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Washington Department of FISH and WILDLIFE

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DISTRICT 3 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla counties

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BE AWARE OF FIRE CONDITIONS AND ROAD CLOSURES

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

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

It is recommended that hunters check for road closures before going on their hunts.

DISTRICT 3 GENERAL OVERVIEW

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

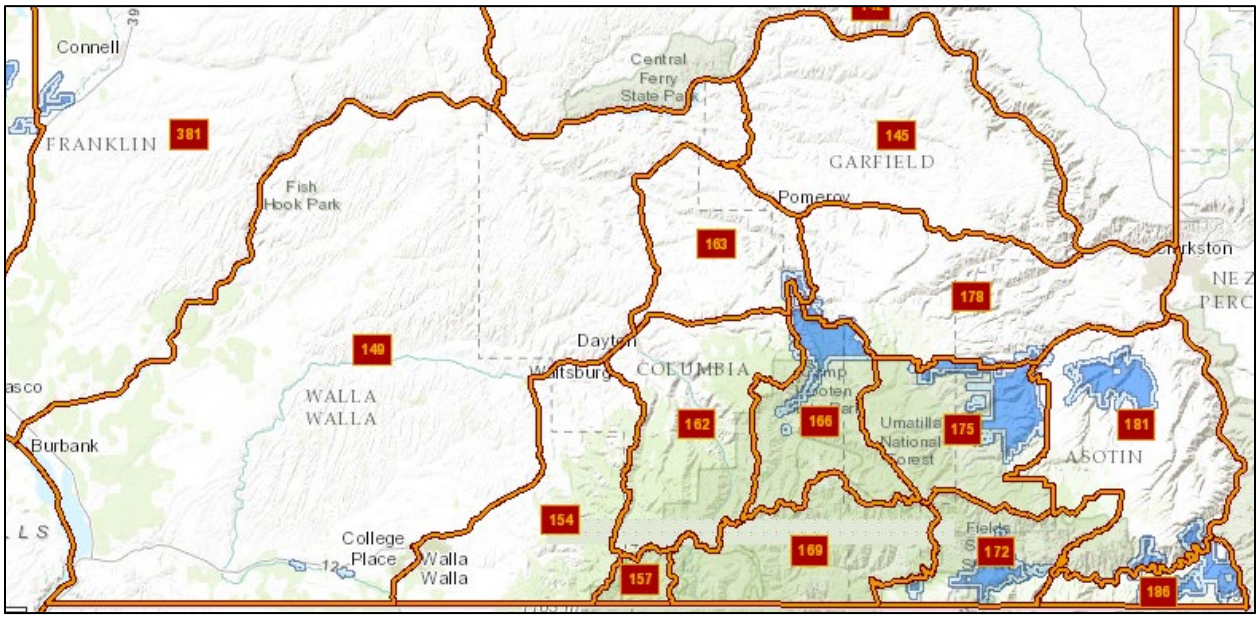


Figure 1. GMU map (from GoHunt) depicting District 3 GMU boundaries, west and south of the Snake River, east of the Columbia River, and north of the Oregon border. Green areas are U.S. Forest Service land and blue areas are WDFW Wildlife Areas.

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

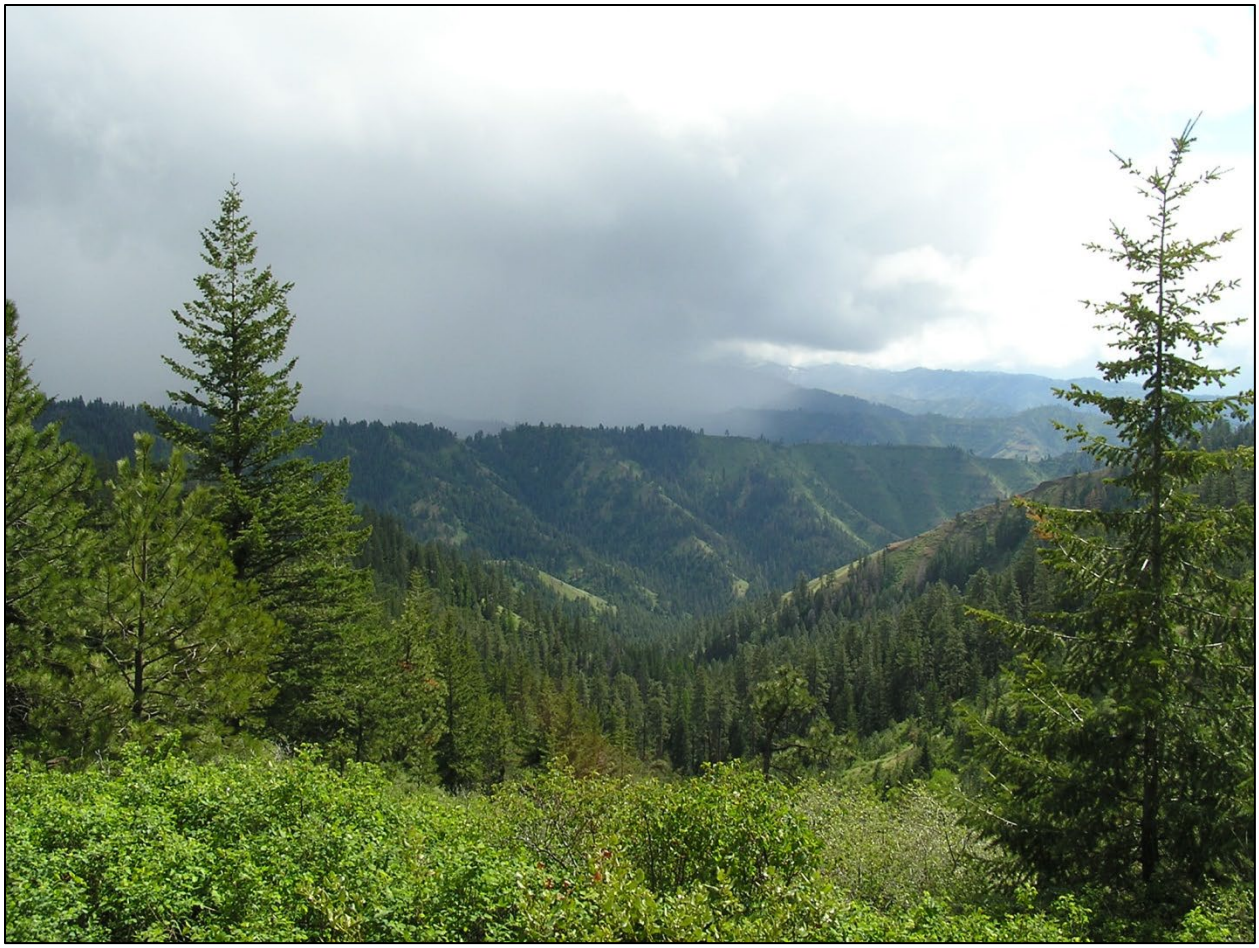


Figure 1. Blue Creek in the western foothills of the Blue Mountains.

District 3 is best known for its elk hunting opportunities in the Blue Mountains and mule deer hunting opportunities in grassland/agricultural GMUs. However, hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including white-tailed deer, black bear, chukar, turkey, and pheasant. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest and harvest-per-unit effort (HPUE) for most game species in District 3 during the 2021 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2020 season and the five-year average. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Species	Harvest					HPUE				
	5-yr avg.	2021	2020	% change (5yr)	% change (2020)	5-yr avg.	2021	2020	% change (5yr)	% change (2020)
Elk (General)	98	136	115	39%	18%	150	66	109	-56%	-39%
Elk (Bull Permit)	92	45	56	-51%	-22%	45%	39%	48%	(Permit success)	
Deer	2,389	1,811	2,519	-24%	-28%	14.8	17.6	14.3	20%	23%
Bear	89	74	102	-17%	-27%	98	86	77	-12%	11%
Cougar	22	18	19	-18%	-5%	Not estimated			**	**
Wild Turkey	917	987	940	7.7%	5%	0.10	0.08	0.10	-18%	-17%
Canada Goose	3,559	4,635	3,961	30%	17%	1.20	1.06	0.89	-11%	20%
Chukar Partridge	2,495	1,587	4,320	-36%	-63%	1.34	0.67	1.93	-50%	-65%
Cottontail Rabbit	558	144	284	-74%	-49%	0.76	0.17	0.28	-77%	-40%
Duck	27,985	33,437	33,159	19%	1%	2.66	2.70	2.43	1%	11%
Forest Grouse	1,807	1,469	2,169	-19%	-32%	0.38	0.28	0.51	-27%	-46%
Gray Partridge	880	260	1,550	-70%	-83%	0.46	0.14	0.51	-69%	-72%
Mourning Dove	3,449	2,727	3,717	-21%	-27%	3.55	1.60	3.85	-55%	-59%
Pheasant	9,061	7,179	10,552	-21%	-32%	0.70	0.56	0.61	-20%	-8%
Quail	4,511	4,038	4,942	-10%	-18%	0.81	0.70	0.69	-13%	1%
Snowshoe Hare	40	71	82	78%	-13%	0.11	0.08	0.18	-33%	-57%

Table 1. General season harvest and HPUE estimates for most game species found in District 3 during the 2020 and 2021 hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year averages and a comparison of 5-year estimates and previous year to 2021 estimates. HPUE is expressed as #hunter days/harvest for elk, deer, and bear (lower is better), and as #harvested/hunter day for all other species (higher is better).

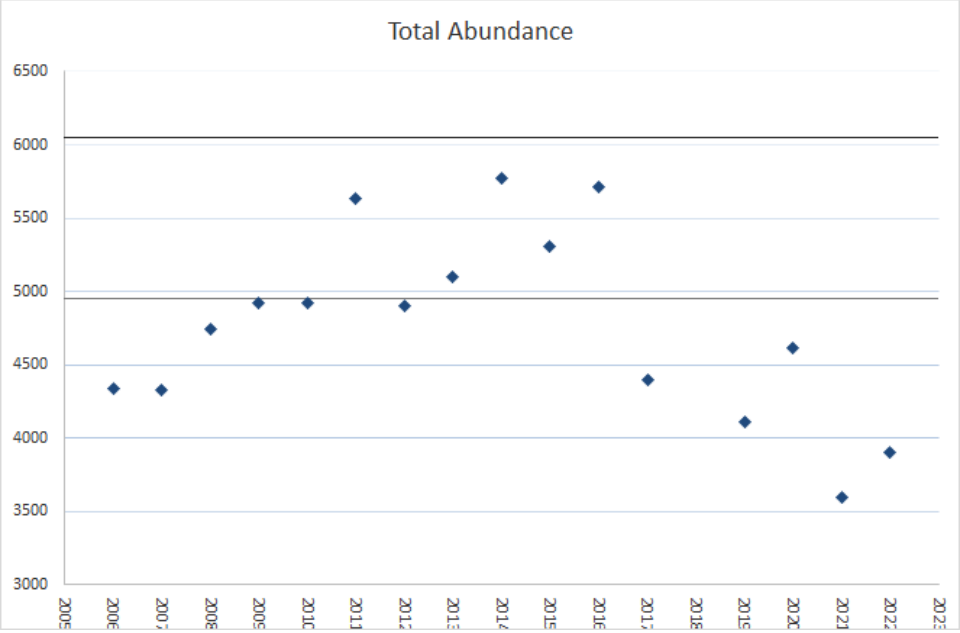
ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

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

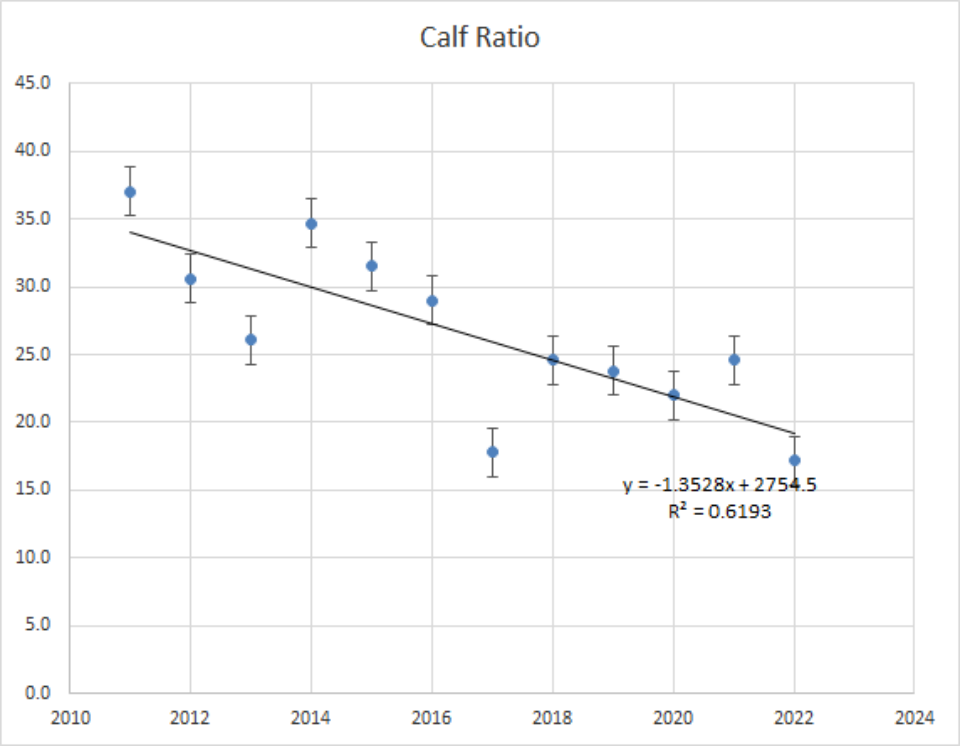
Only the GMUs within the forested portion of District 3 are managed for elk population stability or growth (GMUs 154, 157, 162, 166, 169, 172, 175, and 186). GMUs 145, 149, 163, 178, and most of 181 are managed to limit elk numbers, although some recreational opportunity is provided as determined through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

Biologists in District 3 conduct an annual helicopter survey within the core elk areas to estimate the post-winter population size. In the spring of 2022, survey efforts resulted in a population estimate of 3,901 (90% Confidence Interval of 3,843-4,027) elk. The state line of Oregon (and within Oregon) transects the southern portion of the survey area, resulting in approximately 500-600 elk being classified that likely are not available for harvest in Washington during the fall. The average five-year population estimate prior to 2022 was 4,488 elk, which is 15% higher than the 2022 estimate. The 2022 surveys documented a calf ratio of 17.2 calves per 100 cows and a bull ratio of 19.7 bulls per 100 cows.



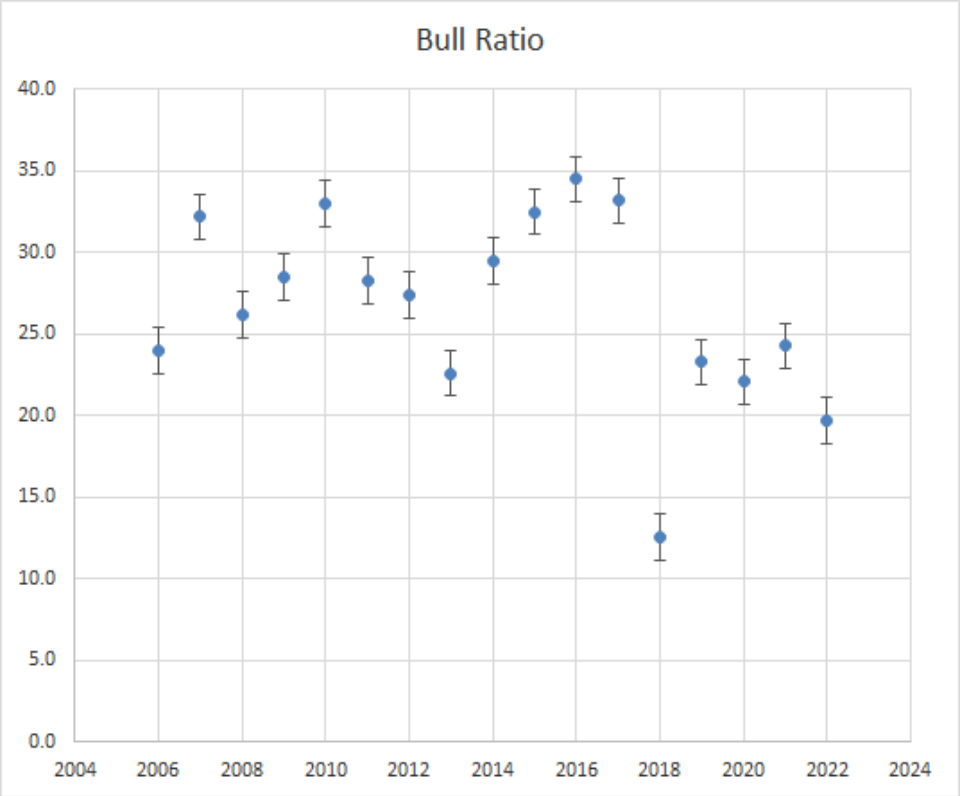
Abundance estimates for the Blue Mountains elk population.

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



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

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



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

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

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Most general season hunters in the Blue Mountains have been hunting here for many years. New hunters to this area will have to consider several options, such as weapon type, private land access versus public land, the difficulty of hunt desired (wilderness versus landscapes with roads), and, as archery hunters, whether the availability of antlerless opportunity is important. In 2022, wildfire activity could be an important consideration on where to hunt. Wildfire activity in 2022 is off to a slow start, but high fuel loads are present if conditions dry out.

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

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH GMU

GMU 145

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

GMU 149

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

GMU 154

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

GMU 157

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

GMU 162

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

GMU 163

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

GMU 166

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

GMU 169

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

GMU 172

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

GMU 175 This GMU is predominantly public land owned by WDFW, USFS, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Access is good throughout the unit. One major change as the result of declining elk numbers observed in this unit is the restriction of archery hunters to spike-only, with no antlerless opportunity available for any weapon type. In July 2021, 80% of this GMU burned in a wildfire.

GMU 178

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

GMU 181

This private land unit is managed to minimize elk numbers due to conflict with agricultural activities. Access can be challenging to obtain. Elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and

do not offer a reliable recreational opportunity during the general season without knowledge of landowners and herd behavior.

GMU 186

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

Summary of GMU Harvest Attributes

The information provided in Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how District 3 GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The values presented are from the 2017 harvest reports. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of elk harvested and hunters per square mile.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 10 for elk harvested/mi^2 (bulls only for modern firearm and cows included with bulls for archery), hunters/mi^2, and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, with Public Access ranking excluded. The modern firearm comparisons are the most straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same in each GMU.

MODERN FIREARM											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Succes		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	6	0.00	10	37	0.03	1	16.2%	2	3	13
154	216	4	0.02	7	184	0.85	5	2.2%	9	3	21
162	210	7	0.03	6	387	1.84	9	1.8%	10	2	25
166	131	5	0.04	4	185	1.41	7	2.7%	8	1	19
169	161	7	0.04	4	150	0.93	6	4.7%	6	1	16
172	108	44	0.41	1	245	2.27	10	18.0%	1	2	12
175	158	13	0.08	2	242	1.53	8	5.4%	4	1	14
178	275	3	0.01	8	58	0.21	2	5.2%	5	3	15
181	262	3	0.01	8	69	0.26	3	4.3%	7	3	18
186	53	4	0.08	2	30	0.57	4	13.3%	3	2	9
ARCHERY											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Succes		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	2	0.00	7	21	0.01	1	9.5%	4	3	12
154	216	5	0.02	3	87	0.40	9	5.7%	5	3	17
162	210	0	0.00	7	54	0.26	7	0.0%	8	2	22
166	131	0	0.00	7	16	0.12	6	0.0%	8	1	21
169	161	0	0.00	7	13	0.08	3	0.0%	8	1	18
172	108	5	0.05	1	44	0.41	10	11.4%	3	2	14
175	158	5	0.03	2	43	0.27	8	11.6%	2	1	12
178	275	2	0.01	4	16	0.06	2	12.5%	1	3	7
181	262	0	0.00	7	24	0.09	4	0.0%	8	3	19
186	53	0	0.00	7	6	0.11	5	0.0%	8	2	20
MUZZLELOADER											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Succes		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	2	0.00	5	7	0.00	1	28.6%	2	3	8
154	216	4	0.0	5	11	0.05	3	36.4%	1	3	9
162	210	5	0.0	5	50	0.24	6	10.0%	5	2	16
166	131	2	0.0	5	11	0.08	5	18.2%	3	1	13
172	108	6	0.1	1	44	0.41	8	13.6%	4	2	13
175	158	0	0.0	5	47	0.30	7	0.0%	7	1	19
178	275	0	0	5	9	0.03	2	0.0%	7	3	14
181	262	0	0	5	13	0.05	3	0.0%	7	3	15

Table 2. Rank sum totals that provide a quick and general comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. GMUs are generally limited to spike bull harvest, but some may have an antlerless opportunity as well (see hunting regulations for specific restrictions). Data presented are based on 2021 harvest reports.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2022 SEASON

It has been uncommon for elk populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where severe winter weather conditions seldom occur. Unfortunately, the winters of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019 were uncommonly severe, resulting in a significant decline in elk numbers. Calf recruitment since 2016 has remained below average, consequently, populations available for harvest are expected to remain lower than years prior to the 16/17 winter. The 2022 general season is expected to be similar to the average during the past 5 years. Harvest since 2016 has been the lowest in the past 20 years. Hunter numbers also typically do not change substantially from one year to the next, but a slow decline has been observed with the declining population. The weather during hunting season does change from year to year, which will influence success rates.

The spring and summer of 2021 was one of the driest and hottest since records have been kept, which resulted in greater than 130,000 acres burnt. The spring of 2022 has been one of the wettest on record, resulting in great forage conditions for elk. This document was prepared in July, while many of these events were unfolding.

HOW TO FIND ELK

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

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

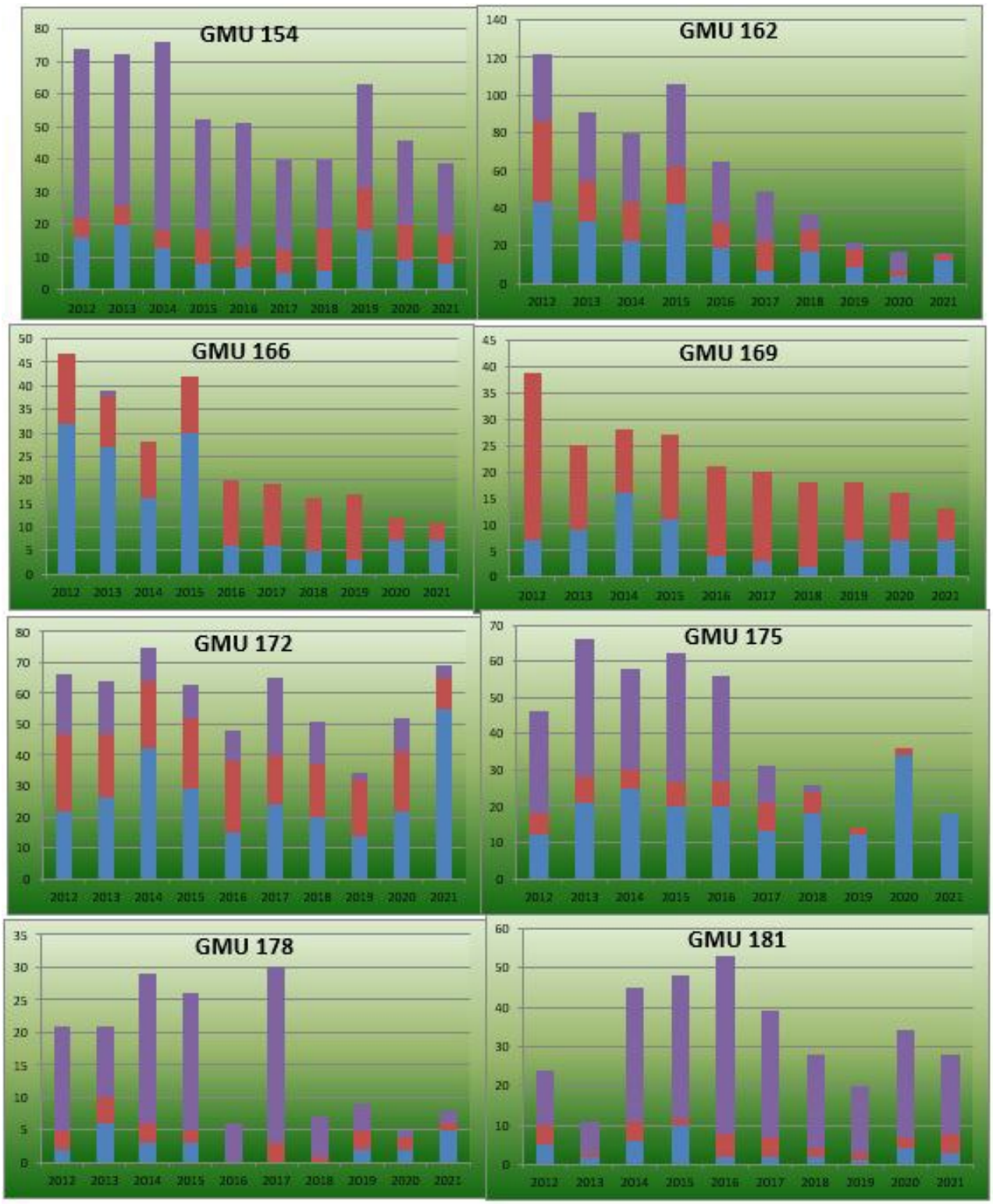


Figure 2. Trends in total number of yearling bulls (blue), branched bulls (red), and antlerless (purple) elk harvested during general and permit seasons combined, 2012-2021. Harvest does not include tribal harvest.

ELK AREAS

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

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

Elk Area 1010 was used to focus antlerless and branched-bull elk hunting on private land in the Dayton Unit. In the past, branched bull tag holders focused on public lands where access was guaranteed, but also increased pressure on that segment of the population. This elk area is also used to focus antlerless harvest on the private lands where depredation complaints have historically been high but limits antlerless harvest on public lands where higher elk densities are desired. For the 2022 hunting season, no antlerless opportunity exists in any portion of the Dayton GMU.

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

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

NOTABLE ISSUES AND HUNTING CHANGES

1. The 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area is now open to all general season and permit opportunities for deer and elk as listed under GMU 172.

2. Antlerless elk opportunity has decreased in GMU 181 due to declining herd size and depredation complaints. Boundary changes were made to hunts in this area in 2018 to include Elk Area 1075 to continue refining efforts to address problematic elk distributions. Elk in this unit primarily inhabit private lands during hunting seasons and acquiring access prior to applying for permits is highly recommended.

3. In July and August of 2021, wildfires burned 80% of GMU 175, a large portion of GMU 166 and a small portion of GMU 169. Severe drought in 2021 reduced forage and water availability throughout the District. In 2022, through July we have seen very wet conditions with above normal vegetation growth.

4. During the summer of 2015, a large wildfire burned through a large portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, extending slightly into GMU 172 on Grouse Flats. A large portion of the fire that occurred in Washington burned later into September, creating desirable habitat conditions for elk with low intensity burning.

5. Severe winters occurred during 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, resulting in high mortality rates of elk. Antlerless opportunity throughout the Blue Mountains has been severely reduced on public lands as a result. Calf recruitment has yet to rebound, and harvest will remain below average.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Both mule deer and white-tailed deer occur throughout District 3. Deer hunting opportunities in District 3 vary from marginal to quite good, depending on the GMU. The GMUs with the highest success (GMUs 145, 149, 178, and 181) also have the highest amount of private land, and access can be limited. GMUs where access to public land is highest (GMUs 166, 169, and 175) have the lowest success, probably due to a combination of high hunter numbers, a high percentage of legal bucks harvested, higher predator densities, and lower quality deer forage. While overall harvest is one indicator of GMU hunting quality, harvest/unit effort (HPUE) and harvest/unit area (HPUA) equalize GMUs based on hunter numbers, number of days hunting, and GMU size. However, both HPUE and HPUA can be misleading, as HPUE is complicated by private land access limitations and HPUA is complicated by the amount of habitat in the GMU that supports deer. In general, HPUE seems to be a better indicator of hunting success. Hunter success and HPUE of either white-tailed or mule deer in District 3 is highest in GMUs 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 178 (Peola), and181 (Couse), with GMU 163 (Peola) seeing a recent increase in success. Total general season harvest is highest in GMUs 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), and 162 (Dayton).

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 3. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and HPUE (harvest/hunter day) are used to monitor population status. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and are conducting annual road surveys to determine herd composition and periodic aerial sight ability surveys to monitor deer populations that are independent of harvest data, in addition to exploring the use of integrated population models.

All available harvest data indicates deer populations are variable within a relatively narrow range in District 3. 2021 was an abnormal year, with extensive wildfires that closed access to the National Forest for parts of the September hunting season and a severe hemorrhagic disease outbreak across the lower elevations of the district. Harvest totals were significantly

lower, but the change in HPUE was not as drastic, indicating the decline in harvest was due to both fewer deer being available but also heavily influenced by lower hunter numbers. For more detailed information related to the status of mule deer and white-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

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

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

The information provided in Table 3 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of deer harvested per hunter and the number of hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison since GMUs vary in size. For example, the average number of deer harvested over the past five years during the modern firearm general season in GMUs 149 (Prescott) and 154 (Blue Creek) has been 461 and 226 deer, respectively. Just looking at total harvest suggests deer densities are much higher in GMU 149 than 154. However, when harvest is expressed as deer harvested/mi^2, the result is an estimate of 0.33 in GMU 149 and 1.05 in GMU 154, which suggests deer densities are probably much higher in GMU 154 than they are in GMU 149. This is further complicated by the amount of actual deer habitat in each GMU. For example, GMU 149 is the largest in total acreage but is comprised primarily of tilled croplands, and deer are concentrated in fields, rangelands, and along the breaks of the Snake River, so densities in a portion of the GMU are probably higher than the harvest/mi^2 indicates.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 12 (except for ties) for deer harvested/mi^2 (deer harvest density), hunters/mi^2 (hunter density), hunter success rates, and public land access. The ranking values were then summed (public land access excluded) to produce a final rank sum, lower totals being more desirable. GMUs are listed by GMU number, not by rank. Comparisons are straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same for most GMUs.

Differences that should be considered include:

1 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in WDFW Access programs, such as Feel Free to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, Hunt by Registration, or Hunt by Reservation, and may offer similar access to some GMUs with public land. See the Access section of this document for private land acreage available for public hunting in each GMU.

2 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in tilled croplands, and actual suitable hunting area may be much smaller, leading to higher-than-expected hunter densities (you will definitely see more hunters in GMU 149 than GMU 169 although those GMUs have similar hunter densities).

MODERN FIREARM											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Score	Rank Sum (Rank)
145	355	229	0.62	4	600	1.69	4	35%	2	**3**	**10 (1)**
149	1409	461	0.33	8	1549	1.10	2	28%	4	**3**	**14 (4)**
154	216	226	1.05	2	920	4.26	11	25%	5	**3**	**18 (5)**
162	210	274	1.31	1	1471	7.00	12	19%	8	**2**	**21 (8)**
163	149	88	0.59	6	373	2.50	8	24%	6	**3**	**20 (7)**
166	131	33	0.25	10	426	3.25	10	8%	11	**1**	**31 (12)**
169	161	9	0.06	12	174	1.08	1	5%	12	**1**	**25 (10)**
172	108	36	0.33	8	187	1.73	5	19%	9	**2**	**22 (9)**
175	158	29	0.18	11	309	1.96	7	9%	10	**1**	**28 (11)**
178	275	185	0.67	3	513	1.87	6	36%	1	**3**	**10 (1)**
181	262	111	0.42	7	345	1.32	3	32%	3	**3**	**13 (3)**
186	53	33	0.62	4	136	2.57	9	24%	6	**2**	**19 (6)**

ARCHERY											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi²)	Total	Harvest per mi²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum (Rank)
145	355	12	0.04	8	48	0.14	4	25%	5	**3**	**17 (5)**
149	1409	48	0.03	9	177	0.13	3	27%	4	**3**	**16 (4)**
154	216	53	0.24	1	219	1.01	11	24%	6	**3**	**18 (6)**
162	210	33	0.16	3	194	0.93	10	17%	8	**2**	**21 (8)**
163	149	30	0.20	2	160	1.07	12	19%	7	**3**	**21 (8)**
166	131	7	0.05	7	78	0.59	9	9%	11	**1**	**27 (11)**
169	161	2	0.01	11	16	0.10	1	13%	10	**1**	**22 (10)**
172	108	9	0.09	6	28	0.26	6	32%	2	**2**	**14 (2)**
175	158	2	0.01	11	52	0.33	7	4%	12	**1**	**30 (12)**
178	275	27	0.10	5	90	0.33	7	30%	3	**3**	**15 (3)**
181	262	5	0.03	9	31	0.12	2	16%	9	**3**	**20 (7)**
186	53	6	0.11	4	11	0.20	5	55%	1	**2**	**10 (1)**

MUZZLELOADER											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi²)	Total	Harvest per mi²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum (Rank)
145	355	19	0.05	4	45	0.13	1	42%	1	**3**	**6 (1)**
149	1409	58	0.04	5	185	0.13	1	31%	5	**3**	**11 (5)**
154	216	N/A	.	.		.	.	.	.	**.**	**.**
162	210	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	**.**	**.**
163	149	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	**.**	**.**
166	131	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	**.**	**.**
169	161	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	**.**	**.**
172	108	19	0.18	1	50	0.47	5	38%	3	**2**	**9 (2)**
175	158	5	0.03	6	40	0.25	3	13%	6	**1**	**13 (6)**
178	275	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	**.**	**.**
181	262	44	0.17	2	128	0.49	6	34%	4	**3**	**12 (4)**
186	53	8	0.15	3	19	0.36	4	42%	2	**2**	**9 (2)**

Table 3. Rank sum totals that provide a quick and general comparison of how total general harvest, hunter numbers, hunter success rates, and access to public land compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. GMUs in **bold type** are open during early and late seasons for the respective weapon type. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2017-2021).

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2022 SEASON

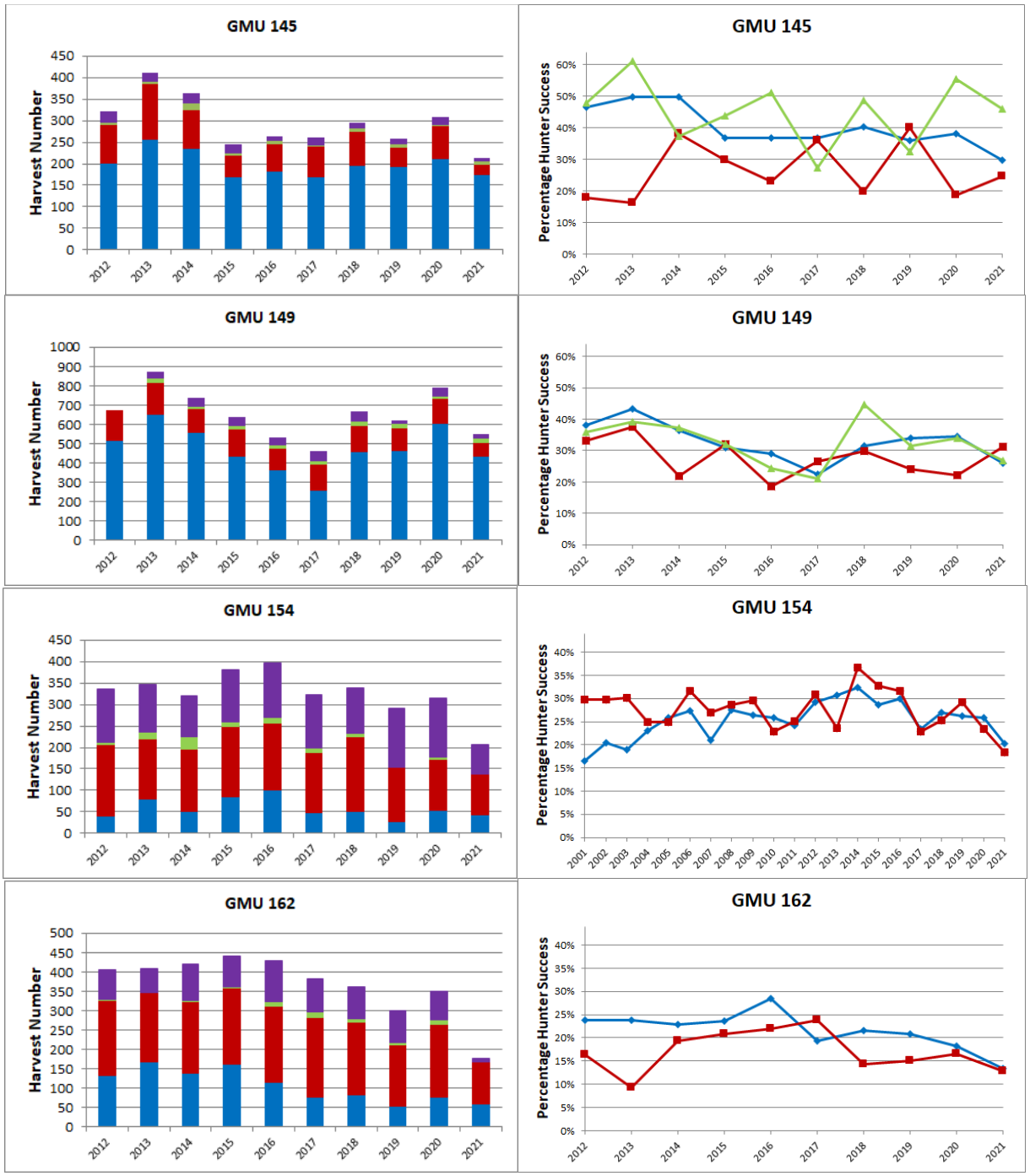
Wildfires are always a possibility that may affect hunter access to some hunting areas, and fires in the Lick Creek GMU last summer likely impacted an already declining harvest trend for deer in that GMU. This trend is most evident in success rates in the GMU, not overall harvest, and has been driven by the increase in hunters in GMU 175, which have doubled since 2001. This spring has had record wet conditions promoting understory growth and projected hot and dry conditions through the summer, wildfire danger is likely to be high and hunters are **strongly encouraged** to check the status of wildfires as well as public land access restrictions (USFS) before planning for the fall hunting season.

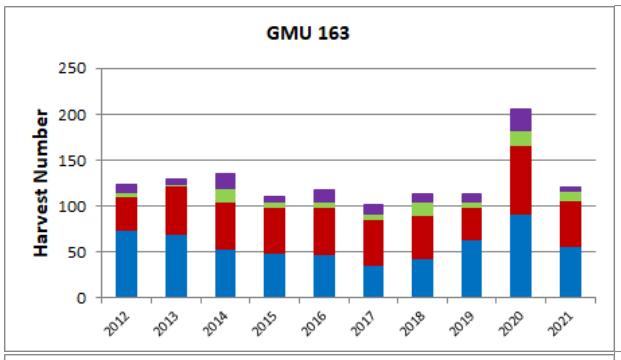
It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where winter and weather conditions are generally mild and do not result in large winter die-offs. Populations are still recovering from very late and heavy snow cover across the district during the winters of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, with snow cover persisting well into the usual spring green-up period. With back-to-back average to mild winters over 2019-2022, we had been expecting to see improvements in deer populations across the district; however, drought conditions and hemorrhagic disease last year took a toll on some portions of the deer herd. The district saw increases in the number of days it took hunters to harvest a deer in almost all GMUs, with only the mountain GMUs showing stable or modest HPUE decreases, but this is likely due to lower hunter numbers. Despite the effects of drought, fire, and disease last season, we expect overwinter survival was very good, and are expecting deer harvest to marginally improve through the 2022 hunting season.

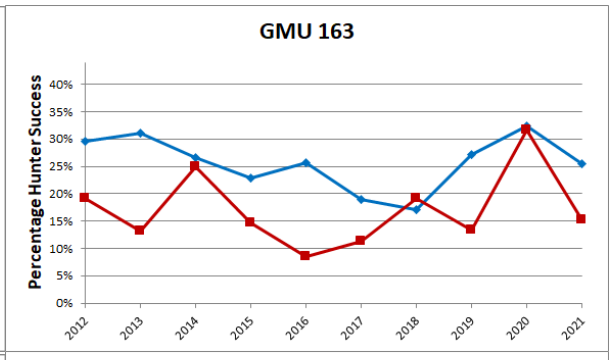
Periodic die-offs have occurred due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and bluetongue, both viral conditions transmitted by a biting midge, a small fly often found near water or marshy areas, which mainly affect white-tailed deer. Last year's drought resulted in disease outbreaks across Eastern Washington,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

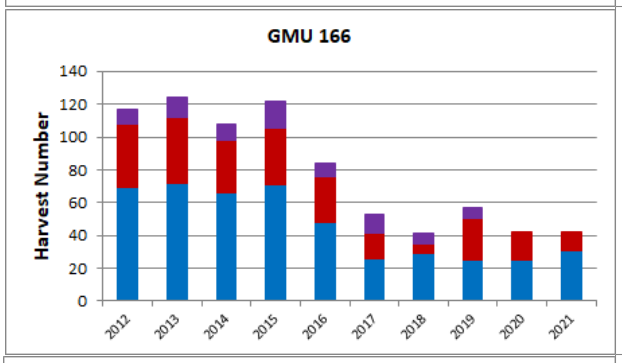
Mule deer populations have experienced long-term declines across much of the west with no definitive cause identified. Habitat loss is suspected to be one possible cause, particularly the loss of winter range. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has probably helped maintain winter range in District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

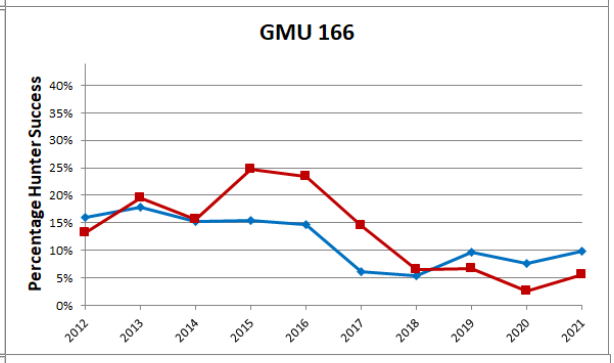
One reference WDFW currently has for future potential harvest during general seasons are recent trends in hunter harvest success and harvest/unit effort. Figure 3 provides trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and is intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed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

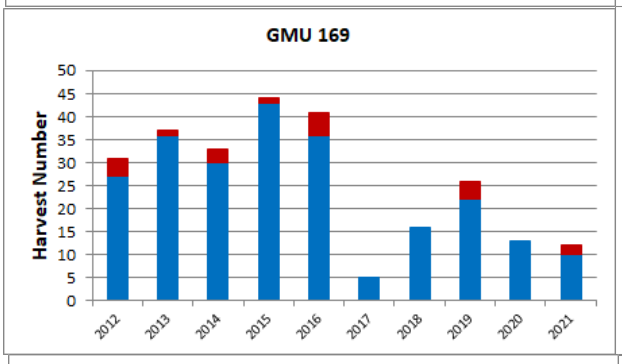

GMU 145
Harvest Number
GMU 145
Percentage Hunter Success
GMU 149
Harvest Number
GMU 149
Percentage Hunter Success
GMU 154
Harvest Number
GMU 154
Percentage Hunter Success
GMU 162
Harvest Number
GMU 162
Percentage Hunter Success

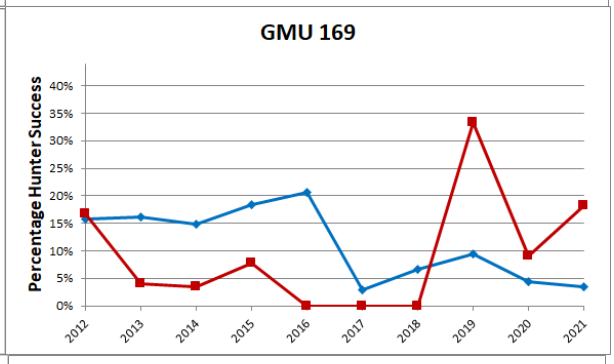

GMU 163
Harvest Number
250
200
150
100
50
0
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021

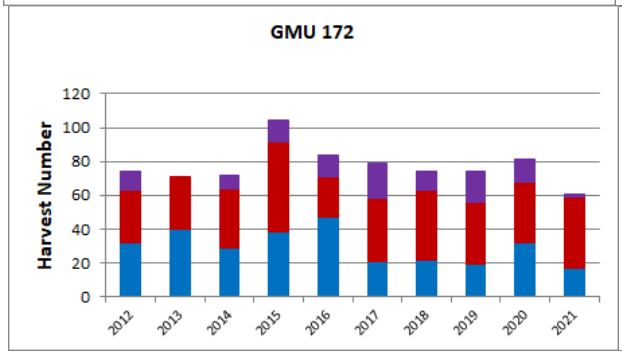

GMU 163
Percentage Hunter Success
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021


GMU 166
Harvest Number
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021


GMU 166
Percentage Hunter Success
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021


GMU 169
Harvest Number
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021


GMU 169
Percentage Hunter Success
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021


GMU 172
Harvest Number
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
2012
2013
2014
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2018
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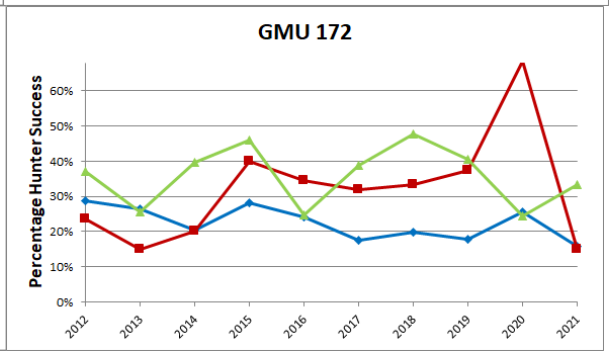
2020
2021


GMU 172
Percentage Hunter Success
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
2012
2013
2014
2015
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2018
2019
2020
2021

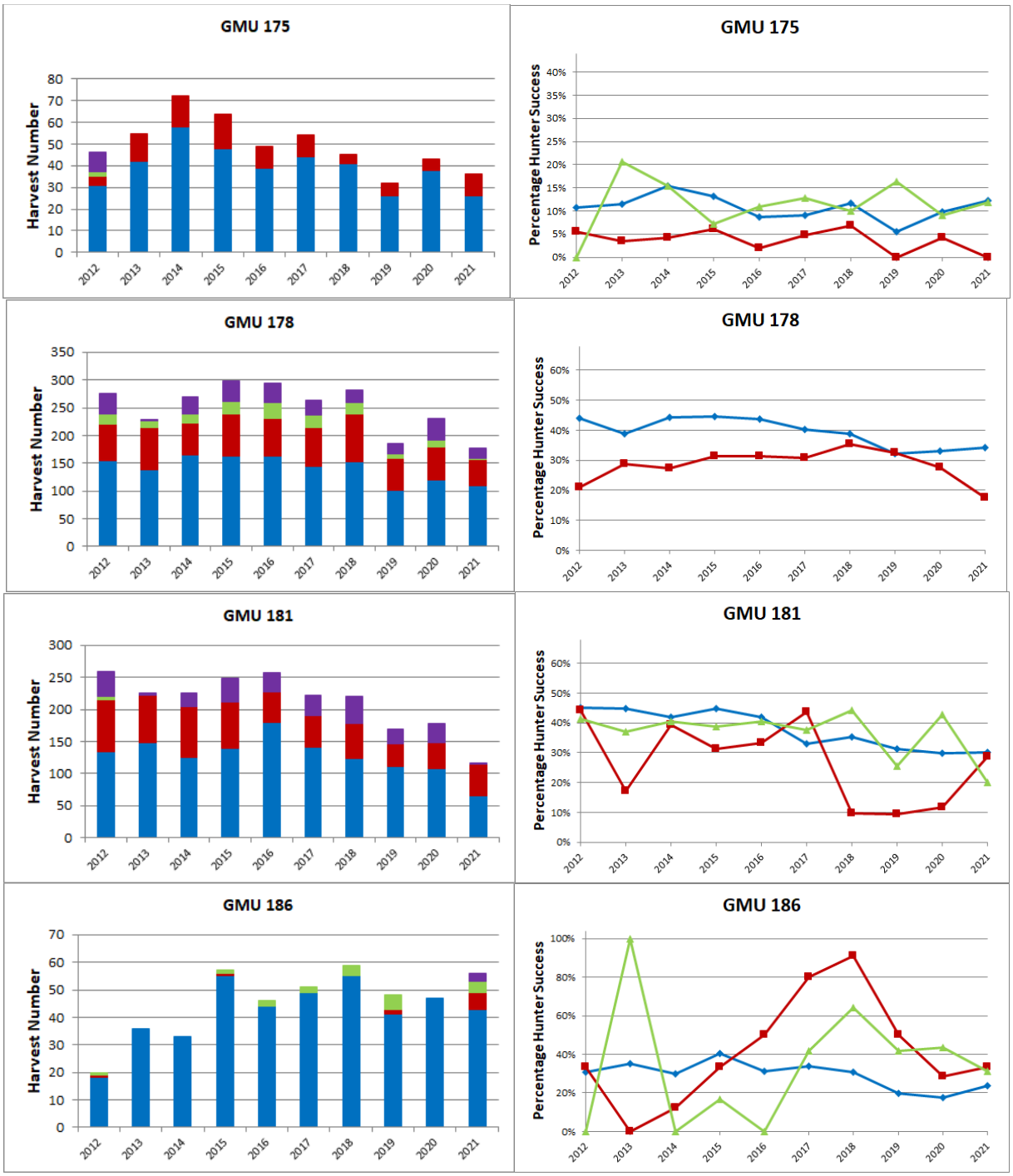


Figure 3. **Left column:** Ten-year trends in total numbers of mule deer bucks (blue) and antlerless deer (green), and white-tailed bucks (red) and antlerless deer (purple) during all general seasons combined from 2012-2021. Totals do not include permit harvest (**note the different scales**, from maximums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

DEER AREAS

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

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

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

BLACK BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

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

District 3 consists of GMUs that are part of the Blue Mountains Black Bear Management Unit 8 (BBMU 8), which is one of nine BBMUs defined by WDFW. Currently, allowing for a general bear season during the fall and controlled permit numbers during the spring has maintained harvest metrics within parameters identified by WDFW as reflective of a healthy bear population. The metrics used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of harvested female bears (no more than 35-39% of harvest), the median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years), and the median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years). Spring bear seasons are currently on "pause" while the policy is being discussed between the Department and the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

WDFW completed a mark-recapture density estimate last season to establish a baseline for monitoring trends in black bear population size. Results of the survey are pending, so we will continue to reference trends in harvest data as surrogates to formal population estimates or indices. Currently, black bear populations are believed to be robust and stable in District 3. Because the age of harvest is used as a management metric, hunters are reminded that **it is required that a premolar tooth be submitted** (lack of hunter compliance with this regulation is one of multiple reasons the Spring Bear hunt has been paused). Tooth envelopes can be obtained by calling a regional office or stopping in at one of the district offices (call ahead as these offices do not have dedicated customer service staff), which may be available to help with tooth extraction as well.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2022 SEASON

Although there are hunters who specifically target black bears, most bears are harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest can vary quite a bit from one year to the next and overall hunter success is quite low. Since 2001, hunter success in District 3 has averaged just 6% and has never been higher than 9%. However, hunter success is likely higher for those hunters who specifically hunt bears versus those who buy a bear tag in case they see one while deer or elk hunting.

Overall, if there is any trend in bear harvest during the general bear season in District 3, it is one of long-term stability. Harvest has generally fluctuated between 75 and 100 bears, excluding a few outliers: 2011 was a relatively poor year, with 66 bears harvested, but harvest rebounded during the 2012 and 2013 seasons before dropping off again in 2014 to 62 bears (Figure 8). 2021 was another low harvest year, but with the drought and US Forest closure due to fires, hunter opportunity was reduced, likely explaining some of the lower harvest. With annual fluctuations in hunter numbers, some index of harvest per unit effort is generally a better

indicator of harvest trends, and 2021 saw only a modest increase in the number of days/harvests, nowhere close to the values observed during the low harvest years of 2011, 2014, and 2017. Figure 4 shows the number of hunter days per bear harvested, which also does not show any consistent increasing or decreasing trend.

At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) (Figure 5). Harvest numbers during 2010, 2014, and 2017 seasons compared to long-term (10-year), and short-term (5-year) averages were lower in both GMUs 154 and 162, but the yearly District harvest does not show any identifiable trends (Figure 4) other than there have been very few low harvest years back-to-back. This was again highlighted by the rebound in 2012 after the low 2011 harvest, in both the 2015 and 2016 harvests after the low 2014 harvest, and again in 2018 after the low 2017 harvest. Based on general long-term stability in District 3 bear harvest, hunters should expect similar harvest and success rates during the 2022 season. We may see some change in the harvest dynamic over time with the new regulation of a two-bear limit and August 1 opener (compared to a past September opener), but in the short term this will likely be offset by the lack of any harvest during a spring season. We did experience the highest total harvest in 2020 (140 bears) since the 2002 harvest (165 bears), but this was not due to second bear harvest, but rather a successful spring season.

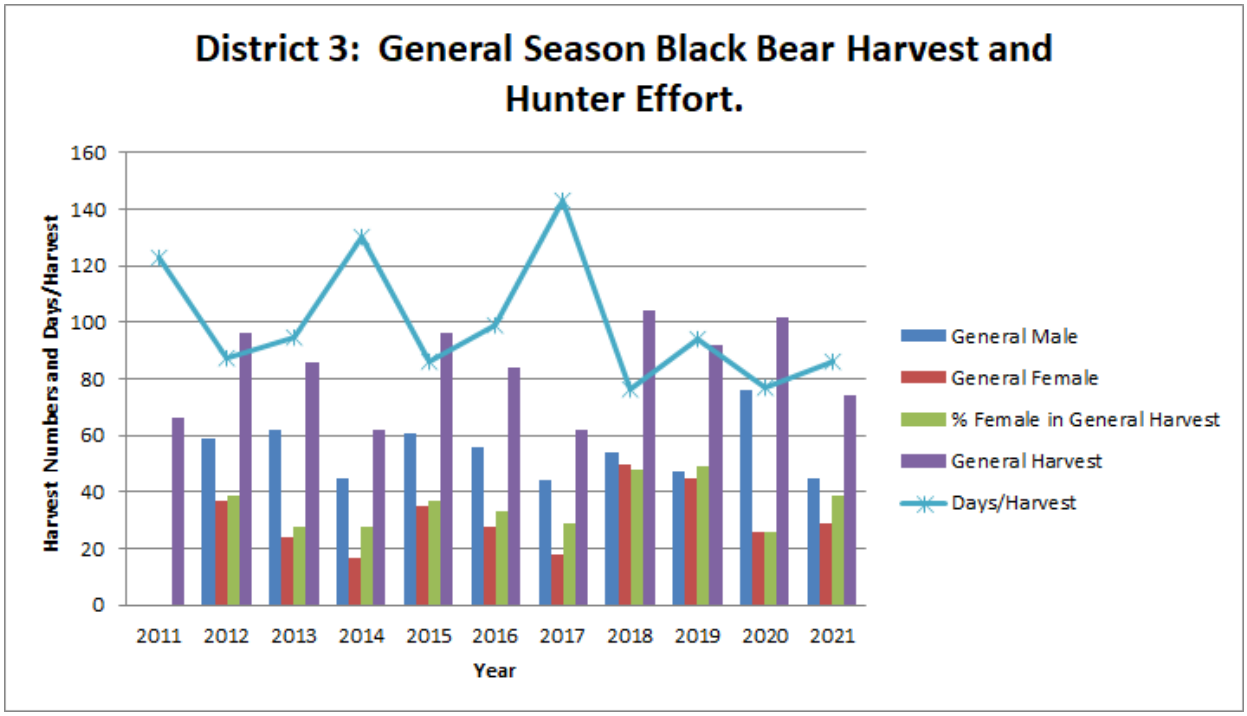


Figure 4. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season, and an index of hunter effort (hunter days/bear harvested) in District 3, 2011–2021 (the sex of harvested bears is not available for 2011).

HOW TO LOCATE AND HARVEST A BLACK BEAR

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

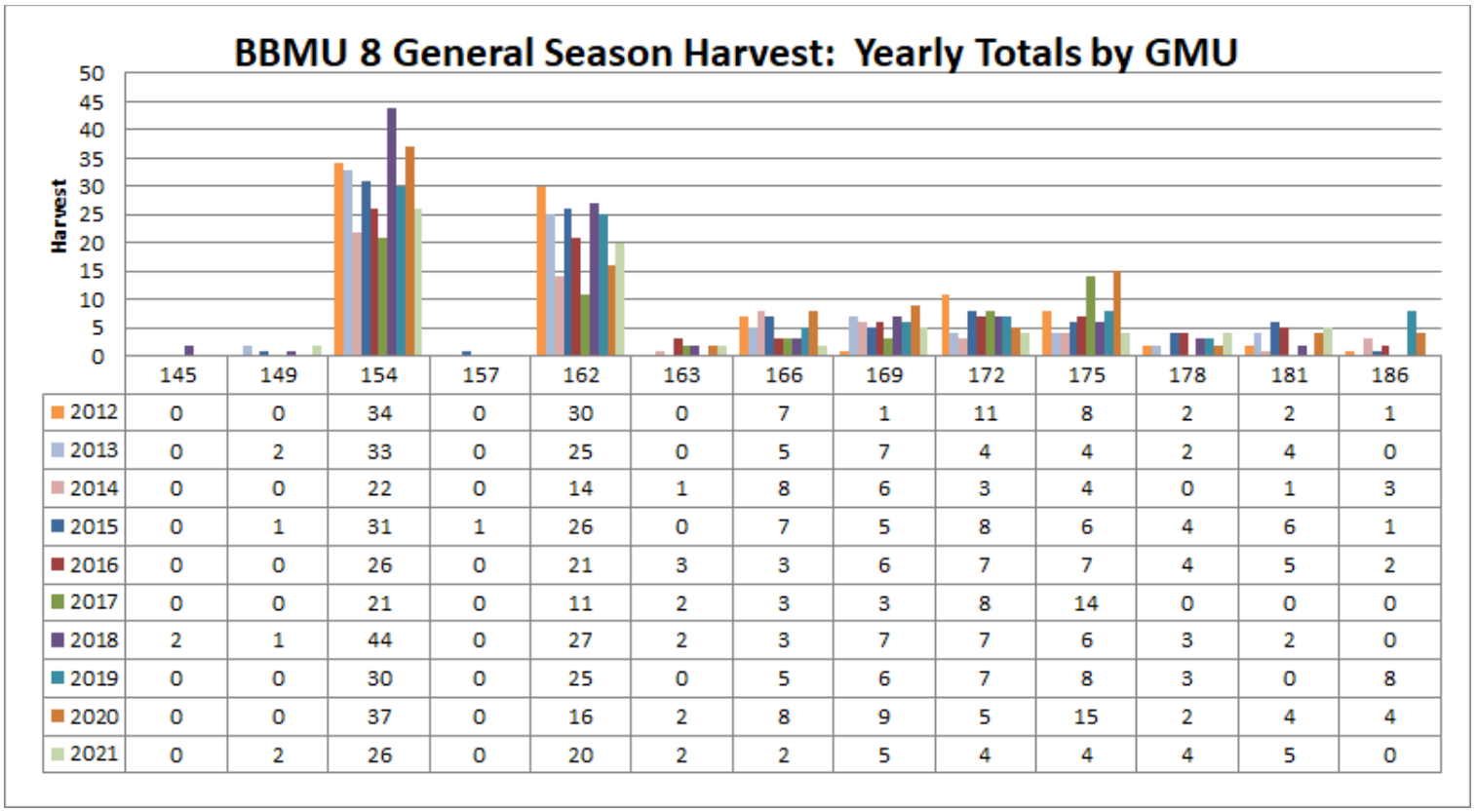
Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. Hunters should focus their efforts early and late in the day in more open terrain (e.g., south-facing slopes). In September, bears can spend a considerable amount of time in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountain foothills in search of fruit that has ripened in the riparian areas and around old homesteads.

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

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

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

Beginning in 2019, bear hunting season dates in District 3 were standardized to an August 1 opener running until November 15 to conform to new statewide standard opening and closing dates. In addition, the two-bear harvest limit was extended statewide. Hunters are still only allowed one bear on their spring bear permit (if/when permit hunts are available) but can harvest an additional bear during the fall season, or two bears in the fall if unsuccessful during a spring hunt.



	145	149	154	157	162	163	166	169	172	175	178	181	186
2012	0	0	34	0	30	0	7	1	11	8	2	2	1
2013	0	2	33	0	25	0	5	7	4	4	2	4	0
2014	0	0	22	0	14	1	8	6	3	4	0	1	3
2015	0	1	31	1	26	0	7	5	8	6	4	6	1
2016	0	0	26	0	21	3	3	6	7	7	4	5	2
2017	0	0	21	0	11	2	3	3	8	14	0	0	0
2018	2	1	44	0	27	2	3	7	7	6	3	2	0
2019	0	0	30	0	25	0	5	6	7	8	3	0	8
2020	0	0	37	0	16	2	8	9	5	15	2	4	4
2021	0	2	26	0	20	2	2	5	4	4	4	5	0

Figure 5. The number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2012-2021 general black bear season in District 3.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 3, but densities likely vary among GMUs, with higher densities where shrub and forest cover make up a larger portion of the unit, corresponding to good deer and elk foraging habitat. Cougar populations in District 3 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining stable adult territories and population by limiting the harvest of adult cougars to approximately 12% to 16% of the cougar population. Beginning in 2008, WDFW has continually adjusted the way it manages cougar harvest in Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intent was 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.

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

In April 2020, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted higher harvest guidelines for cougars based on local harvest data instead of a Statewide average density estimate to calculate available opportunity, while still meeting the Game Management Plan (GMP) goals. Social stability is one goal stated in the GMP, which is maintained by adult territorial cougars. Based on this, only adult cougars (greater than 24 months of age) will count towards the harvest guideline in the coming years. It is unclear at this time if the harvest will change significantly under these new guidelines. Most harvest occurs during the fall big game seasons during the open season, which was not changed in 2020. The expectation of this change is that the winter season (Jan 1-Apr 30) should remain open in four out of every five years, allowing for good snow tracking conditions for hunters specifically targeting late-season cougars and potentially resulting in a higher harvest than observed in past years.

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

Hunt Area	2021-2022 Harvest Guideline	2021-2022 Harvest
145, 166, 175, 178	6-7 adult	6 (9) – Did not close
149, 154, 162, 163	7-9 adult	9 (11) – Closed 1/15/22
169, 172, 181, 186	5-6 adult	2 (2) – Did not close
Public safety, depredation removals	None	2 – across all GMUs

For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit WDFW's website.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2022 SEASON

Cougar harvest in District 3 has been variable over the years, with the average since 1990 of 17 cougars and a range between a low of 5 and a high of 33. However, in 14 out of the last 25 years, the range has been between 12 and 20 cougars harvested. Since 2012, the number of cougars harvested in District 3 has averaged 19 cougars, and sub-adults typically dominate the harvest. With the yearly variation, it is hard to predict future harvest, but cougar sightings in the district continue to be fairly common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the harvest. Under the new harvest management guidelines, it is much less likely for all hunt areas to close by the January 1 evaluation period, but hunters interested in a cougar harvest in any of these GMUs should still plan on taking advantage of good cougar tracking conditions prior to January.

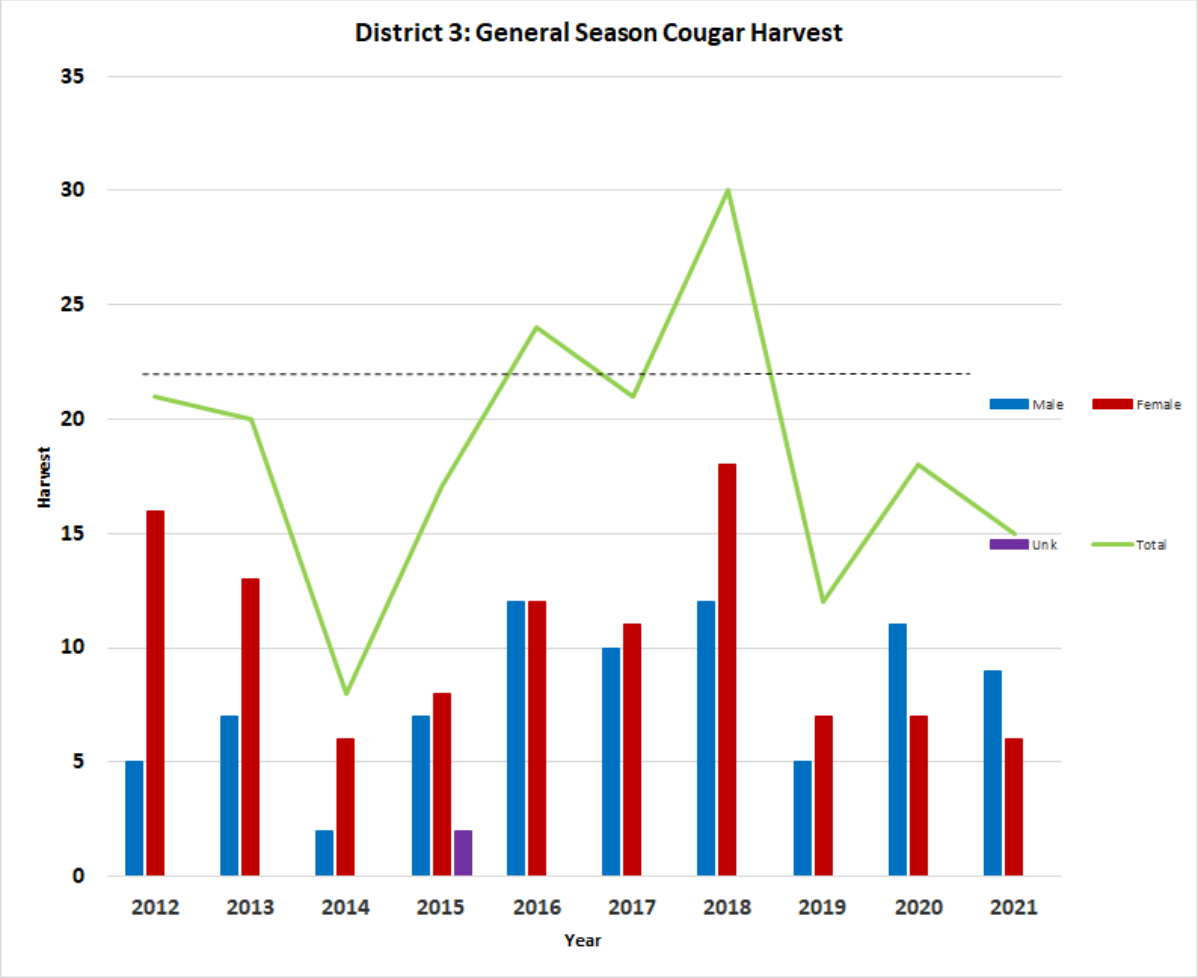


Figure 6. The reported number of cougars harvested in District 3, 2012–2021. The dashed line represents the upper harvest guideline for all three cougar hunt areas combined.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

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

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

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

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

MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY

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

CONCENTRATION AREAS

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

POPULATION STATUS

The number of ducks in District 3 during established hunting seasons is most strongly related to the status of breeding duck populations in Alaska and Canada. The following are the trends from USFW/Canadian Wildlife Service monitoring data over the six-year period from 2014-2019: the 2014 breeding survey estimated the breeding population in Alaska at 3.5 million ducks, a 6% increase over 2013 values, but still well below the 2012 estimate of 4.4 million. The mallard estimate recovered from 2013 lows of 338,000 to an estimate of 501,000 for 2014, a

48% increase, and similar to the 2012 estimate (USFWS, Trends in Duck Breeding Populations, 1955-2015).

In 2015, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats traditional survey area was 3.4 million, a 3% decrease from 2014 estimates, and 8% below the long-term average. The mallard breeding population estimate was 471,000, a decrease of 6% from 2014 levels, but still 24% above the long-term average. In 2016, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats area was 4.3 million, a 28% increase over 2015 estimates, and 17% above the long-term trends. The mallard breeding population estimate was 584,000, 24% above the 2015 estimates, and 54% above the long-term trend. In 2017, the total estimate for the Alaskas-Yukon area was 3.99 million, an 8% decline from the previous year, but 8% higher than the long-term average. The 2017 estimate for mallards was 538,000, an 8% decline from the 2016 estimate but 40% above the long-term average. In 2018, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 3.38 million, 15% below 2017 estimates, and 9% below the long-term average. The 2018 harvest in District 3 mirrored the population estimates, with a 15% decline in harvest over the 2017 duck harvest. In 2018, the mallard population estimate was 451,000, a 16% decline over 2017 estimates but still 17% above the long-term average. In 2019, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 2.61 million, a 23% decline over 2018 estimates, and the third year in a row of population declines. 2019 also saw a continued decline in mallard breeding population numbers, with an estimate of 361,000, 20% below 2018 and 7% below the long-term average.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

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

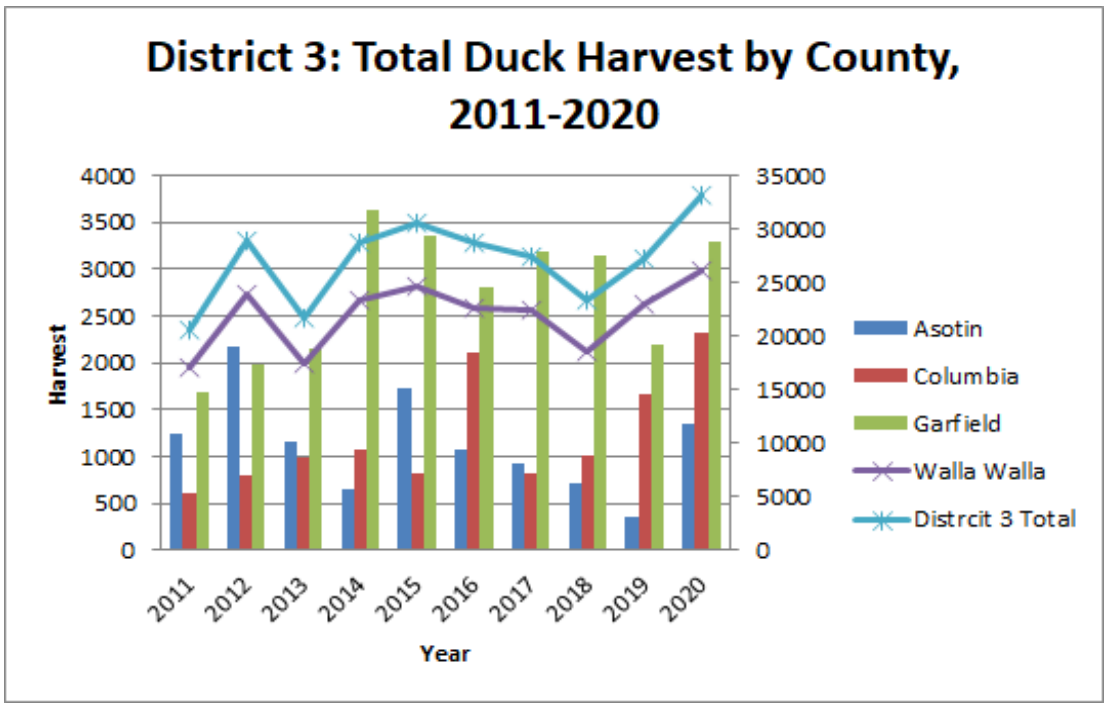


Figure 7. Trends in the total number of ducks harvested (blue line, right axis), and totals by county in Walla Walla (purple line, right axis), Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties (bars, left axis), 2011–2020.

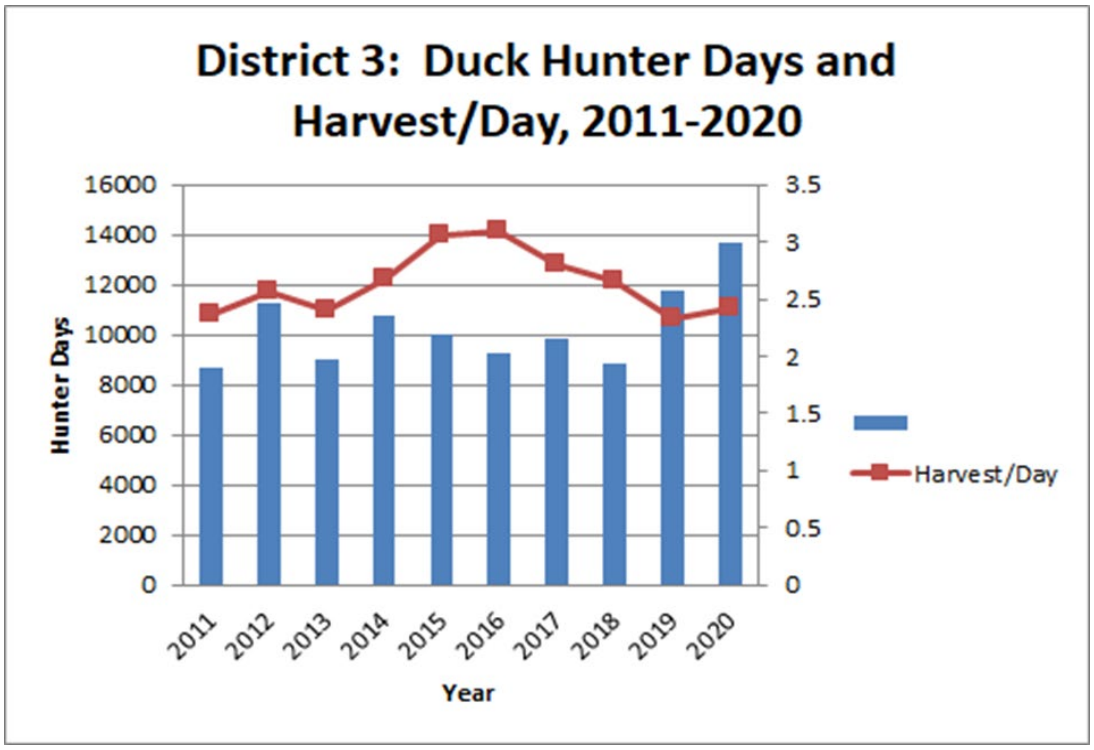


Figure 8. Trends in the total duck hunter days (left axis), and ducks harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2011-2020.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

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

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

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

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

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

MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

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

POPULATION STATUS

Few geese breed in District 3, so WDFW does not conduct breeding goose surveys in this part of the state. Urban goose populations can be problematic at times but offer limited hunting opportunities.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 3 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most goose harvest will occur in Walla Walla County during the late season, where twice as many geese are harvested each year compared to Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties combined. Although harvest is low in the three eastern counties of the district, creative hunters can find opportunities along the Touchet, Tucannon, and Snake rivers

by requesting access from farmers who have geese feeding daily in their crop fields, particularly alfalfa.

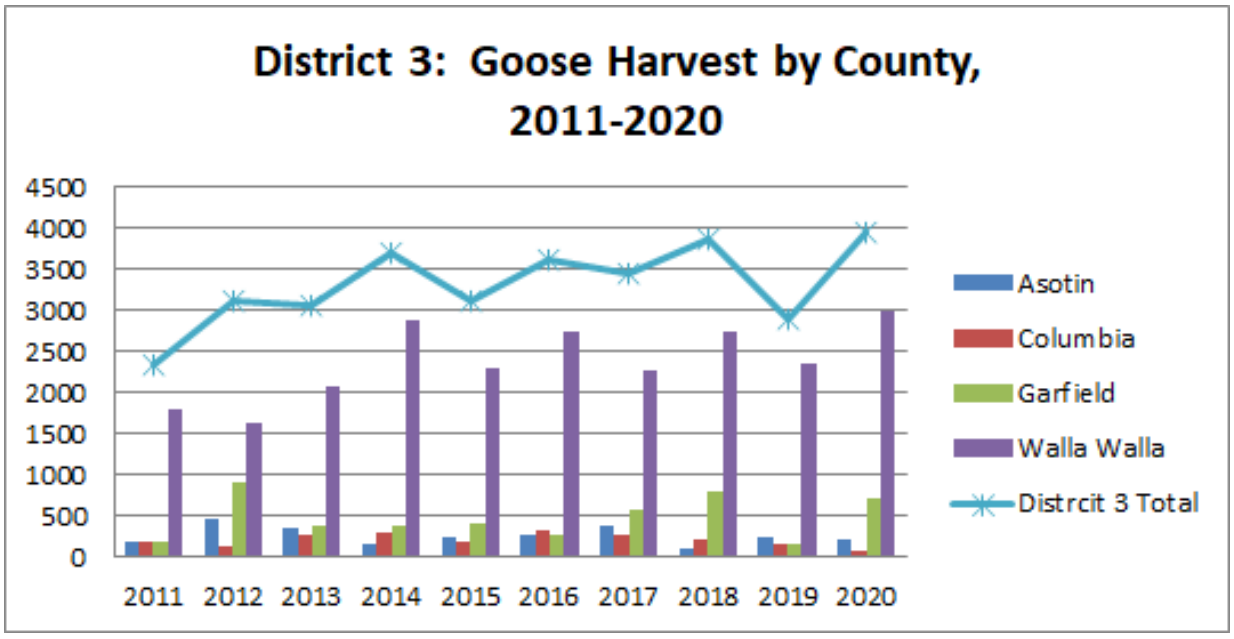


Figure 9. Trends in the total number of geese harvested (pale blue line), and totals by county in Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Walla Walla counties, 2011–2020.

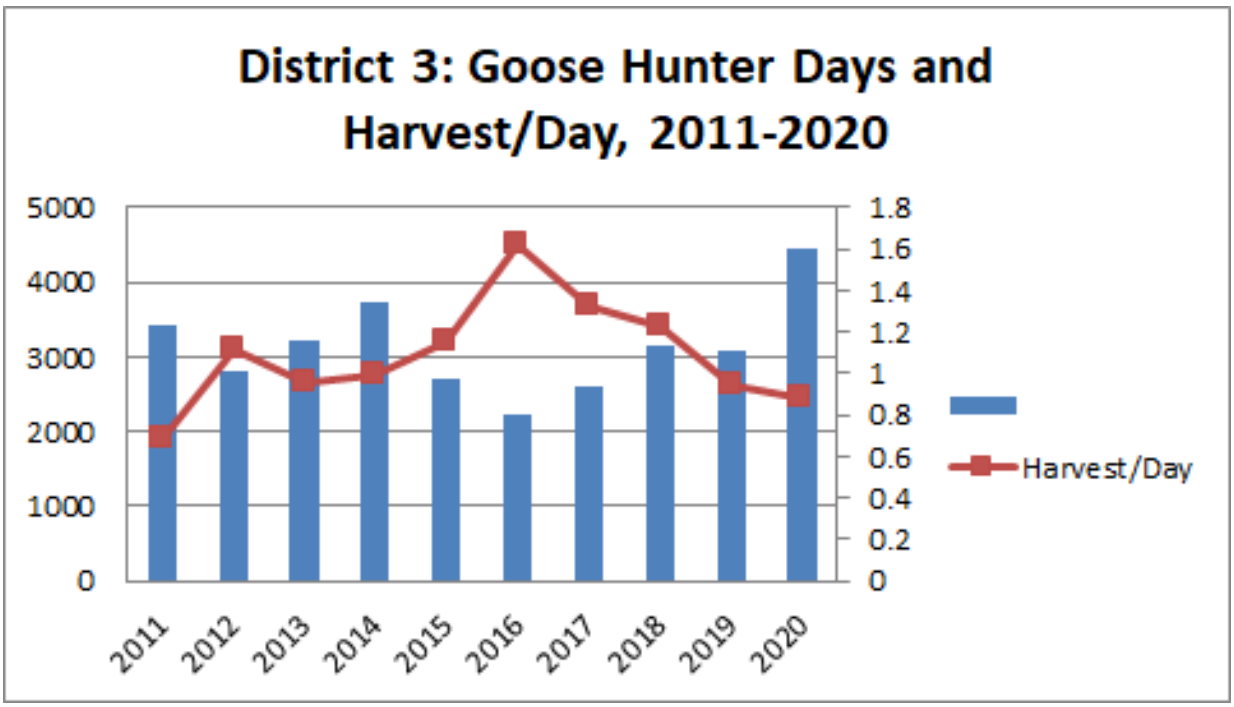


Figure 10. Trends in the total goose hunter days (left axis), and geese harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2011–2020.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

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

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

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

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

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

POPULATION STATUS

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

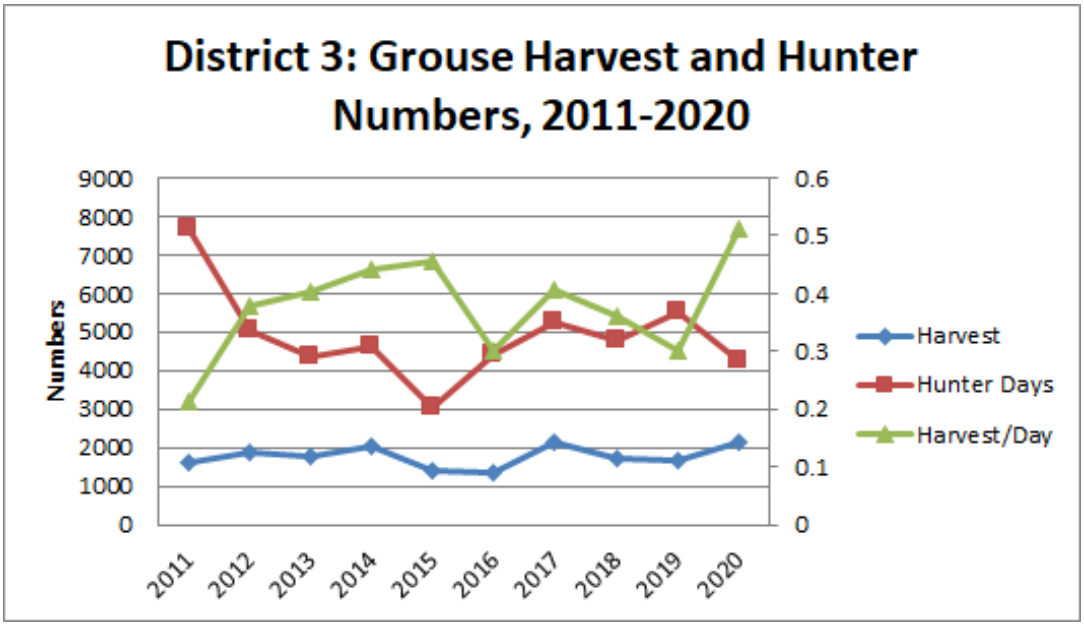


Figure 11. Number of grouse harvested, number of hunter days (right axis), and grouse harvested per hunter day (left axis), 2011-2020.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

The total number of grouse harvested in District 3 has declined significantly since 2009 when 5,147 grouse were estimated to be harvested. This is compared to 2,143 in 2017 and around 1,700 in both 2018 and 2019. Harvest in 2020 rebounded to 2,200 birds, but still well below the 2009 levels. Despite harvest declines, hunter numbers have declined as well, with a dramatic decrease in 2010 followed by a slow decline since then. Even with the sharp declines in harvest, there is a strong correlation between hunter days and total grouse harvested, suggesting hunters should expect on average to harvest one grouse for every two to three days hunting. Typically, a hunter may go a few days without seeing birds or getting a shot at any but will harvest multiple birds on a given day, once they find good habitat and encounter birds still in family groups. Since harvest is so closely tied to brood production, weather conditions in the Spring are a good predictor of hunting season success. This year's cool, wet spring may have impacted early brood production. Birds that fail early will often attempt a second clutch, and later nesting birds have had very good brood-rearing conditions, with abundant vegetation promoting superior foraging conditions for chicks. Overall, we expect fewer birds to have successfully nested this year, resulting in decreased abundance during the coming hunting season.

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

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

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

PHEASANTS

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

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

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

POPULATION STATUS

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

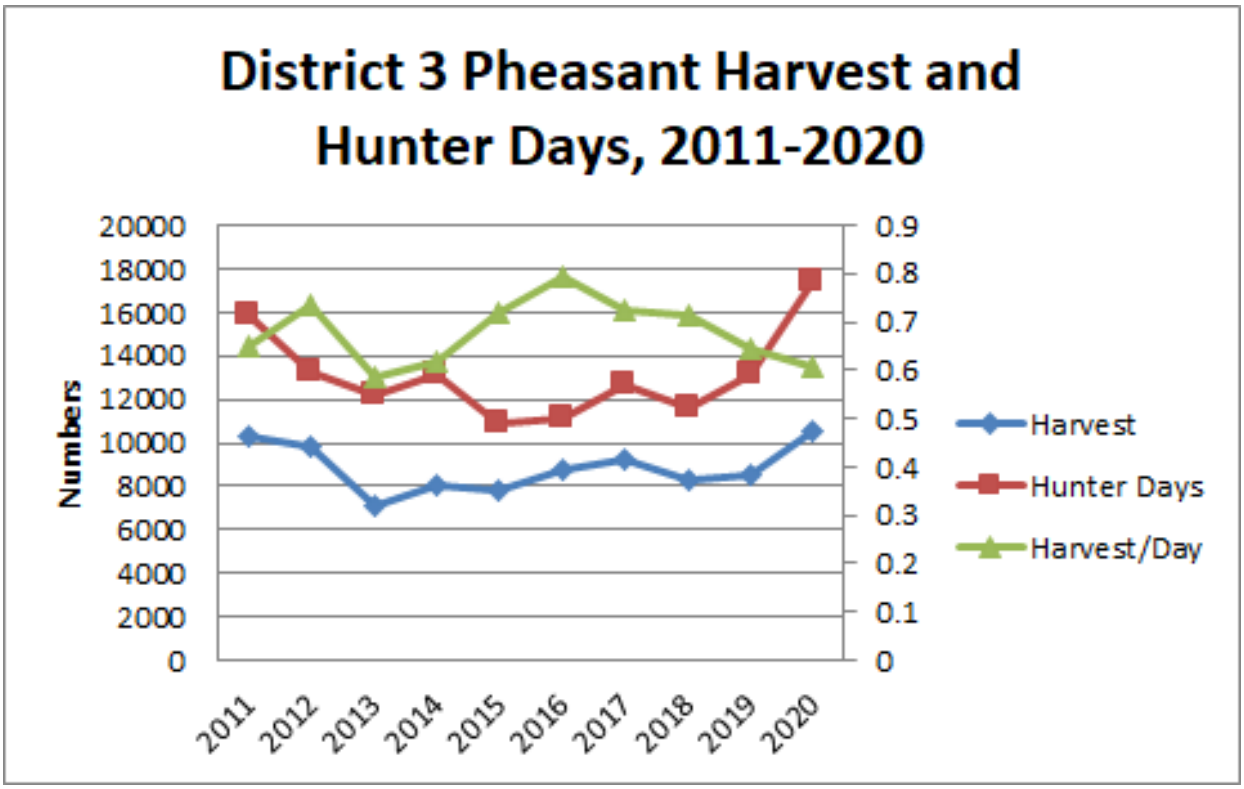


Figure 13. Total pheasant harvest, hunter days, and harvest per day in District 3, 2011-2020.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

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

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

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

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

QUAIL

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

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

POPULATION STATUS

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

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

The total number of quail harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. The breeding conditions during spring and early summer of 2022 have been poor for nesting success but should support good survival of late nesting birds, but not enough to overcome early nest failure. Biologists predict that 2022 quail harvest numbers will continue their recent slide.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

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

TURKEYS

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

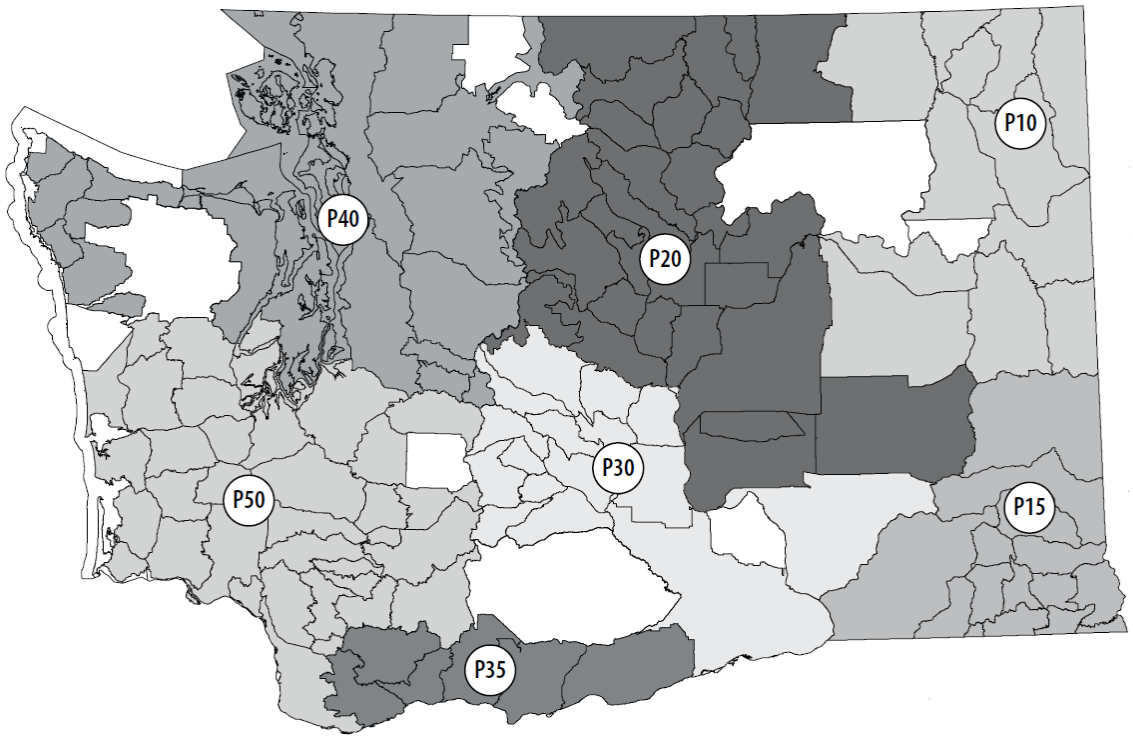


Figure 15. Map depicting WDFW's seven wild turkey population management units.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for turkeys. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. The 2019 harvest continued the improving trend from 2018, with a CPUE of 0.11 during the spring season, dropping a bit at 0.09 for the fall. Harvest in 2020 saw a drop during the spring season, which may be an indication that recent increases in harvest limits are stabilizing the population. That said, the 2020 fall harvest was the second highest in the last 10 years, both in total harvest and CPUE. The 2021 season saw a spike in hunter numbers and harvest, but CPUE was slightly down as the increase in hunter numbers was not quite matched by the harvest.

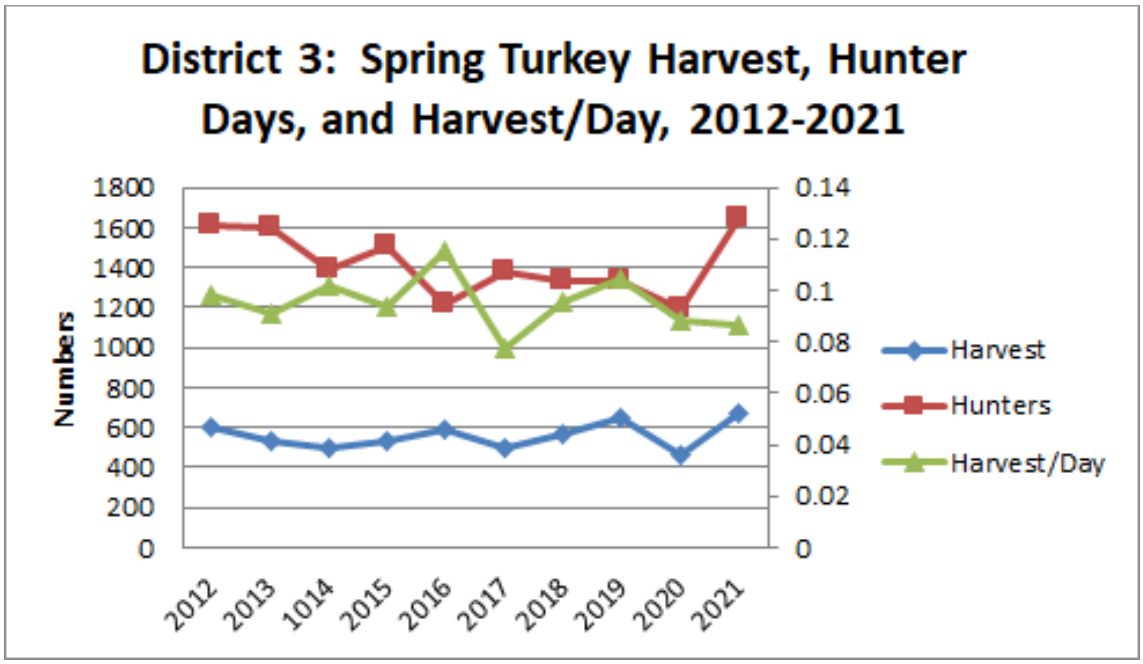


Figure 16. Spring turkey harvest numbers and numbers of hunter days (left axis), and harvest/day (right axis), 2012-2021.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

The total number of turkeys harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season and overwinter survival. The total harvest of 742 in 2014 was nearly average, followed by harvests of 770 in 2015, 773 in 2016, and 769 in 2017. With more liberal bag limits, 2018 saw a jump in harvest to 1,053 birds combined for spring and fall seasons, with a similar harvest of 1,048 in 2019, both years being well above the five-year average of 821 birds. Although harvest dropped during the 2020 and 2021 seasons, we still saw total harvest in the 940-990 bird range, still above the 5-year average which has climbed to about 920 birds. The 2021 harvest was bolstered by a healthy Spring harvest. The spring season limit remains at two bearded turkeys in Eastern Washington. Based on long-term harvest trends, turkey populations in southeast Washington appear to have stabilized after years of increasing harvest, and future harvest is likely to be most impacted by spring weather conditions on brood survival and the occasional hard winter impacting all age classes. Prospects for this season are a bit of a mixed bag; the mild winter means good survival and possibility for higher nesting success, especially for yearling hens most impacted by winter severity, but the cool, wet spring does not bode well for poult production. Successfully nesting hens will find good poult rearing conditions with ample seed and insect food resources. All told, biologists are cautiously optimistic that we will see at least an average harvest for the coming fall season.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

Most turkey hunters target gobblers in the spring when males are displaying and readily come to box, slate, and mouth calls that mimic hen groups. Setting a blind or using camouflage

clothing near meadows or small forest openings used as strutting grounds can be very effective. Often only minimal calling is needed to bring turkeys within range. Identifying roost areas and setting up nearby can also be effective, but efficient calling will be needed to attract birds. Gobble calls should only be used infrequently, and hunters generally should not stalk or approach gobble calls, as it may be another hunter.

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

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

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

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

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

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

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

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

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

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

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

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

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

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

GMU 145 - MAYVIEW

Access rating – Poor

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

GMU 149 – PRESCOTT

Access rating – Poor

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

GMU 154 – BLUE CREEK

Access Rating – Poor/good

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

GMU 157 – MILL CREEK WATERSHED

Access rating – No entry without permit

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

GMU 162 - DAYTON

Access rating – Good/poor

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

GMU 163 - MARENGO

Access rating – Poor/fair

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

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

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

The Last Resort
Kampstore2005 Tucannon Rd.
Pomeroy, WA 99347
www.thelastresortrv.com

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

GMU 166 - TUCANNON

Access rating – Excellent

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

GMU 169 - WENAHA

Access rating = Excellent

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

GMU 172 – MOUNTAIN VIEW

Access rating – Good/fair

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

GMU 175 – LICK CREEK

Access rating – Excellent

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

GMU 178 - PEOLA

Access rating – Poor/fair

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

GMU 181 - COUSE

Access rating – Good/poor

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

GMU 186 – GRANDE RONDE

Access rating – Good/poor

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

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

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

The following is a summary of anticipated private land acres available through the department's Private Lands Access program in **2020**. There have been a number of land ownership changes and withdrawals from the Access Program, so hunters should be sure to check current conditions before heading out to their usual hunting spots.

District 3 Access Acres

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

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

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

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS

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

ONLINE PARCEL DATABASES

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

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

WDFW'S MAPPING TOOL

WDFW's GoHunt tool has been revamped as the new Hunt Regulations Web map and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU. The web map can be accessed by clicking the above link or going to WDFW's hunting website.