk with hoof deformities](#)

## About TAHD

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:** Currently, 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 forcing them to walk through foot baths and cleaning and bandaging their hooves, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

## TAHD in Washington

WDFW has confirmed cases of elk afflicted with TAHD in 17 Washington counties, including King, but primarily in the southwest region of the state. Efforts to formally estimate the prevalence and distribution of TAHD indicate the disease is most prevalent in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and the western half of Lewis counties. In April 2018, WDFW confirmed the presence of the disease in Klickitat County – the first such finding in Washington east of the Cascade Range. WDFW detected TAHD in Walla Walla County in 2019 and in Kittitas County in 2020.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has confirmed TAHD in elk populations in both western and eastern Oregon. The disease has also been confirmed in Idaho and recently in California.

## How hunters and others can help

State wildlife managers are asking for help to monitor and prevent the spread of TAHD in several ways:

- **Leave hooves:** Scientists believe that treponeme bacteria may persist in moist soil and spread to new areas on the hooves of infected elk. For that reason, WDFW encourages hunters in 400, 500, and 600 series game management units (GMUs) to remove the elk's hooves and leave them on site. If you harvest an elk in a 100, 200, or 300 series GMU, where the disease is uncommon, please keep any abnormal hooves and report your

observation to the nearest [WDFW regional office](#). WDFW will work with you to submit the hooves for diagnostic testing.

- **Report elk:** You can help WDFW track TAHD by [reporting observations](#) of healthy or limping elk and dead elk with hoof deformities.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the spread of the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes or tires before leaving the area.

## Diagnosing and monitoring TAHD in elk

From 2009 to 2014, WDFW, the USDA National Animal Disease Center, and four other diagnostic laboratories collected hooves and tissue from 43 elk to find the cause of the disease. Biologists collected samples from elk in areas affected and not affected by the disease.

By 2014, all five laboratories identified treponeme bacteria in the diseased elk samples, but not in those from healthy elk. This finding provided evidence of the role of treponeme bacteria in causing the disease. A WDFW technical advisory group, composed of the State Veterinarian's office, state public health officials, university researchers, and other specialists independently reviewed and accepted WDFW's diagnostic research.

Since then, WDFW continues to partner with leading experts to better understand this disease and has initiated a [variety of field studies](#) to assess its distribution and prevalence, along with its effect on elk survival and reproduction. WDFW is also working closely with Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, which was designated by the legislature in 2017 as the state lead in assessing the causes and potential solutions for elk hoof disease.

Several links to more information are available on the [WDFW website](#).

## DEER

WDFW has not conducted population surveys for several years throughout District 12 due to funding and staffing limitations. However, hunting prospects are believed to be quite good on private and public lands where hunting is allowed from anecdotal observations and annual harvest statistics.

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. 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.

WDFW continues to manage deer in GMU 454 (Issaquah) with liberal seasons designed to prevent 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.



A black-tailed deer buck in GMU 454, damaging landscape plantings – Photo submitted to WDFW Image Gallery

GMU 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 for those willing to lace up their boots. 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.





A doe and fawn in King County – Photo by Mike Smith

GMU 466 (Stampede) is a patchwork of private, state, and USFS lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). It consists of second-growth timber, with some old growth on USFS lands. This unit has a lot of steep ground, with about 2,500 feet in elevation change. Be prepared for early winter snowfall, which has the potential of stranding hunters, but also the potential to improve success.

GMU 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 2020 season, five any buck tags in the Quality category and five 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 online here: [Deer Harvest Reports](#).

## BEAR

Bears inhabit areas of District 12, but like elk, many are on private lands. Hunters should ensure they have permission to hunt where they're interested. Berry production throughout the district was good this year. Bears are often at lower elevations early on before they move higher as the season progresses.



A bear in GMU 460 – WDFW photo

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics can be found 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 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 at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar/>. The hotline and website will be updated weekly beginning Jan. 1, 2021. Hunters must have a 2021-22 cougar license and tag to hunt cougar in April 2021.

## PHEASANT

WDFW 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 and quail 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. The weather experienced this spring combined with anecdotal observations collected this summer suggests healthy grouse populations this year.

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.



A male sooty grouse displaying on the Snoqualmie Tree Farm, GMU 460 – Photo by Chris Anderson

## EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE

While 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

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 river 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, see [Let's Go Waterfowl hunting](#).

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

District 12 is within the ceded area of several Northwest Treaty Tribes and tribal hunting. Tribes set their own seasons and bag limits. Tribal Enforcement personnel ensure tribal members follow hunting regulations, which are sometimes very different from state regulations.

More information about tribal hunting rights and state-tribal co-management is on [WDFW's website](#).

### **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, see page 90 of the [2020 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). There aren't many shooting areas in King County per county ordinances. Please contact your local sheriff for specific locations.