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Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



Photo by Brad Richard

2021 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 district in state. The district's western extent is associated with marine waters of Puget Sound and features a vibrant and varied agricultural land base. The lowlands support abundant wildlife in the Skagit Flats and the west side of Whatcom County, including diverse and large flocks of resident and overwintering waterfowl species.

The Skagit and Nooksack rivers are the two primary river systems in the district and 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 or 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. The Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park manage many of the 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 Cascades Mountains and support game species such as mountain goat, black bear, and black-tailed deer.



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. Additionally, portions of North Sound, Stillaguamish, and Cascade (GMUs 407, 448, and 450) are also within the district (Figure 1).

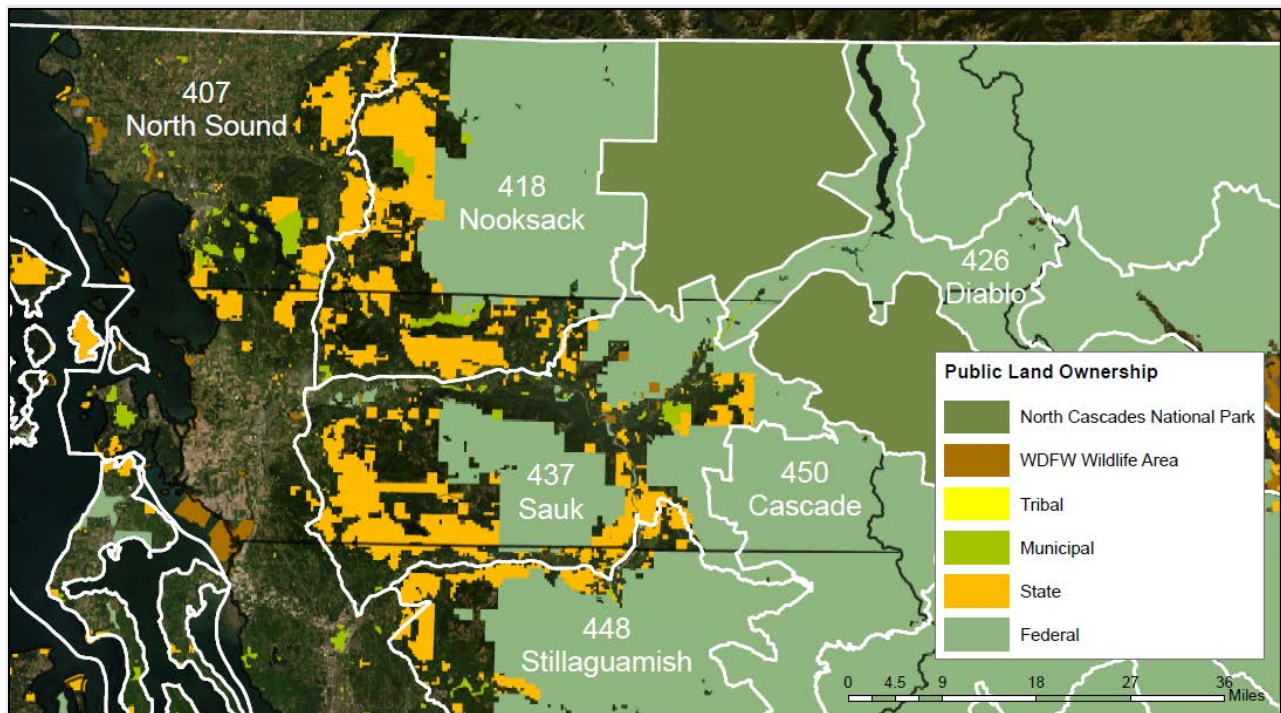


Figure 1. Game Management Units (GMUs) in Skagit and Whatcom counties

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 most diverse waterfowl species hunting opportunities in the state, including lesser snow geese, Canada geese, Pacific black brant, Harlequin ducks, 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 permit holders within the Mount Baker Wilderness Area.
- A unique opportunity to hunt black bear in GMU 418 during the spring, with access to extensive land behind private gates where bears are otherwise not disturbed by hunters.

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 2021 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet. Black-tailed deer, black bear, elk (GMUs 407 and 448 only), and cougar continue to provide over-the-counter tag opportunities in District 14. While elk (GMUs 418 and 437), spring black bear, and mountain goats opportunities are managed as special permit only hunts. This is due to the sensitivity of these populations to hunting, either because they are below population objective (elk), more vulnerable to harvest (spring black bear), or have lower reproductive rates (mountain goats).

Like most of Western Washington, District 14 does not host any native upland game bird populations and is not managed for these species. However, WDFW will continue to implement a pen-raised pheasant release program in Skagit and Whatcom counties in 2021–2022. Other game birds that WDFW manages collectively as forest grouse include the ruffed, dusky, and sooty grouse. Dusky and sooty grouse (formerly referred to as blue grouse) occur in District 14 and continue to have a long season from Sep. 1 – Dec. 31. A daily bag limit of four of any species and no more than three of one species remains the same as previous years.

Due to high overall population sizes and stable reproductive rates of waterfowl, states within the Pacific Flyway will continue to enjoy extremely liberal hunting seasons regarding the number of hunting days and bag limits. The decrease to a one-bird daily bag limit for Northern Pintail will continue into this season because the nationwide change was in response to population estimates below established threshold limits.

In the district, all hunters are required to apply for and possess a special migratory bird authorization when hunting lesser snow geese, Pacific brant, and sea ducks, which include harlequin ducks, surf, white-winged, and black scoters, long-tailed ducks, and common and Barrow's goldeneye. Additionally, a harvest report card must be submitted by each hunter by March 20, 2022, regardless of harvest success. Please reference page 18 in the [Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information on these Authorization and Harvest Record cards.

ELK

The North Cascades (Nooksack) elk herd continues to grow and expand into areas of formerly unoccupied habitat, including agricultural areas where elk-related damage to crops can occur. Based on the post-hunt survey conducted in spring 2020, the estimated population size of the North Cascades herd within the herd's core area is approximately 1,500 animals. The 2020 survey indicated a bull-to-cow ratio of 22 bulls per 100 cows, just above the WDFW objective of 12–20 bulls per 100 cows. The calf-to-cow ratio was estimated at 37 calves per 100 cows. A calf-to-cow ratio of 40 calves or greater per 100 cows is considered excellent calf recruitment.



Hunter stands with the mature bull elk he harvested – Photo by Ernie Garbe

Although the North Cascades elk herd population continues to increase, the WDFW population objective of approximately 2,000 elk has not been met. Since establishing a very limited hunt of this population in 2007, hunting opportunities have been few but are increasing. The current harvest strategy provides some recreational and damage-related harvest while allowing the population to continue to grow.

The North Cascades elk herd offers one of the premier special permit bull elk hunting opportunities in Western Washington. Archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm hunters that are 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).

The annual harvest success rate since 2007 has been high, ranging up to 100% depending on the hunt method type, due to limited hunting pressure and lengthy seasons. In 2020, the harvest success rate in GMU 418 for all hunt method types combined was 79%, with 23 of 29 permit holders harvesting a bull elk. In Elk Area 4941, 12 of 21 permit holders harvested a bull elk for a 57% success rate. Note that beginning with the 2021 season, all of GMU 437 is available to elk special permit hunters.

The WDFW Private Lands Access program has partnered with Sierra Pacific Industries to provide access to their properties within GMU 418 for all elk special permit holders who draw a tag for GMU 418. This program will provide information about access to these lands to permit holders prior to the 2021 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.

Hunters who draw a special permit in GMU 437 are no longer restricted to hunting in Skagit Valley within the boundary of the former Elk Area 4941. 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. Securing access to private property can increase your chances of success in this GMU.

Master Hunters, youth, seniors, and hunters with disabilities 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 2020, eight of 15 permit holders harvested a cow elk for a 53% success rate. All Special Permit holders for GMU 437 will be mailed a letter with necessary information regarding hunting on private land in Skagit Valley prior to the 2021 hunts.



Photo by Robert Waddell

General season harvest opportunities for any elk in GMU 407 (North Sound) in Skagit and Whatcom counties and that portion of GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) in Skagit County 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. Hunters seeking public lands opportunities for these general season elk hunts should visit the [WDFW Hunt Regulations Web map](#) for more information.

GMU 407 tends to have greater numbers of elk than GMU 448, but access to private property may be key 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 more likely to harvest an animal. When hunting Van Zandt Dike, hunters should be aware of the DNR property boundary and not cross onto private property (without permission) or into GMU 418.

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). Hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), a tool that provides information on Washington's 2021–2022 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. Though other conditions can result in limping or hoof deformities, WDFW research conducted from 2009–2014, in conjunction with review by 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 distant from the core affected area, including the North Cascades elk herd. Although TAHD is present in elk in District 14, it does not appear to be as common here as it is in southwest Washington. 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, 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 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 ways to treat it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but this is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

WDFW is implementing an incentive-based pilot program in 2021 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 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 waterproof license holder.



An elk hoof with elk hoof disease is examined by a biologist

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
- **Report elk observations** of both 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 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, visit [WDFW's website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.

DEER

WDFW is not currently conducting black-tailed deer surveys 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 quite high local deer densities that cause damage to private properties.



A female black-tailed deer and her fawn feeding in a field in Skagit County in fall 2020 – Photo by Brent Moran

Hunters reported a total of 870 harvested deer during the 2020 general season in the primary GMUs within District 14 (GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437), a slight decrease from the 924 deer harvested during the 2019 season. From a hunting perspective, GMU 407 provides the best opportunity for successfully harvesting a deer in District 14. In 2020, 576 deer were harvested in GMU 407 during the general season hunts, similar to the 573 deer harvested in 2019. The next best option for hunters is GMU 437, with 199 deer harvested in 2020. 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 2021 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 a quality buck during the rut. Permit hunter success rates during the 2020 season were 12% (GMU 418), 12% (GMU 437), and 20% (GMU 426) for hunters who participated. Sixty tags were issued, and hunters reported harvesting a total of eight bucks for a 13% success rate overall.



A young black tailed deer – Photo by Stephanie Pelham

WDFW was able to negotiate access to Sierra Pacific properties for six of the 25 permit holders in GMU 418 during the 2020 season and likely will provide the same opportunity for 2021 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 Mount Baker Wilderness in GMU 418 and Glacier Peak Wilderness in GMU 437 are open for the high buck hunt from Sep. 15 – 25. These areas can be accessed by using USFS roads and trail systems.

Within District 14, some hunting opportunities exist on private industrial timberlands and property managed by Washington DNR. However, these areas are mostly gated due to timber theft, dumping, vandalism, and other problems. 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](#), a tool that provides information on Washington's 2021–2022 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 has documented an outbreak of Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) in black-tailed deer in several island GMUs within District 13. 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 the virus more likely 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 and then detected on Orcas and San Juan Islands during May and June 2021. The disease now appears to be impacting deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart Islands. WDFW also has investigated several deer mortalities on Whidbey Island, with deer displaying symptoms consistent with AHD. However, official lab results from these investigations, which may or may not confirm AHD, are pending. As of July 2021, WDFW has not confirmed AHD in deer in Skagit or Whatcom counties. However, District 14 biologists are actively monitoring for this disease in mainland deer populations.

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people – either 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 try and 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 usually does so within three to five days of contracting it.

If you see a deer that is displaying any of these symptoms, please report the location of the sighting on [WDFW's Dead, Sick, or Injured Wildlife reporting page](#). For more information on AHD, please visit the [Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease \(AHD\)](#) section of our website.

BEAR

Black bears are common in District 14, though a formal estimate of the district's bear population is unavailable. Black bears live in a diverse array of 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.

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.

A total of 172 bears were reported harvested during the fall 2020 hunt in GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437, a slight decrease from the 199 bears harvested during the 2019 season. Over 1,500 hunters experienced an 11% overall success rate in the four GMUs. A harvest of 82 bears in GMU 418 was the highest overall.

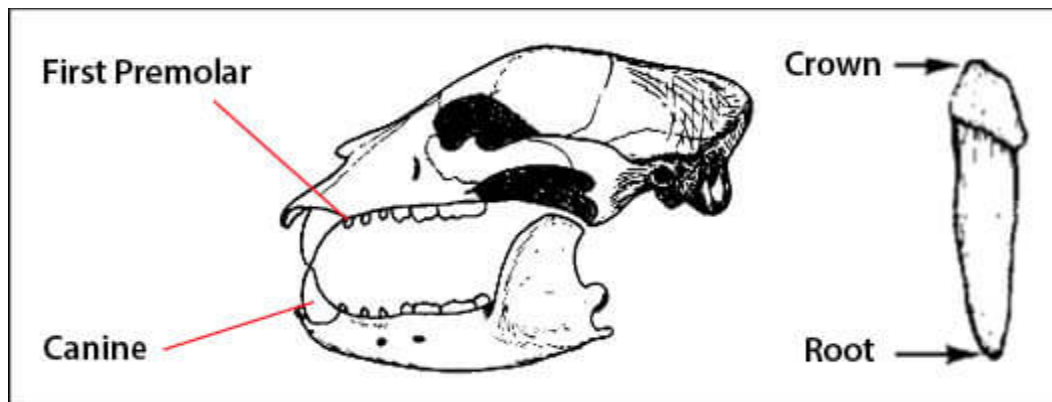
District 14 hunters that choose to hunt in GMUs 418 and 426 will be hunting in a grizzly bear recovery area identified by WDFW. Before hunting, hunters must successfully complete the annual WDFW online bear identification test and pass the exam with a score of 80% or higher. While hunting, people must carry proof that they have passed this test or an equivalent test from another state.



A black bear walks down a forest service road in the spring – Photo by Douglas Boze

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. Access behind gated roads is largely available to those willing to walk or mountain bike, and there are ample numbers of clear cuts with younger age class regeneration units that attract bears. Hunters willing to hunt fall bears in the early season and at higher elevations, and who are willing to hike in and pack out, can pursue bears in classic alpine environments where huckleberries, and thus bears, are more abundant and spot-and-stalk opportunities await.

All successful fall black bear hunters statewide **MUST** submit a black bear premolar tooth per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department by Dec. 1, 2021. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw. Tooth envelopes are available at all WDFW offices.



GMU 418 is one of the few Western Washington GMUs, and the only GMU in District 14 where a spring bear hunt is promoted to address damage caused by bears peeling young trees (primarily Douglas fir) on commercially managed forest lands. WDFW's Private Lands Access Program coordinates access for permit hunters to areas behind private gates where bears are otherwise not disturbed by hunters. In the past five years, hunters have harvested about eight bears per year, for an average annual success rate of 27%. Spring bear hunters are encouraged to be patient when evaluating a bear in the field to avoid shooting a sow with dependent cubs.

Bear hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), a tool that provides information on Washington's 2021–2022 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 a cougar while pursuing other game. 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 covered by a cougar harvest guideline. GMUs 418, 426, and 437 have a harvest guideline of 10 – 13 animals, and GMUs 448 and 450 have a harvest guideline of 8 – 11 animals. In those GMUs covered under a harvest guideline, WDFW may close the late hunting season after Jan. 1, 2022 if cougar harvest meets or exceeds the guideline. During the late season, cougar hunters may hunt cougar from Jan. 1 until the hunt area harvest guideline has been met and the GMU is subsequently closed by WDFW, or until the end of the season on April 30, whichever occurs first. It is the hunter's responsibility to verify 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, 2022. During the 2020–21 season, the cougar harvest did not exceed the guideline in these units, and they remained open throughout the season.

Hunters should remember that a 2021 hunting license is valid from April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022. Thus, a hunter wishing to hunt cougar in April 2022 will need to purchase a 2022–2023 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 must 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](#), a tool that provides information on Washington's 2021–2022 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more.

MOUNTAIN GOAT

The Mount Baker area continues to have one of the largest concentrations of mountain goats in Washington. Mountain goat hunting in Washington is a once-in-a-lifetime harvest opportunity and is a limited-entry tag that 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. A prospective hunter would be well served to scout the available units thoroughly to see if they are up to the challenge prior to applying for a hunt.

For 2021, 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 sole 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 be sharing these units with the winners of the statewide auction and raffle permits.



Photo by Greg Green

Statewide harvest success rates for mountain goats are generally 75% or greater in any year, and the Mount Baker area has produced some mature goats of exceptional quality. During the 2020 season, three males were harvested in Avalanche Gorge and one male was harvested in Chowder Ridge for an overall success rate for all three hunt areas combined of 67%.

WDFW strongly encourages hunters to refrain from shooting female goats (nannies). Although nannies can be legally taken by permit holders, mountain goats are slow to reach sexual maturity and display a slow production rate, thus they are very sensitive to the removal of adult females. Beginning in 2018, mountain goat hunt applicants drawn for a permit may only purchase their license after successfully completing the WDFW online mountain goat gender identification training. Additionally, please review the educational material sent to you if you draw a permit and make all efforts to harvest a male goat (billy).

A hunter who kills a mountain goat in Washington must present the head with horns attached for inspection within 10 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, the head/horns of a lawfully harvested mountain goat in Washington may be kept for personal use.



Hunter happily poses with his harvested goat – Photo by Brett Emmons

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 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 each year at about 27 sites throughout Western Washington. Like past seasons, pheasant releases will occur at four sites in District 14 this fall.

Whatcom County boasts three pheasant release sites located at WDFW Lake Terrell Wildlife Area, Alcoa Intalco Works, and British Petroleum Refinery. Releases are performed by volunteers on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday of each week during the season, with a total of 450–500 birds released each week between the three sites.

The fourth site in District 14 is in Skagit County at the Samish Unit. Releases will occur once before the youth hunt (Sep. 18–19) and the other before the senior hunt (Sep. 20–24). No further releases will occur after this. However, hunters may pursue the remaining on-site pheasants until the opening of the statewide waterfowl season (October 16; see page 19 of the [Washington 2021 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 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet and [WDFW's Pheasant Hunting webpage](#) for more detailed information.

FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed grouse and sooty (blue) grouse are found on public and private forest lands throughout District 14. Ruffed grouse are the most widespread species of grouse in the district, as well as statewide. They are most abundant in lowland secondary succession coniferous and deciduous forests under 2,000 feet of elevation. Hunters should seek higher elevation sites along trails and ridgelines above 2,000–3,000 feet within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands when targeting sooty grouse. Also, areas with berry-bearing plants like huckleberry, 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 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** was adopted by the WDFW Commission. The rule was recommended and subsequently adopted based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. In addition, the decision to set the season back was because brood hens are disproportionately vulnerable to harvest during this time, which this conservative strategy will alleviate.



A male ruffed grouse walking on the side of a road – Photo by Michael Schroeder

During the 2020 hunting season, hunters reported successfully harvesting 1,705 grouse in Skagit County and 1,038 in Whatcom County. Harvest increased 12% in Whatcom County compared to the five-year long-term average, which is probably a result of a 23% increase in hunter participation. However, in Skagit County, harvest decreased by 33% based on the same long-term average, despite a 10% increase in hunter participation. This makes it difficult to determine the potential causes of the decrease. For the 2021 season, hunters should expect the same reliable hunting conditions, just with a later start.

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 important for 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 wing collection barrel sites:

- Whatcom County - SE corner of the Welcome Grocery Store building (5565 Mt Baker Hwy, Deming)
- Skagit County – TBA (location will be along Hwy. 20 west of Baker Lake Rd, Concrete, WA 98237)

Please be sure to use the provided bags at the site and to fill out all necessary information. If these locations are not convenient 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 hunting in District 14 is low, with a little more than 100 birds harvested in each county last season and showing declines in catch per unit effort despite increased hunter numbers and the number of hunter days afield. 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, which are a non-native species. Also, because of its non-native status, hunters may pursue this species year round. Compared 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.



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 confuse 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. Eurasian collared doves are larger than mourning doves and slightly lighter in color. Aside from the diagnostic black collar on the backs of their necks, they also have a squared tail, while mourning doves have a pointed tail. Identification is especially crucial when hunting Eurasian collared doves outside of the mourning dove season to prevent accidental take of a species out of season.

Only a small game or big game license is required to hunt Eurasian collared doves. As for all hunting activities, hunters should confirm the area they plan to hunt 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 quite some time and are thought to be linked to decreases in hunter interest and participation. Hunting this species requires a little more tact than hunting other species in the pigeon/dove family. Finding areas that the birds pass over, what 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 come and go 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. Band-tailed pigeons have a strong attraction for the same areas, so scouting before your hunt will increase your chances of success. Additionally, the birds are also more difficult to bring down compared to mourning and Eurasian collared doves, so staying well hidden and reducing your movement when hunting is important to getting them in range and getting a good shot.



Adult band-tailed pigeon perched in a bird bath – Photo by Creative Commons

Every year, district biologists perform mineral site surveys in mid-July at historic mineral sites throughout the state. In District 14, there are currently two sites that are monitored in Skagit and Whatcom counties. Biologists use these surveys to monitor changes in the local breeding population which allow them to anticipate trends in the regional population. However, the open season (Sep. 15 – 23) usually corresponds with fall migration, when northern birds move into this area, making predictions about the quality of hunting this species difficult.

A small game license, state migratory bird permit, and migratory bird authorization card with band-tailed pigeon harvest report card are required, and 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, 2021.

WATERFOWL

YOUTH HUNT DATES: 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 on Sep. 25, 2021, in Western Washington, and Oct. 2, 2021, in Eastern Washington. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt. Please refer to page 10 of the [Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) pamphlet.

COMBINED YOUTH, VETERANS & ACTIVE MILITARY HUNT DAY: Open species include Canada geese, white-fronted geese, white geese, brant, ducks (including scaup), and coots. These hunts will be held statewide on Feb. 5, 2022. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt. Please refer to pages 19 and 25 of the Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Regulations pamphlet for bag limit details for this hunt.

DABBLING DUCKS

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, while Whatcom County ranks 7th in the state and 137th nationwide for waterfowl harvest. During last season, Skagit County remained the state's second-best duck harvest county (following Grant County), with a harvest of 50,735 birds, which is up 10% from the five-year average. However, we assume this is because of an almost 20% increase in hunter numbers and a 25% increase in days afield and not overall duck numbers. The Whatcom County harvest was 27,679 birds, up 11% from the five-year average and 47% higher than the previous season, equating to 10,320 more birds harvested! The increase is also attributed to the 21% increase in hunter numbers and 34% increase in days afield.

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 to the sport. Hunters are also 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.

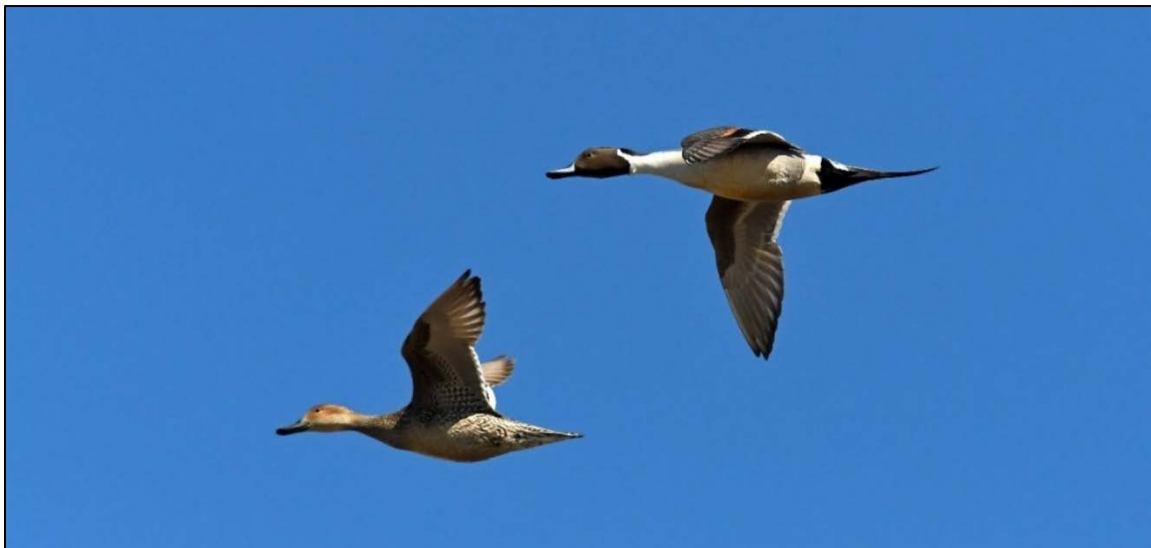


Adult male American wigeon flying to feed
– Photo by Ryan Askren

For the second year in a row, agency staff members and most other state/provincial and federal entities could not perform breeding surveys due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, weather conditions during early spring point toward suitable to great local production, but the lack of precipitation locally in June and July could negatively impact the survival of young into the hunting season.

Early season hunting opportunities in District 14 are generally more successful on the saltwater marshes. On opening day, hunters can expect a mixed bag of species, including blue-winged teal and wood duck, since they do not typically leave for their southern wintering grounds until later in the season. Large numbers of northern breeding ducks start to arrive in late October and November.

Bag and possession limits for Northern pintail were decreased last season from a two-bird daily limit to a one-bird daily limit. This change was made nationwide and is in response to lower than average population estimates. Although this district supports a large Northern pintail population, this is not typical in many other areas. This bag limit will continue for the 2021–22 season.



An adult female and male Northern pintail midflight on a clear day at the Island Unity – Photo by Alan Bauer

General season this year will run Oct. 16-24 and Oct. 27 – Jan. 30, 2022, except for scaup, which is only open from Nov. 6 – Jan. 30, 2022. Bag limits are restricted to seven ducks, to include no 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, bag limits should not include more than one (1) harlequin (only one (1) per a season), six (6) scoter, 6)(six long-tailed duck, and six (6) goldeneye.

Please be sure to acquire all the appropriate authorizations and harvest record cards required for the species/areas you are pursuing. For more information, refer to the [Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) pamphlet. In addition, authorizations and harvest record cards are available at WDFW license dealers or online using [WDFW's Wild System](#). Hunters must select each of the required harvest record cards for the species they intend to hunt.

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 at most harbors, including Blaine, Squalicum, and Fairhaven. Birch Bay State Park is also another popular access point for sea ducks and brant hunting. Boat access can improve hunting options and success greatly.



Adult male surf scoter swimming in Puget Sound – Photo by Ryan Askren

Like some dabbling ducks, all sea ducks have their own species-specific daily bag limit which can make up the total seven (7) bird bag limit. In Western Washington, the daily bag limit is one (1) Harlequin (and only one Harlequin per person per season), two (2) scaup, two (2) scoter, two (2) long-tailed duck, two (2) canvasback, two (2) redhead, and two (2) goldeneye. Refer to page 19 in the [Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) pamphlet for more details.

Immediately after taking a scoter, long-tailed duck, harlequin, or a goldeneye in Western Washington, a hunter must fill out their harvest card information in ink. The mandatory harvest reporting deadline for sea ducks is March 20, 2022.

PACIFIC BRANT

Skagit County has a historic and well-known tradition of Pacific brant (includes Black brant) hunting. Brant wintering in Padilla and Samish bays mostly belong to a race that nests in a small area in the western Canadian high arctic and are referred to as gray-bellies. Because of their limited nesting and wintering grounds, this population is vulnerable to excessive harvest. To prevent overharvest, aerial surveys of the wintering population are flown to determine a wintering population estimate. In the past, this estimate dictated whether there was a six-day season (if more than 6,000 birds were counted), a three-day season (between 3,000 – 6,000 birds), or no season at all (under 3,000 birds).



Brant loafing on a gravel bar in Puget Sound (Photo credit: Ryan Askren)

In 2019, the agency established a guaranteed two-day season for Skagit County to make it more predictable for hunters. Last year this strategy was used again, but the dates were split to optimize the potential for favorable weather. The Skagit County brant season will take place on Jan. 15 and 22. Additional season dates will be determined by the aerial survey results. Season updates will be provided by a WDFW news release. Hunters can subscribe to the [WDFW email list](#) to receive news releases and other Department information.

In Whatcom County, the population is made up of mostly black brant which are more abundant and less vulnerable to over harvest, much like the population in Clallam County. Therefore, the two have been grouped together and season dates have been set for Jan. 15, 19, and 22.

Both counties in District 14 are open for brant hunting on the special Youth, Veterans, and Active Military hunt day on Feb. 9, 2022. A special migratory bird authorization card is required to hunt both brant during general and special seasons. Lastly, the mandatory harvest reporting deadline for brant is March 20, 2022. Data obtained from these reports are important for managing this species.

CANADA GEESE

Mixed flock of cacklers and Canada geese getting up after feeding – Photo by Ryan Askren



Skagit County boasts the second-highest Canada goose harvest in Washington. This year, the early Canada goose season will occur Sep. 5–10 and offers early season hunting opportunities for hunters in both Skagit (Goose Management Area 1) and Whatcom (Goose Management Area 3; refer to page 24 of the [Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) pamphlet

for more detailed information about Goose Management Areas). During this early season, bag limits are five (5) per day, with a possession limit of 15. Higher limits are in place because early seasons are used to target and decrease the population of resident birds, while later seasons see an influx of migrant geese.

Regular goose season dates are different for Skagit and Whatcom counties and are based on their respective Goose Management Zone (refer to page 24 of the [Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) pamphlet). Possession bag limits during this season decrease to four (4) per day, with a possession limit of 12 birds.

The mandatory harvest reporting deadline for Canada geese harvested in Washington is March 20, 2022.

LESSER SNOW GEESE

Snow goose hunting is another mainstay of waterfowl hunting in District 14 and provides a very different alternative to hunting dabbling ducks. New this year is the addition of Whatcom County to Goose Management Area (GMA) 1 and a liberal bag limit of 10 white geese per day and a 30-bird possession limit. This change was made because the population is healthy and stable, which is evaluated using data collected on the breeding grounds and during wintering aerial surveys of the Skagit-Fraser River Delta.

Harvest of snow geese in this area last year increased and is predicted to do so this season. This increase is predicted to continue because recruitment in 2019 was very high, and that cohort is now sexually mature, which might result in another bumper year for juvenile birds in the 2021–22 season. However, this prediction will be heavily influenced by weather conditions and predator abundance on the breeding grounds.



A flock of snow geese erupting from a field in Skagit Valley – Photo by Ryan Askren

Hunters interested in harvesting snow geese should seek to gain 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 tend to stay within a several mile home range but will not necessarily return to the same field they were feeding in the previous day. Due to their large numbers and aggressive feeding, they tend to exhaust a food source very quickly. During the beginning of the hunting season, hunting in corn stubble is a popular technique. 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 continue to spend time in areas on either side of Interstate 5, north of Burlington, and the Edison area.

No changes have been made to this year's season structure for white geese (lesser snow, Ross', and blue geese) in GMA 1 except for the addition of Whatcom County to the GMA. Like last year, the 2021–22 season will include a late hunting season for white goose only from Feb. 12–22, 2022. One closure will be observed during the season from Nov. 29 – Dec. 10, to allow for the February hunt.

Hunters will need a federal migratory bird stamp (if over 16 years of age), a small game license, state migratory bird permit, and a special migratory bird authorization with GMA 1 snow goose harvest record card. These must be reported online at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login> before March 20, 2022.



A flock of snow geese using a Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program site in District 14 – Photo by Rob Wingard

Hunters should note that many WDFW-managed lands will be closed to goose hunting during this late season opportunity (refer to page 24 in the [Washington 2021 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#)). All normal 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 many waterfowl species that could be confused with snow geese. Several thousand trumpeter and tundra swans reside throughout western parts of District 14 from mid-fall through spring. Waterfowl hunters must be able to tell the difference 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 both state and federal laws, it is illegal to harm swans in Washington state under any circumstances.



HUNTER ACCESS

Access on 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 limit access to walk-in only, while some do not allow access of any kind. With less hunting pressure, this can result in good hunting opportunities for those willing to use bicycles or hike behind locked gates when access of this type is allowed.

One exception to this is Sierra Pacific Industries, which owns significant private industrial timberlands in Skagit and Whatcom counties. For the 2020–21 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 spring bear permit holders.

Weyerhaeuser-Columbia Timberlands Corporation (Weyerhaeuser) has recently sold properties throughout northwest Washington to Hampton Lumber, and at the time of publishing the recreational access policies have not been finalized. This includes inholdings in Skagit and Whatcom counties.

Because much of the land in District 14 is private property, hunters should obtain permission to hunt from landowners and be mindful of where houses, livestock, and outbuildings are situated in relation to the areas where hunting will take place. Portions of District 14 GMUs are under firearm restrictions. Hunters should research land ownership and understand local firearm limitations prior to hunting.

The Private Lands Access Program has negotiated access for hunters on dozens of private properties throughout Whatcom and Skagit counties. For 2021, WDFW staff members have enrolled several sites for deer and elk general season hunting in GMU 407 and are pursuing more access opportunities. The program currently has over 60 sites available on private lands for the upcoming waterfowl season (30 in Skagit County and 29 in Whatcom). These sites offer either 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 will be enrolled in the Hunt by Reservation system. The use of a Register to Hunt site is very similar to a Feel Free to Hunt site (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 completed for the year. Many sites will not be open for opening day of waterfowl season. 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](#).



A prolific Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program site – 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 whomever books the reservation. To make a reservation on 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 be made beginning at 8 a.m., two weeks prior to 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 and access rules, as well as the program in general, 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 not every unit will be available on opening day.

In addition, the WDFW Private Lands program has developed and enhanced hunting opportunities on WDFW-managed lands. This includes five sites on the South Padilla Bay

(Bayview 1, 2, and 3) and Samish River (Edison East and West) parcels managed by the Skagit Wildlife Area.

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.

USFS 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 is currently in a planning process to decommission or abandon a significant portion of its managed road network on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Ultimately, this will further restrict vehicular access to upper elevation habitats for big game and forest grouse hunting.

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, BP, Nooksack, and Lake Terrell wildlife area units in Whatcom County. All these sites are managed for waterfowl and provide walk-in and/or 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



A standing corn field on the Island Unit – Photo by Alan Bauer

ISLAND UNIT

The Island Unit totals 268 acres, with approximately 140 acres managed for wintering waterfowl forage, including corn, fava beans, millet, mowed areas, and moist-soil plants such as smartweed and yellow nutsedge. Depending on the conditions, over half of the area may be flooded with sheet water, which enhances the area for foraging waterfowl and decoy hunting. Though accessible by boat only, the area is a very popular site for waterfowl hunting. Hunters typically launch from the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit boat launch or the Skagit County Parks boat launch under the Conway bridge.

Hunters should be aware that the tide gate has failed at the southern end of the eastern lobe. Efforts are underway to conduct an emergency repair, but it is unclear at this time when it will be completed. This tide gate failure has impacted our standard management and plantings in this zone, and if the repair is not completed before the hunting season, it is possible that water levels will be more variable than hunters have seen in past years. Thus, the ability to control the water levels will not exist and will be more driven by river flows and tidal variations.

SAMISH UNIT

The Samish Unit consists of 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, which were 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 is accessed from the parking lot located on Samish Island Road.

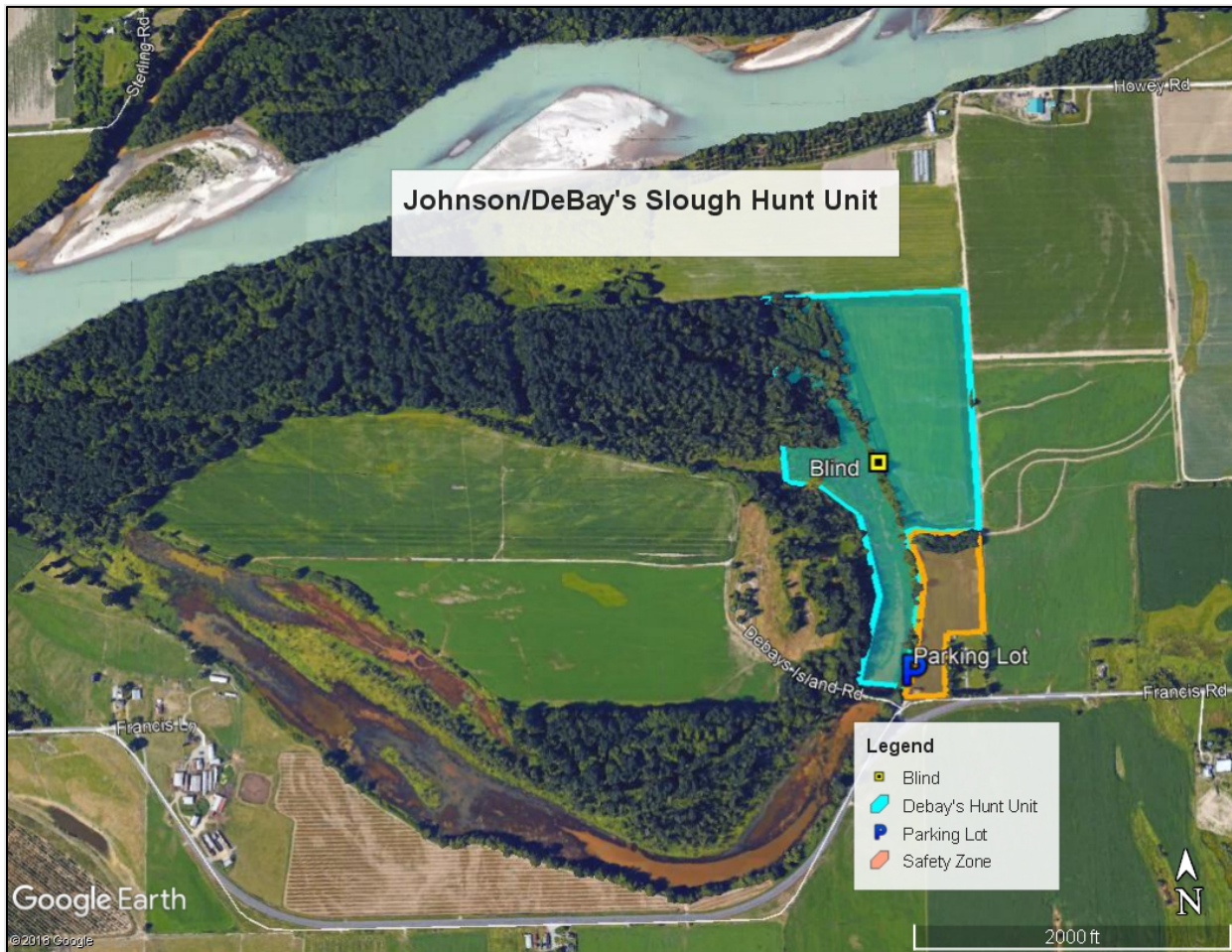


An empty blind at the Samish Unit on a nice fall day – Photo by Alan Bauer

This is a very popular site for waterfowl hunting, and all blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis. This summer, WDFW will be working with the Northwest chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association to update and install new blinds. In addition to the existing permanent blinds, temporary blinds will be installed that vary from year to year depending on crop plantings and water conditions. Be sure to check the map on site for the most updated information.

JOHNSON/DEBAY'S SLOUGH HUNT UNIT

The Johnson/Debay's Slough Hunt Unit is 23 acres and can be a very productive hunting site. The unit is planted with a mix of 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 depending on the plantings and water conditions. The blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.



SKAGIT BAY ESTUARY

The Skagit Bay estuary starts at the bayfront edge of the delta of the Skagit River (North to South Forks) and extends south towards Stanwood along the north shore of Camano Island or the South Bay area. A large portion of the first-class and second-class tidelands in this area 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.



Fir Island Farm Reserve – Photo by Robert Waddell

The Skagit Bay topography is quite diverse and 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 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 (WDFW) and Conway Launch (Skagit County). For information about walk in access options, refer to the [Skagit Wildlife Area webpage](#) for more details.



WHATCOM COUNTY

LAKE TERRELL UNIT

Lake Terrel Unit blinds –
Photo by Richard Kessler

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 on the lake which are all on a first-come, first-served basis.



One ADA-accessible hunting blind (photo below) was constructed by the Whatcom County Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association and is available by calling the Whatcom Wildlife Area Manager, Richard Kessler, at 360-739-3404.

TENNANT LAKE UNIT

The Tennant Lake Unit of the Whatcom Wildlife Area has three waterfowl hunting blinds that are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters can sign in on the day of the hunt at the sign-in box located at the top boat launch to let others know which blind they will be using. This site is reliably productive throughout the hunting season.



A view out of one of the three blinds at Tennant Lake – Photo by Richard Kessler

NOOKSACK UNIT



The Nooksack Unit is located south of Slater Road at the Nooksack River and 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 in corn and potatoes during the spring. Upon harvest, 10% of the corn crop is left standing to provide winter forage for waterfowl, providing for a high-quality hunting area. Instead of a corn and potato crop, barley was planted this year and will be left standing for waterfowl feed. About

10 acres of corn was planted in strips within the barley. There are several permanent hunting blinds and temporary stand-up blinds located within the farm field, with all blinds on a first-come, first-served basis. New this year is an ADA-accessible blind within a huge constructed pond on the unit. This blind will be available by calling the Whatcom Wildlife Area Manager, Richard Kessler, at 360-739-3404.

BP UNIT

The BP Unit is located north of the BP Refinery off Grandview Road. It has a couple of constructed blinds for waterfowl hunting which are first come, first served with no reservations. Some sheet water hunting in fields are also available after the pheasant hunting season is over.



Photos by Richard Kessler