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Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 15 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties

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DISTRICT 15 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 15 includes Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties and is one of four districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that makes up Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) 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 and mountain tops above timberline to marine estuaries at sea level in Hood Canal and Puget Sound.

A range of hunting opportunities are available in District 15, including elk, deer, bear, cougar, waterfowl, and grouse. A variety of small game species like rabbit, quail, coyote, and bobcat are also present. Table 1 shows estimates of harvest for most game species in District 15 during the 2020 hunting season and compares those estimates to the 2019 season and the five-year average. Find specific information on harvest trends in the appropriate species section of this document.

Species	Harvest		
	5-year avg.	2019	2020
Elk	40	41	32
Deer	1,820	1,612	1,845
Bear	77	117	97
Cougar	8	7	n/a
Ducks	4,588	3,134	n/a
Canada Goose	241	196	n/a
Snipe	81	11	n/a
Grouse	2,725	2,326	n/a
Mourning Dove	37	51	n/a
Quail	144	0	n/a
Snowshoe Hare	5	0	n/a
Cottontail Rabbit	65	110	n/a

Table 1. Estimates of the 2019, 2020*, and 5-year average annual harvest for most game species hunted in District 15 are shown. Waterfowl and small-game harvest totals were tabulated from all of Mason, Kitsap, and Jefferson counties. For cougar, only general hunting season harvest is shown. *2020 harvest data was not available for some species at time of printing this report.

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 WDFW 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 and by master hunter permit. Periodically, WDFW receives reports of an elk or two 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 to good. These units are usually within the targeted range for bull to 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 more than 300 elk. Although WDFW is 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.

For more detailed information on the status of Washington's elk herds, hunters can read 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 don't mind navigating the intricacies of hunting around small private land pieces, 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 2021, there are eight rifle permits, four archery permits, and three muzzleloader permits available. Each permit season provides additional days to hunt compared to the general season. Hunters should 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 adjacent valley ridges year-round or will migrate to summer range in Olympic National Park. Recently, some elk from the Duckabush herd have been moving southward to new areas between the Hamma Hamma and Duckabush Rivers. The Hamma Hamma group spends most of the year on land that the Hama Hama Company owns.. Elk in the Lilliwaup are generally non-migratory and spend the year in and around Lilliwaup Swamp. In the past, WDFW has observed elk movement from Lilliwaup Swamp northward 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. Elk also move between the upper Wynoochee River drainage and the North Fork Skokomish, which brings us to GMU 636.

GMU 636 is open to hunting by special bull permit only. In 2021, there are four rifle permits, three archery permits, and one muzzleloader permit 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 Skokomish River valley, and near the town of Matlock. Elk around Matlock and on the lower stretch of the South Fork Skokomish are primarily non-migratory. In the upper Wynoochee Valley, we've recorded elk movements into Olympic National Park during the summer, and occasionally elk over-winter in the North or South Fork Skokomish River valleys. WDFW has observed from this area moving as far south as the WDFW forage fields along the Wynoochee River.

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 three-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 District 15 (see Figure 1 below). Thus, actual hunting pressure in these units is greater and hunters looking for an elk in any of these GMUs could encounter tribal hunters.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2021 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 50% for archery, 45% for muzzleloaders, and 58% for modern firearm hunters. In GMU 636, muzzleloader hunters report the highest success at 80%, followed by rifle hunters at 57%, and archery hunters at 48%.

GMU 651 is open for general season hunting during the early archery, modern firearm, and late-muzzleloader seasons. Legal elk is three-point minimum bull except antlerless elk are legal in Elk Area 6061 for archery 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 and success in GMU 651 is presented in Figures 2 and 3. Cow harvest totals include master hunter permit harvest conducted to reduce elk damage to agricultural crops, but not other elk removals that may occur to reduce damage.

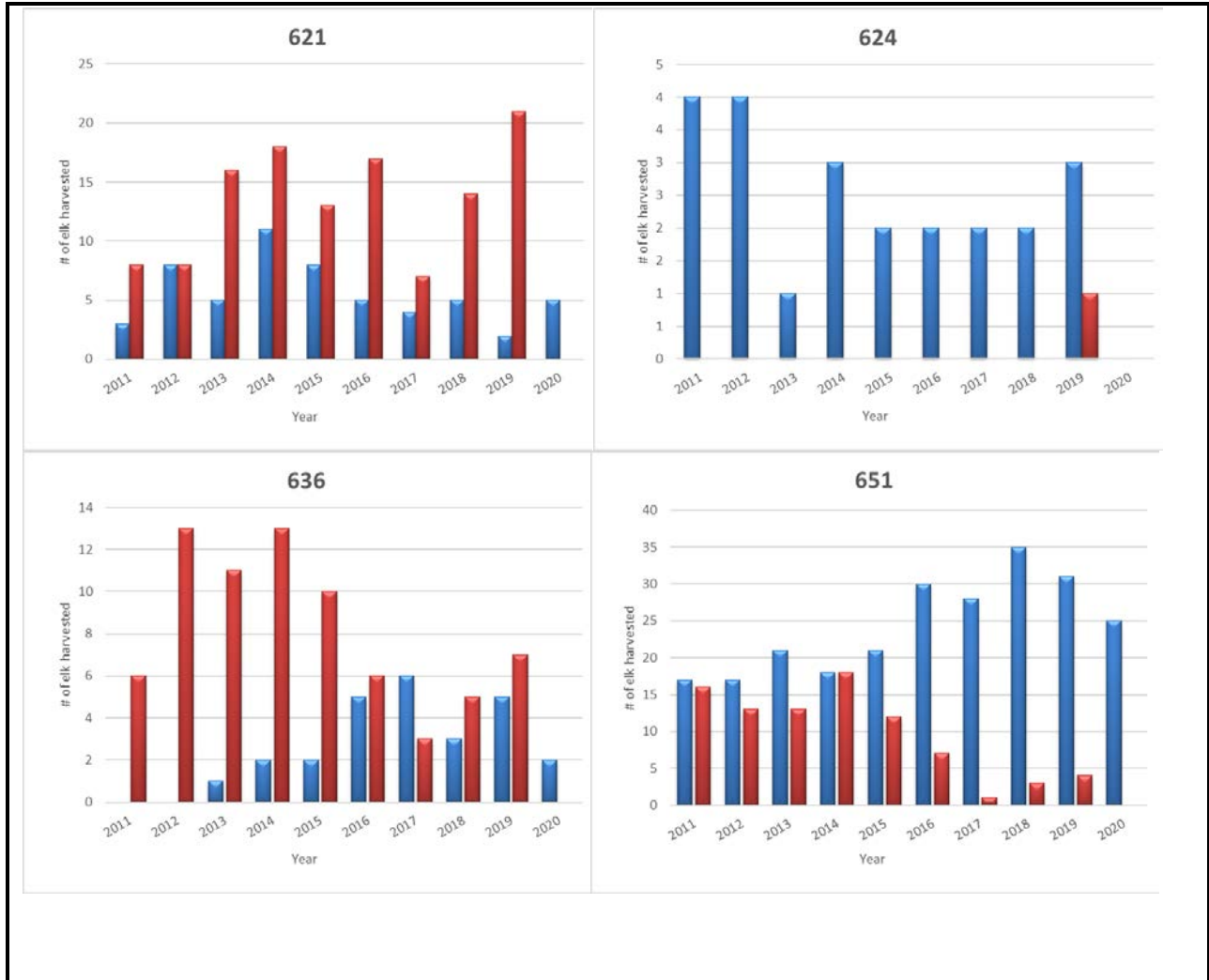


Figure 1. Total State (blue) and Tribal (red) elk harvest in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 during 2011–2020. Tribal harvest data for 2020 was not available at time of writing this report.

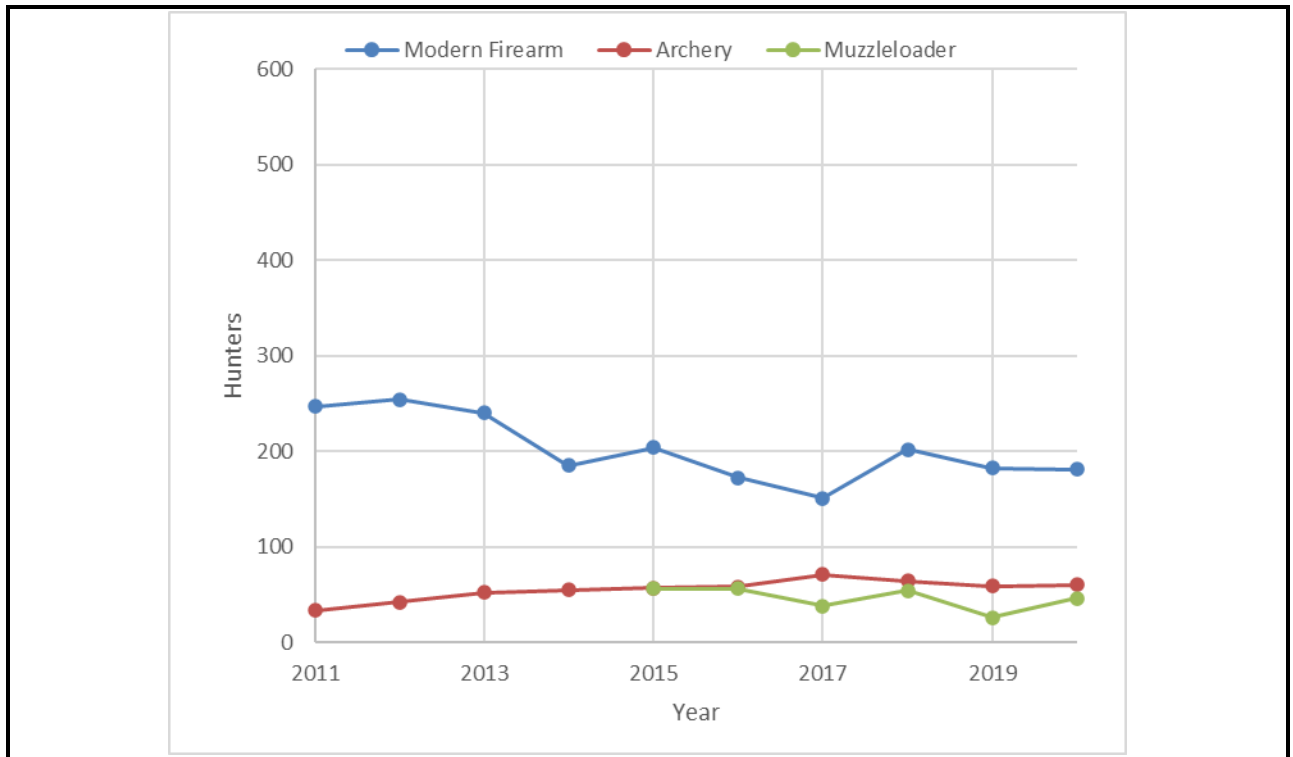


Figure 2. Elk hunter numbers during the general hunting seasons in GMU 651, 2011–2020.

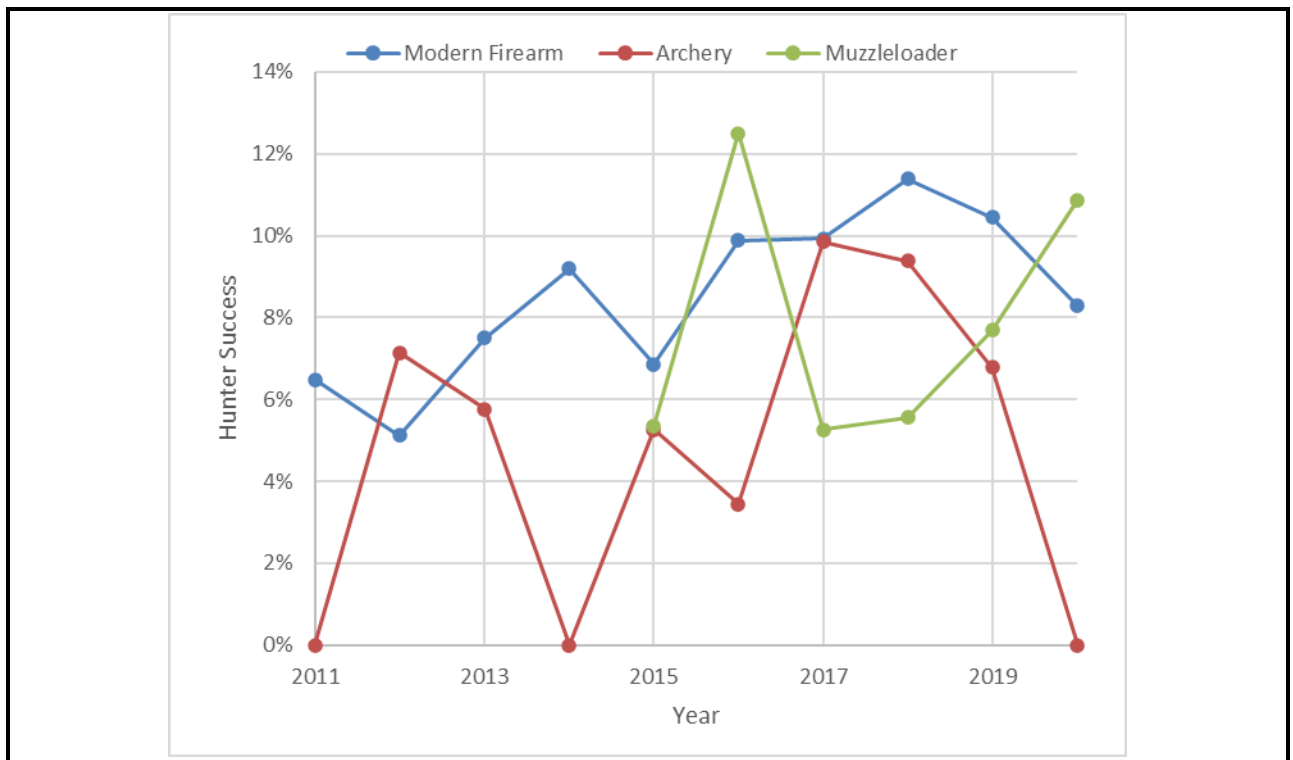


Figure 3. Elk Hunter success rates during general hunting seasons in GMU 651, 2011–2020.

ELK AREAS

There are two elk areas in District 15: Elk Area 6061 (Twin Satsop) and Elk Area 6071 (Dungeness). WDFW established Elk Area 6061 primarily to help address chronic elk damage issues and created Elk Area 6071 to limit elk hunting for safety reasons.

Current hunting regulations allow the harvest of three-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.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, WDFW has received increased 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.

All of District 15 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:

In 2021, WDFW is implementing 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 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 Sept. 1 – Dec. 31 will be awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

- 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 see WDFW's webpage on [TAHD](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

The number of hunting permits in GMUs 621 and 636 went up slightly in 2021 compared to 2020. All of these permit hunts include additional days for each weapon type. General season dates in 2021 will be similar to 2020.

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, the Department uses trends in harvest, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort as surrogates to a formal index or estimate of population size. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and the agency is currently evaluating new approaches to 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 read 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 that Green Diamond Resources owns will require an access permit. Good deer hunting can be found in lower elevation habitats in GMU 636, but deer density in this unit appears to decline at higher elevations.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2021 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 do not change dramatically from one year to the next, unless there is a dramatic shift in hunting regulations or access. Consequently, the best predictor of future harvest during general seasons available are recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success.

Figures 4 through 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 they want to hunt in District 15, as well as what they can expect to encounter with regard to hunter success and hunter numbers.

DEER AREAS

WDFW established Deer Area 6020 in GMU 624 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 WDFW did adjust permit levels for some hunts.

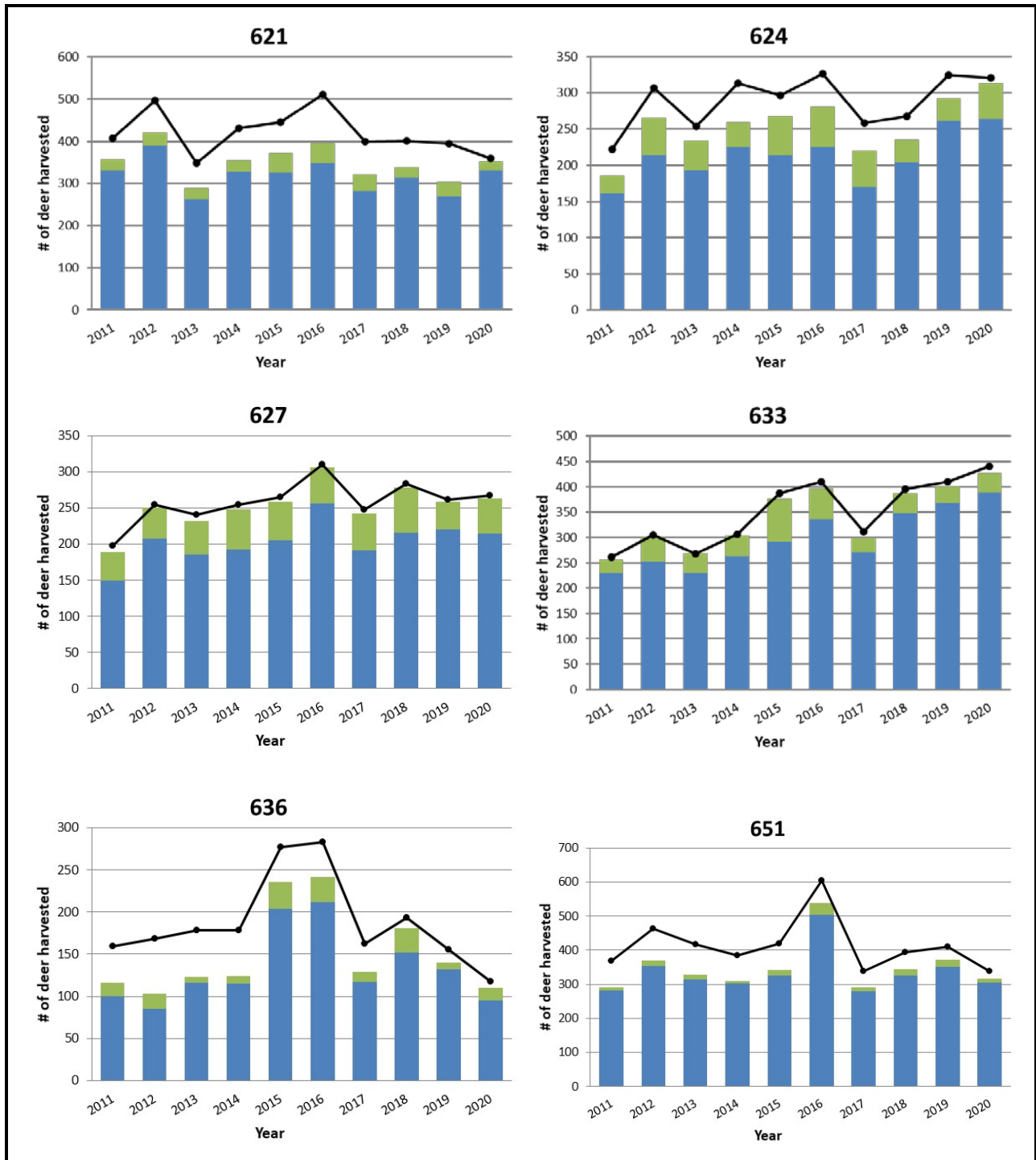


Figure 4. Trends in the total number of buck (blue) and antlerless (green) deer harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons combined, 2011–2020. Total deer harvest (black line) includes harvest from state general and permit seasons plus tribal harvest. Tribal harvest was not available for 2020 season at the time this report was written.

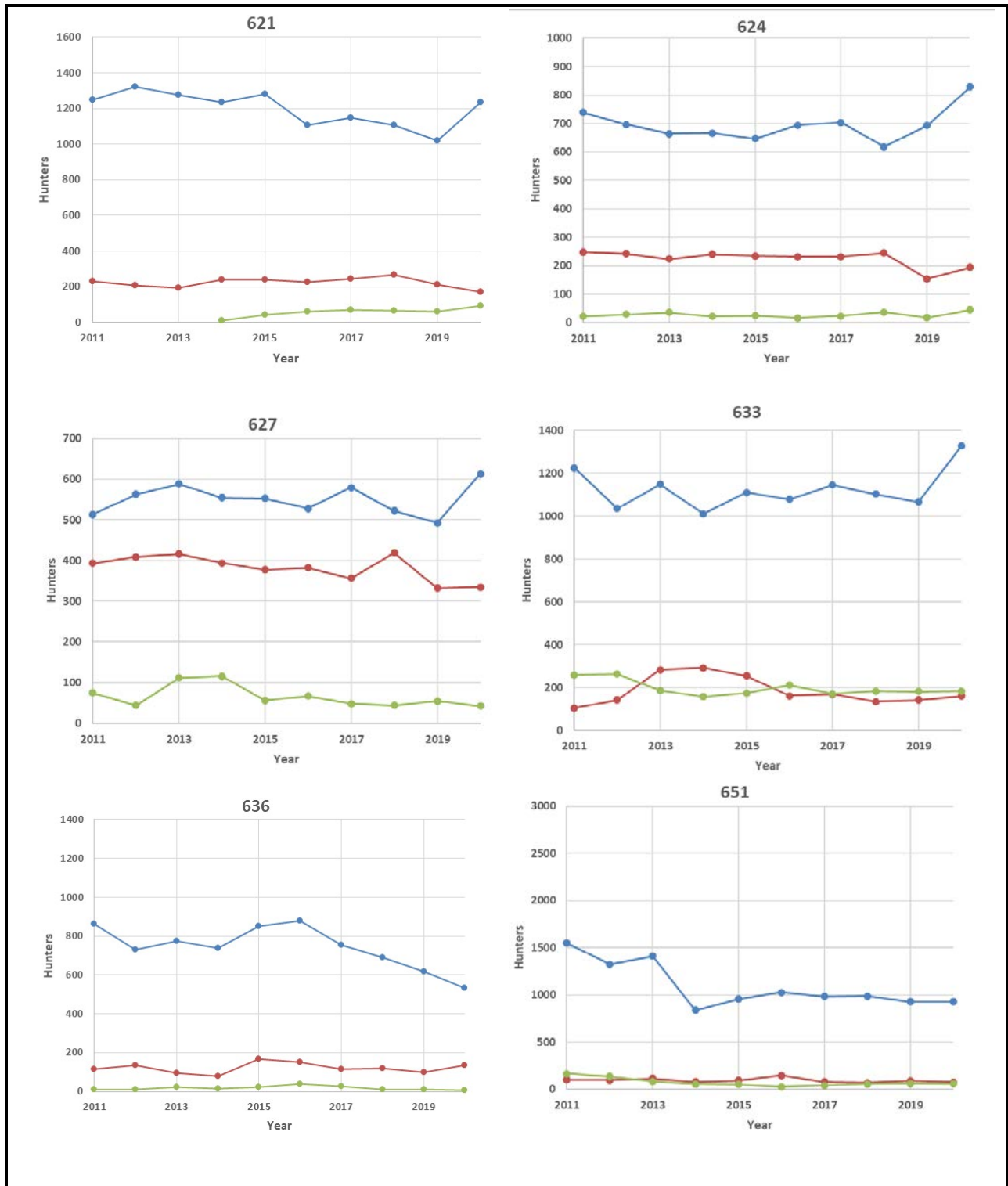


Figure 5. Trends in hunter numbers during general modern firearm (blue), archery (red), and muzzleloader (green) deer seasons in District 15, 2011–2020.

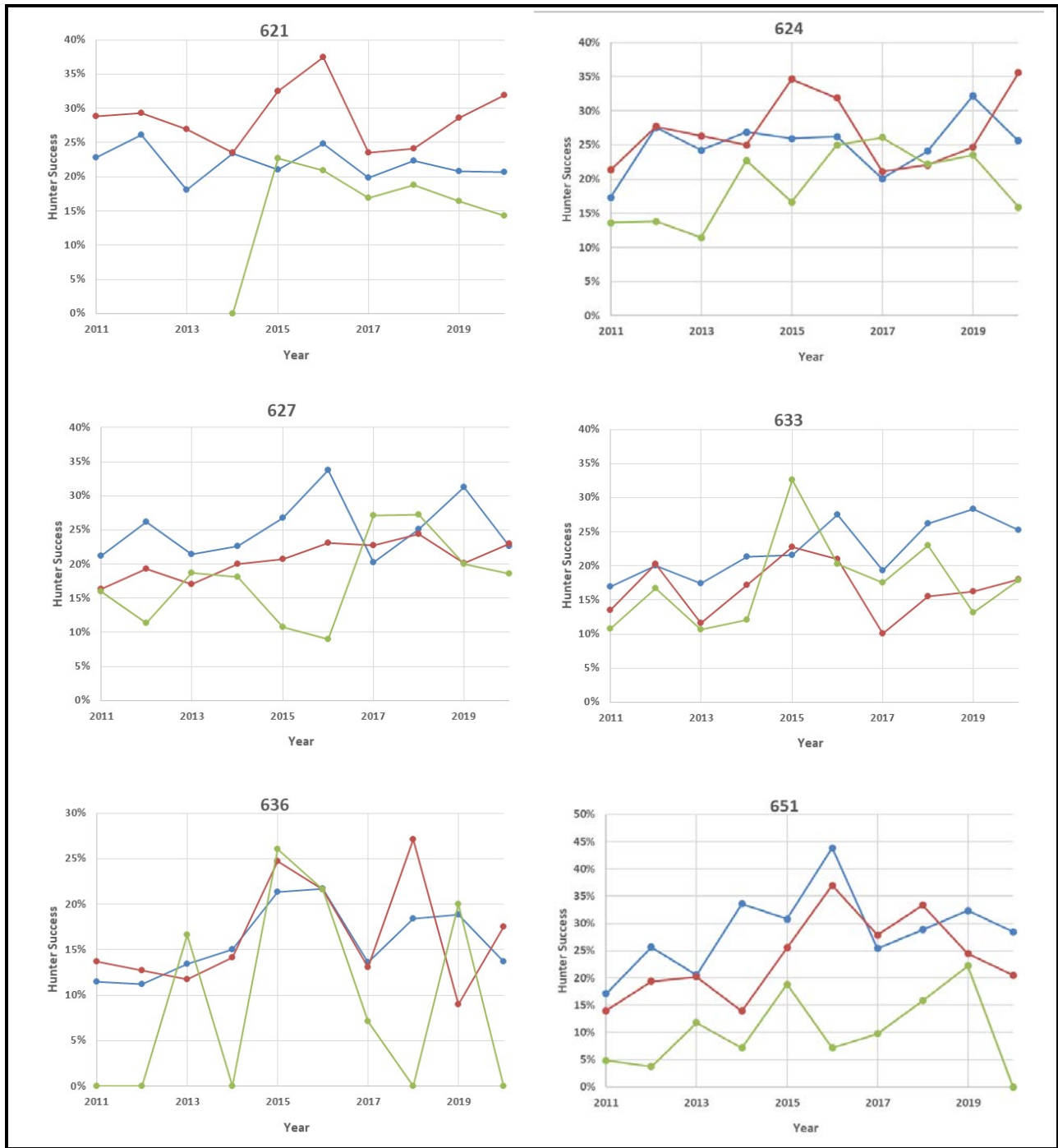


Figure 6. Trends in hunter success rates during general modern firearm (blue), archery (red), and muzzleloader (green) deer seasons in District 15, 2011–2020.

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears occur throughout District 15, but population densities 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 August 1 to November 15. Hunters can purchase up to two bear tags during each license year.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2021 SEASON

Most bear harvest in District 15 comes from hunters killing 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 5% in the Coastal BBMU and 6% in the 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 2019 (Figure 7). At the GMU level, bear harvest is usually highest in GMU 621 (Figure 8). Since 2017, two spring bear permit hunts were available in GMUs 627 and 633. WDFW added these hunts to reduce bear-human conflicts in two units with expanding urban development. Hunter participation and success during these permit hunts is low. Since 2017, 30 permits were issued, 15 hunters hunted with the permit, and three bears were killed.

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

There are no notable changes expected for the 2021 bear hunting season in District 15.

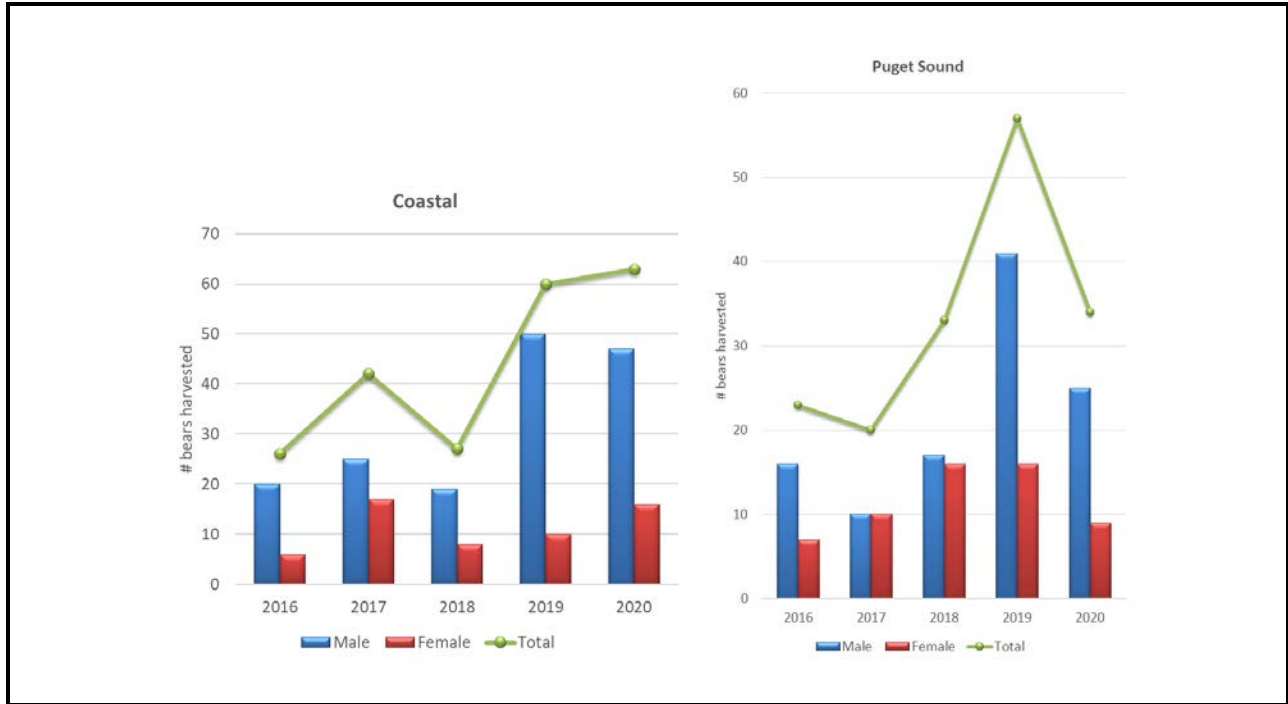


Figure 7. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 15, 2016–2020. Bears removed for other reasons are not included.

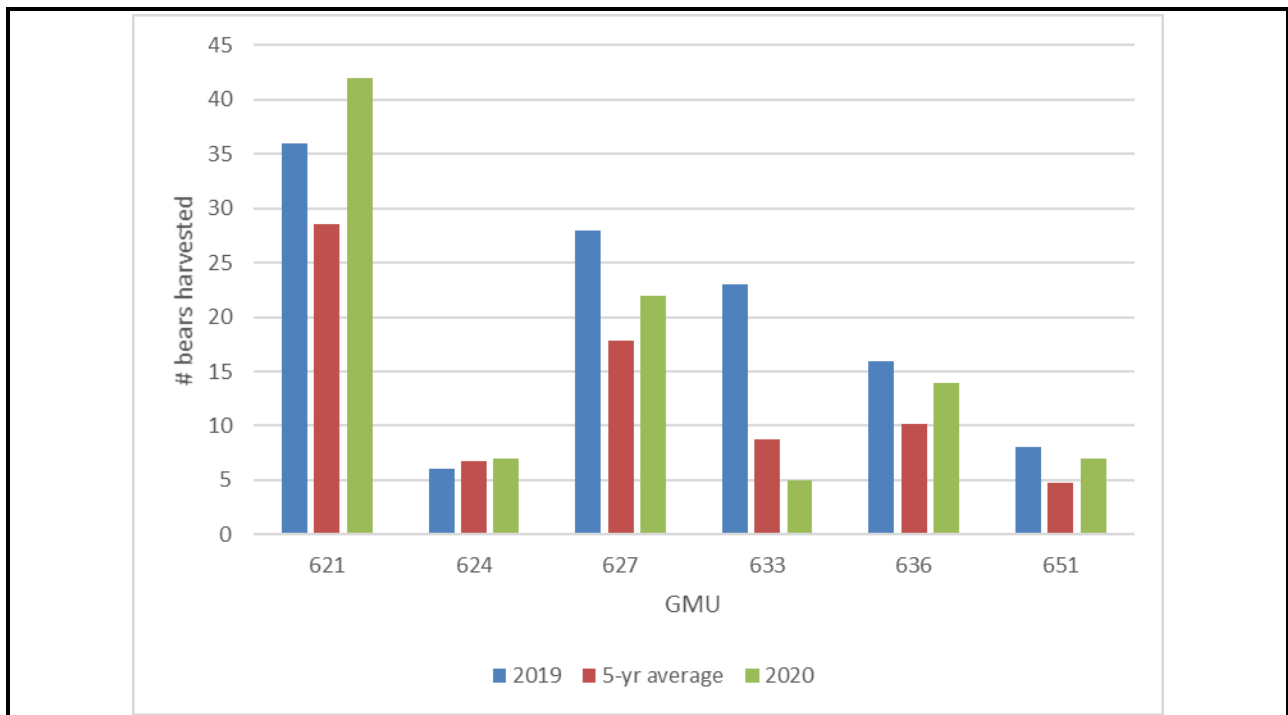


Figure 8. The number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2019 and 2020 seasons in District 15. The five-year average for total number of bears harvested in each GMU is also included.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 15 and the Department structures hunting seasons to maintain a stable cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW changed to a standardized approach for establishing harvest guidelines based on habitat availability and a standard general season. The Department uses this approach to have a longer season, without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

WDFW established a series of hunt areas with standard early season dates of Sept. 1 through Dec. 31 and late season dates from Jan. 1 to Apr. 30. The late season is dependent upon whether harvest is above or below the harvest guideline. 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. Harvest guidelines can be found in the Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet. General season cougar harvest was eight in 2019/20 (Table 2). For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit the WDFW website.

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline 2019	2019-2020 Harvest
618, 636, 638	4-5	0
642, 648, 651	6-8	4
621, 624, 627, 633	None	4

Table 2. Harvest guidelines and the reported 2019-20 harvest for the three cougar hunt areas located in District 15.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2021 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 9). Since 2015/16, the number of cougars harvested during hunting seasons has averaged eleven.

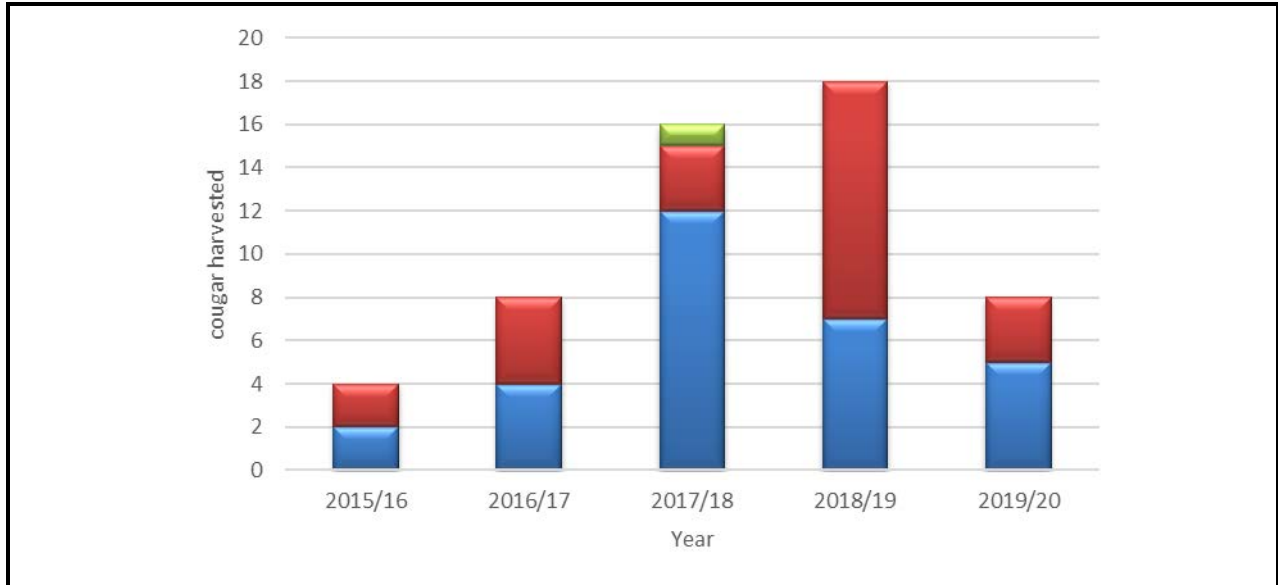


Figure 9. The estimated number of male (blue), female (red), and undetermined sex (green) cougars harvested by hunters annually in District 15 (all GMUs combined), 2015/16 –2019/20.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Hunting season and harvest guidelines are similar to 2020.

MOUNTAIN GOAT

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



The Klahhane Club, a sportsman’s group in Port Angeles, introduced mountain goats into the Olympic Mountain range prior to the establishment of the Olympic National Park (ONP) in the 1920s (Houston et al. 1994). Mountain goats thrived in the Olympic range, rapidly expanding their distribution and abundance to more than 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 (National Park Service, 1995). A mountain goat hunt outside ONP ran from

1983 until 1997, and hunters harvested 119 goats. 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. WDFW established a new permit hunt in 2014. This permit hunt ran from 2014 until 2018 and hunters harvested 15 fifteen goats. The Department suspended the hunt during a joint relocation effort that Olympic National Park, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and DFW led to remove mountain goats from the Olympics, while augmenting the Cascade mountain goat population. Other management actions include lethal removal of goats, which is ongoing. This effort has removed more than 400 goats.

These permit hunts should be viewed as management hunts, with two principal objectives being to provide recreational hunting opportunity and to reduce goat numbers. We estimate fewer than 100 goats remain in the hunt area.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2021 SEASON

As with any mountain goat hunt, hunters can expect rugged, strenuous hunting conditions as they pursue goats in the designated Olympic goat hunt unit. There are very few maintained trails to access many of the areas where mountain goats can be found in this unit, so hunters should be prepared to navigate challenging terrain. For some areas, the hunt boundary transects right across the mountain top, and goats can easily move between Olympic National Park, where hunting is not allowed, and the permit hunt area. WDFW would recommend hunters focus efforts near Mount Ellinor, Mount Washington, Mount Pershing, Jefferson Peak, or the Brothers. Of course, hunters might find mountain goats in other areas of the goat unit, so you might consider the above as a starting point for scouting. WDFW has recorded very few goat sightings north of Mount Constance in the Buckhorn during the most recent surveys.

Olympic National Park will be conducting aerial lethal removal of goats during July and August 2021. Its efforts will avoid most of the permit hunt area except those areas north of the Mount Constance.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

This permit hunt reopens in 2021 with three permit hunt periods, 25 total permits, a two-goat limit, and an expanded hunt area.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

Several species of ducks 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. Hunters can locate nesting wood ducks 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

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. Survey efforts in 2020 were curtailed due to restrictions to support public health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2021 PROSPECTS

District 15 hunters can expect similar hunting opportunities during the 2021 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.

Due to extensive residential development on the shorelines, saltwater hunting opportunities are limited, especially in Kitsap County. Always check with the sheriff's department for county shooting closures before hunting.

Also, be sure to check the 2020 Migratory Waterfowl Regulation pamphlet for additional requirements before hunting sea ducks (long-tailed ducks, scoter, harlequin, and goldeneye) in western Washington.

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

Hunters are most likely to find western, lesser, Taverner's, and cackler Canada geese in District 15. White-fronted and, occasionally, snow geese can also be encountered.

POPULATION STATUS

Like ducks, weather largely drives the goose numbers in the district. The more severe the weather, the more likely hunters will see the northern subspecies in the area. Anecdotal observations suggest that local westerns are stable or slightly increasing.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2021 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 15 are expected to be like trends observed during the last few seasons. Hunters harvest most geese 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 opportunity for the hunter. 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.

WDFW does not conduct any standardized or formal surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 15.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2021 PROSPECTS

The number of grouse harvested in District 15 has been consistently low in Kitsap County and, although lower than some previous years, has been trending upward in Mason County recently (Figure 10). Grouse harvest in Jefferson County includes areas in District 16.

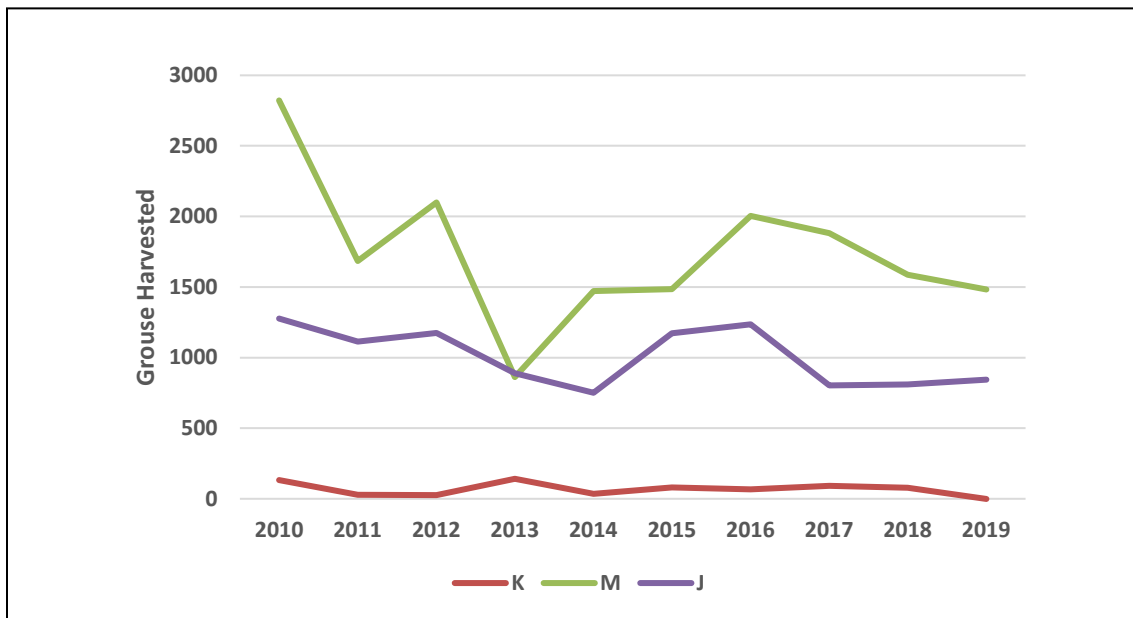


Figure 10. The number of grouse harvested in Jefferson, Kitsap, and Mason Counties during 2010 – 2019. 2020 grouse harvest data was not available at the time this report was completed.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

The opening date for the grouse season changes from Sept. 1 to Sept. 15 in 2021.

PHEASANTS

District 15 has no viable populations of wild pheasants. All pheasant hunting opportunities in District 15 are associated with the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program. This program provides an upland bird hunting opportunity and encourages participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, WDFW releases 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants at 25 sites, and three of those sites (Hunter Farms, Belfair, and the Mason Lake (Sgt. Mak) site) are in District 15. Hunters can find release site locations and other details on the WDFW [website](#) or websites associated with the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program, or at the Peninsula Bird Hunters Association.

QUAIL

Although frustratingly unpredictable, hunters are most likely to find quail in District 15 in two to six-year-old clear cuts, under power lines, and in tall stands of scotch broom 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 to try including 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 clear cuts around Mason Lake. The time to scout is in the spring and early summer when the males are quite vocal.

TURKEYS

Although turkeys are occasionally seen, there are no established turkey populations in District 15. 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 this district cannot be recommended as a place to bag a turkey.

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 feet in elevation. In autumn, they feed mainly on berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey 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.

HARVEST TRENDS

Although band-tailed pigeon harvest statewide is down from 2009 harvest levels, since 2015 the trend has been increasing. 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 hunters report little to no harvest.

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Often, band-tailed pigeons congregate in areas with red elderberry, which are typically most abundant in five to ten-year-old clear cuts. Hunting can be exceptionally good in these areas. The key to harvesting band-tailed pigeons is scouting because it is hard to predict which clear cuts,

they will be using during the hunting season. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites and then sit patiently and wait for shooting opportunities as they occur.

As indicated by the mineral site survey WDFW uses to monitor trends in population size, 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.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Hunters need a small game license, state migratory bird permit, and migratory bird authorization with band-tailed pigeon harvest record card to hunt. Hunters will have a nine-day season from Sept. 15-23. Hunters should review the 2020 Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates, harvest reporting, and any other regulation changes.

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 that DNR and USFS manage in all District 15 GMUs. The vast majority of 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. See below for GMU-specific information on land access and ownership. The Department encourages hunters to check ahead of time to determine if any landowner restrictions apply to the area they plan to hunt.

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. Contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) or the specific landowner with 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. Rayonier acquired lands in District 15 formerly owned by Pope Resources Company in 2020. New for 2021, Rayonier may require access permits to recreate on their lands in Kitsap, Mason and Jefferson Counties. Hunters should visit their website for more

information on accessing these lands. Manke, Port Blakely, Hama Hama are also timber companies with land in District 15.

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, which acquired land from Olympic Resource Management, a division of Pope Resources Company, in 2020. Although some DNR and private mainlines may be open to motor vehicles, most hunting access is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicle. New in 2021, Rayonier may require an access permit to hunt portions of those lands formerly owned by Pope Resources; we advise hunters to check with Rayonier about requirements to hunt their lands 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. DNR owns a considerable amount of land in the western part of the unit. Rayonier and Green Diamond Resource Company also have holdings here. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles, except that DNR allows all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use on designated trails on some of its land in this unit. New in 2021, Rayonier may require an access permit to hunt portions of those lands formerly owned by Pope Resources; we advise hunters to check with Rayonier about requirements to hunt their lands in this GMU.

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 it generally opens most areas to motorized use from September to the end of December. However, exceptions for fire danger 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 its 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. Exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings.

PUBLIC LAND RESOURCES

- **WA Department of Natural Resources – Olympic Region**
olympic.region@dnr.wa.gov
360-374-2800
411 Tillicum Lane, Forks, WA 98331-9271
- **WA Department of Natural Resources – South Puget Sound Region**
southpuget.region@dnr.wa.gov
360-825-1631
950 Farman Ave. N., Enumclaw, WA 98022-9282
- **US Forest Service – Hood Canal Ranger District – Quilcene**
(360) 765-2200
295142 Highway 101 S., P.O. Box 280, Quilcene, WA 98376

PRIVATE TIMBERLANDS

- **Green Diamond Resources**
Recreation Email: recreation@greendiamond.com
- **Rayonier**
Recreation Phone Number: 1-855-729-4868
Recreation Email: Hunting@Rayonier.com

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

Hunters should call the 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.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 15 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be extremely difficult 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.

WDFW's 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 at geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/.

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 hunters can buy for less than \$10 on DNR's website.

United States Forest Service

Mapping tools and information can be found on the USFS website.