

**2023**



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH &  
WILDLIFE**

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Two local District 11 youth hunters, one with her first black bear harvested in GMU 667

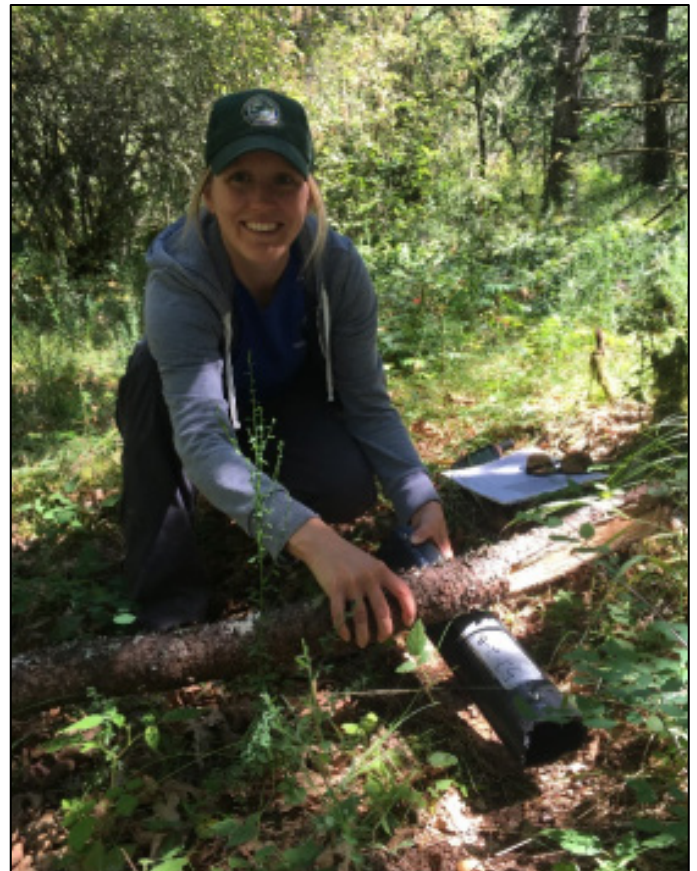
## **DISTRICT 11 HUNTING PROSPECTS**

Thurston and Pierce counties and GMU 667 of Lewis County



## Your District 11 Wildlife Management Team

Biologist Tirhi collecting black bear hair samples as part of 2020 District 11 bear density monitoring project.



Biologist Butler checking western gray squirrel hair tubes on Joint Base Lewis McChord (2019).

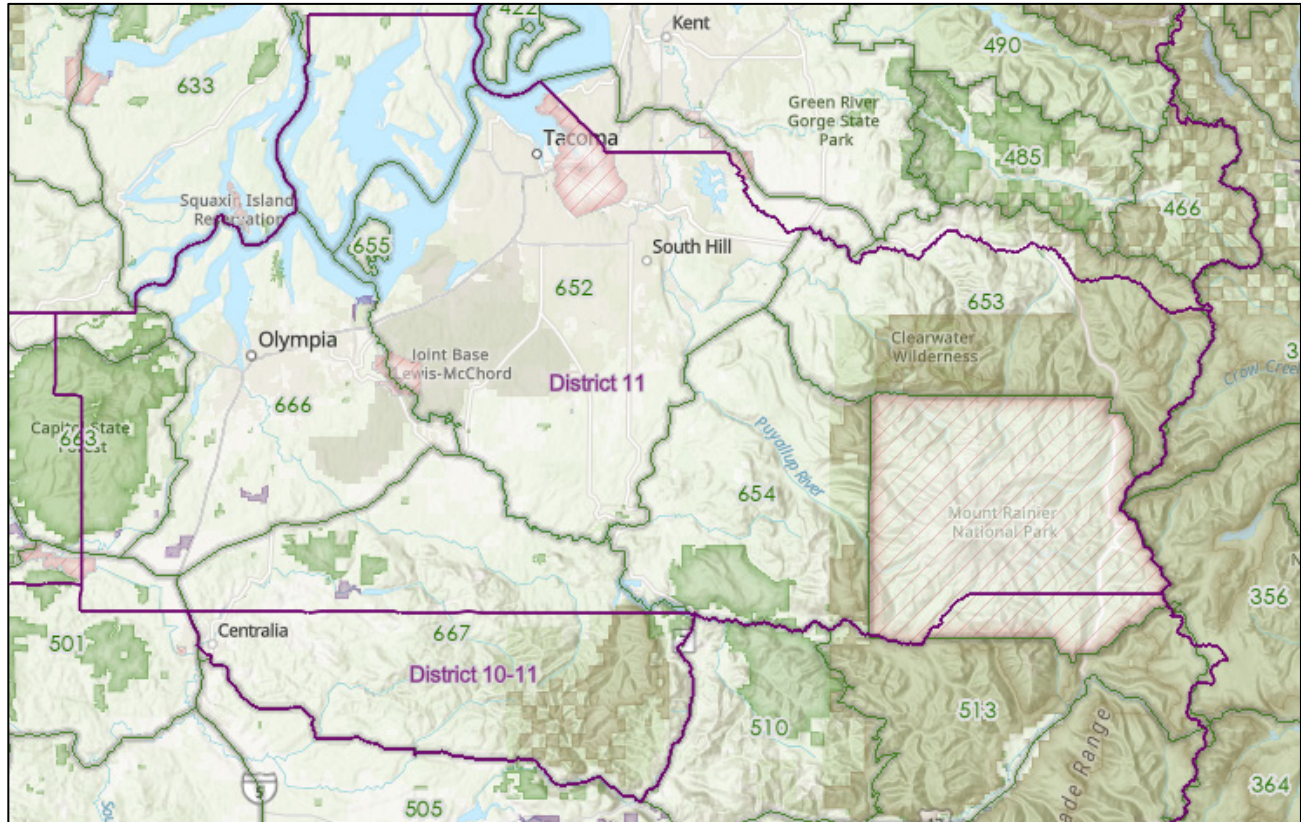


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## DISTRICT OVERVIEW

The Game Management Units (GMUs) that comprise District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), Anderson Island (GMU 655), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Land ownership in the district includes private residential and agricultural (e.g., GMUs 652 and 666), and both private and public industrial timberlands (e.g., GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.



Map depicting the six District 11 Game Management Units and surrounding units in neighboring districts (400s for Region 4 and 500s for Region 5).

Varied hunting opportunity exists within District 11, from waterfowl hunting on Puget Sound waterways to deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW's Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie wildlife areas (GMU 667), and Washington State Department of Natural Resources' (WWDNR) Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654), Tahoma State Forest (GMU 654/667), and additional patchwork ownership in the district provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting on public land. U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land surrounding Mount Rainier National Park in the eastern portion of the district is also accessible. Hunting is not allowed within Mount Rainier National Park.





### **WESTERN DISTRICT 11**

The western GMUs within District 11 include Anderson Island (GMU 655), Puyallup (GMU 652), Deschutes (666), and the western half of Skookumchuck (GMU 667). More urbanization characterizes this side of the district as compared to the eastern half. Because of this, WDFW often uses hunting regulations and management to stabilize rather than increase game populations as well as control wildlife nuisance and damage. For example, WDFW provides hunters more liberal seasons and damage hunts for deer and elk in these western GMUs. However, urbanization also results in more private property in the western half and hunters must seek access permission for most hunting. Hunters can only access Anderson Island by private boat or ferry, which can make hunting difficult (in addition to seeking access permission from private landowners). Despite these hurdles, urbanization in the western GMUs also contributes to less hunting pressure and pockets of higher game species density, in particular deer, elk, coyote, beaver, river otter, and waterfowl.

### **EASTERN DISTRICT 11**

The eastern GMUs within District 11 include the White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), and the eastern half of Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Eastern District 11 is characterized by expansive forestland, both public and private, and higher elevation mountainous areas. Most of Mount Rainier National Park lies within District 11 and dominates the southeast corner of the district. The elevation as it increases moving eastward across the district has a profound impact on game species. Habitat condition, food availability, and seasonal migration patterns are all dictated by this gradient and resulting weather patterns. Snowpack from September through July in eastern District 11 affects both game availability and road access; these in turn affect hunting opportunity and success. Hunters interested in a more rugged, challenging, and mountainous hunting experience will certainly appreciate the eastern half of District 11. Access can be challenging since most of the eastern district is either national or state forest, tribal forestland (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe), or private timberland. A series of secondary and primitive roads provide access into these forestlands but require hunting by foot or horse away from roads and deep into timber or along river systems and often in snow.

## FIREARM AND WEAPON RESTRICTIONS

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston counties of District 11. Maps of Pierce County firearm restriction areas are available on Pierce County's [Public GIS tool](#) and the Pierce County firearm regulations can be found at: [piercecounitywa.gov](http://piercecounitywa.gov) (type firearm regulation in the search button to find a list of related material). Maps of no-shooting and controlled shooting zones in Thurston County can be found at: [co.thurston.wa](http://co.thurston.wa) (Open 'Show Me Everything Map', choose Maps and Layers tab, type 'controlled shooting' in the lower search button, click the 'controlled shooting zones' layer to turn on). Note that fire season can result in both public USFS and private industrial timberlands closing for all access. Hunters should check with the local ranger station on closures for USFS before setting out during fire season. The [Incident Information System](#) also includes wildfire information. Anderson Island is mostly private property with some public property and so much of the island would be 'hunt by permission.'



## MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

District 11 encompasses parts of two national forests: Gifford Pinchot and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. USFS land is found primarily in the eastern half of District 11 surrounding Mount Rainier National Park on its northern and western sides. This includes the Clearwater Wilderness bordering Mount Rainier on the north. USFS land is free to hunt but much of it is either permanently or seasonally gated and requires access by foot or horse (reference Road Closure section).

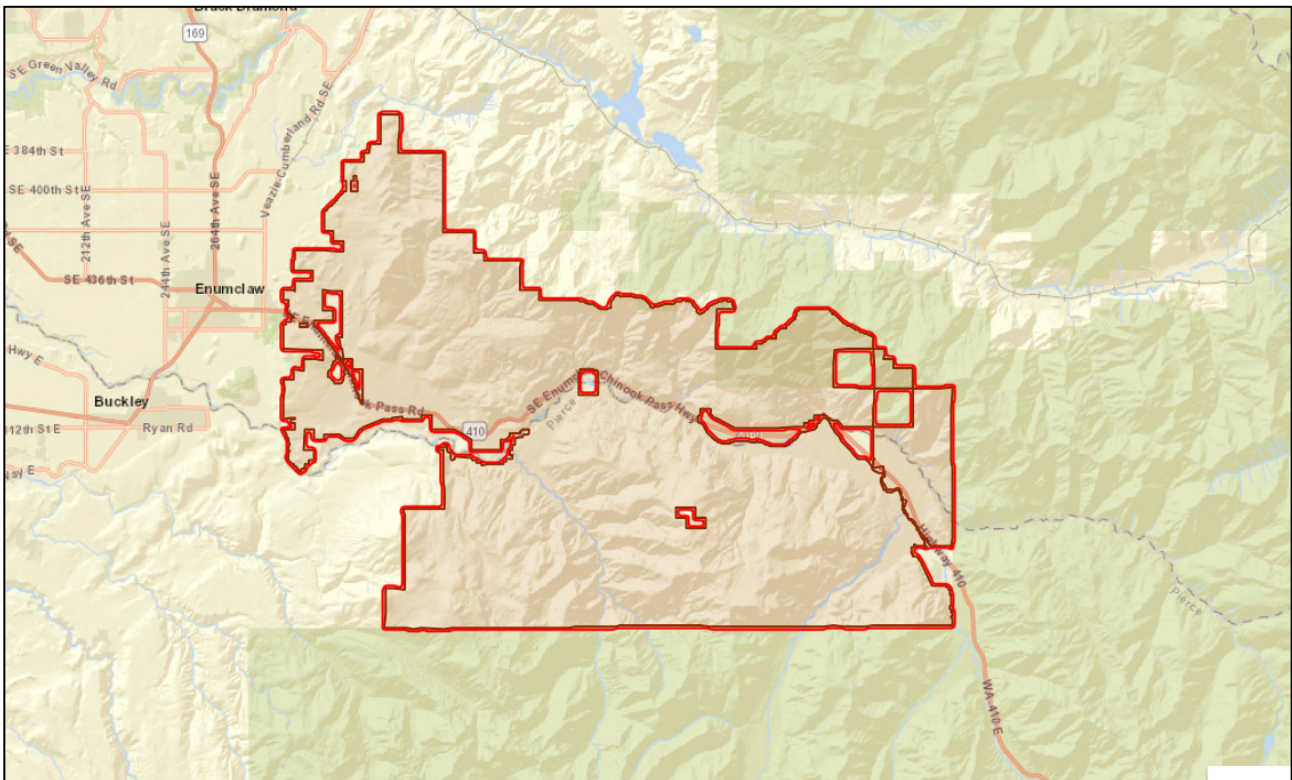
Washington State Department of Natural Resource (DNR) manages 3 million acres of public trust lands in Washington. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) manage over 1 million acres of public lands. Outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing, are allowed on most of those lands with a Discover Pass to park. Visiting Washington State Parks also requires a Discover Pass although hunting is not allowed in Washington State parks. Discover Passes are available for purchase at [discoverpass.wa.gov](https://discoverpass.wa.gov). WDFW issues a Vehicle Access Pass at no charge with the purchase of any annual hunting, trapping, or fishing license, excluding an annual razor clam or shellfish/seaweed license. A Vehicle Access Pass allows visitors to park at WDFW wildlife and water access areas. A Vehicle Access Pass is transferable between two vehicles. See sections below on ways to obtain maps of DNR, WDFW, and Washington State Parks managed lands.



## PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

Timberlands throughout the district are owned or managed by various private commercial timber companies and tribal governments, each having their own access regulations, including some with fee access programs. These lands provide some of the best opportunity for both small and large game hunting in District 11.

**THE MUCKLESHOOT INDIAN TRIBE** owns the White River Tree Farm (78,121 acres), previously owned and managed by Hancock Natural Resource Group, which is now under the ownership Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture, Inc. (Manulife). The [Muckleshoot Indian Tribe](#) continues to allow non-motorized access only under a fee access program managed by Manulife. Non-motorized access requires a non-motorized access license. A map of this tree farm, prices, and application process for fee access program, and rules and conditions of that program can be found [here](#). The license allows access April to December, with no access July 2-5.

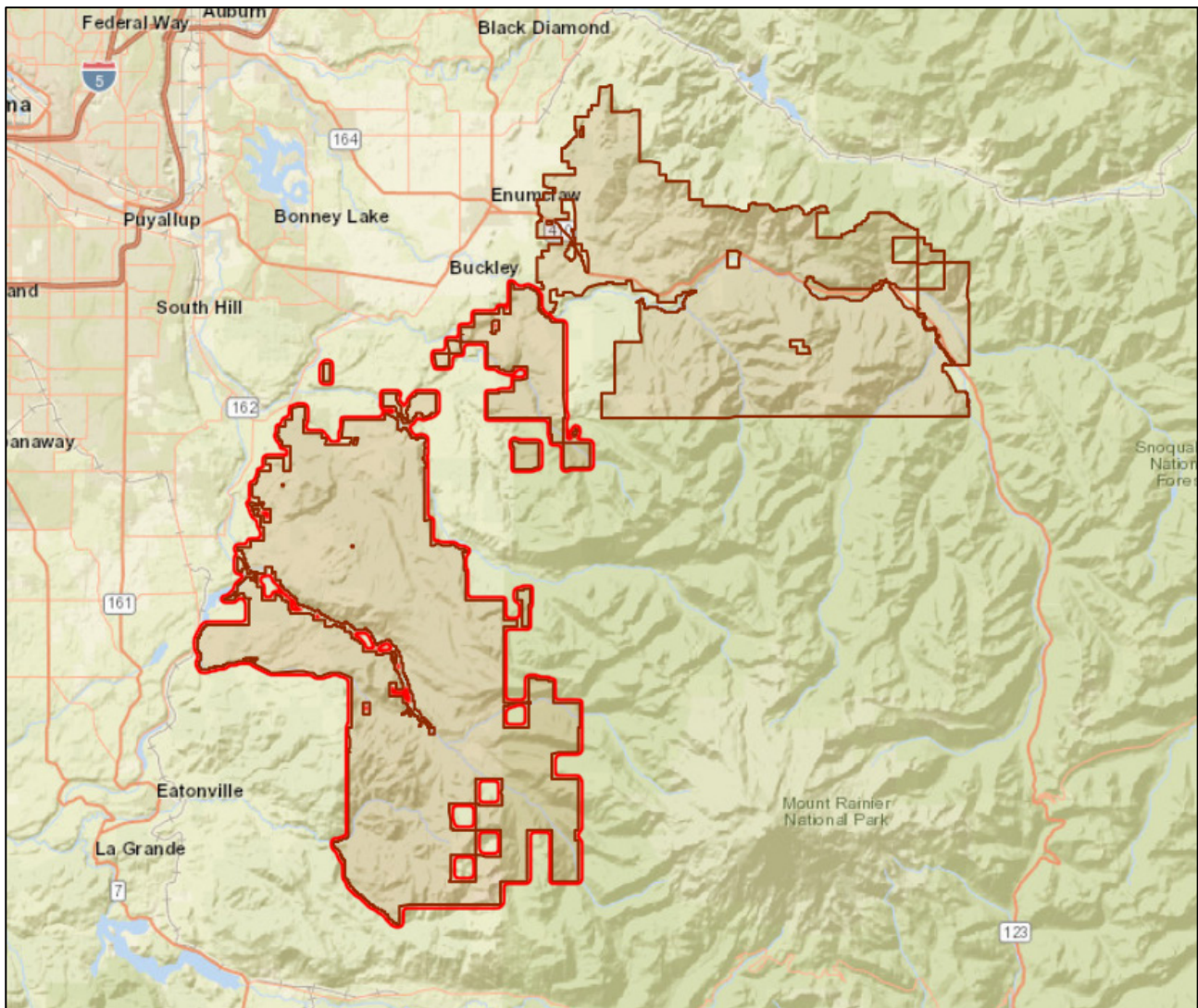


Muckleshoot Indian Tribe's White River Tree Farm.

**MANULIFE INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT TIMBERLAND AND AGRICULTURE, INC. (MANULIFE, PREVIOUSLY HANCOCK FOREST MANAGEMENT)** continues to own a portion of the Kapowsin Tree Farm (103,462 acres) but has also sold a significant amount of land to various other companies/tribes. Motorized and non-motorized access is controlled through a fee access program. Maps of this tree farm, prices, and application process for the fee access program, including its limited elk hunt (see the Promotional Contest of Chance pdf link), and rules and conditions can be found [here](#). A Manulife Recreation Access License is required for motorized access into the

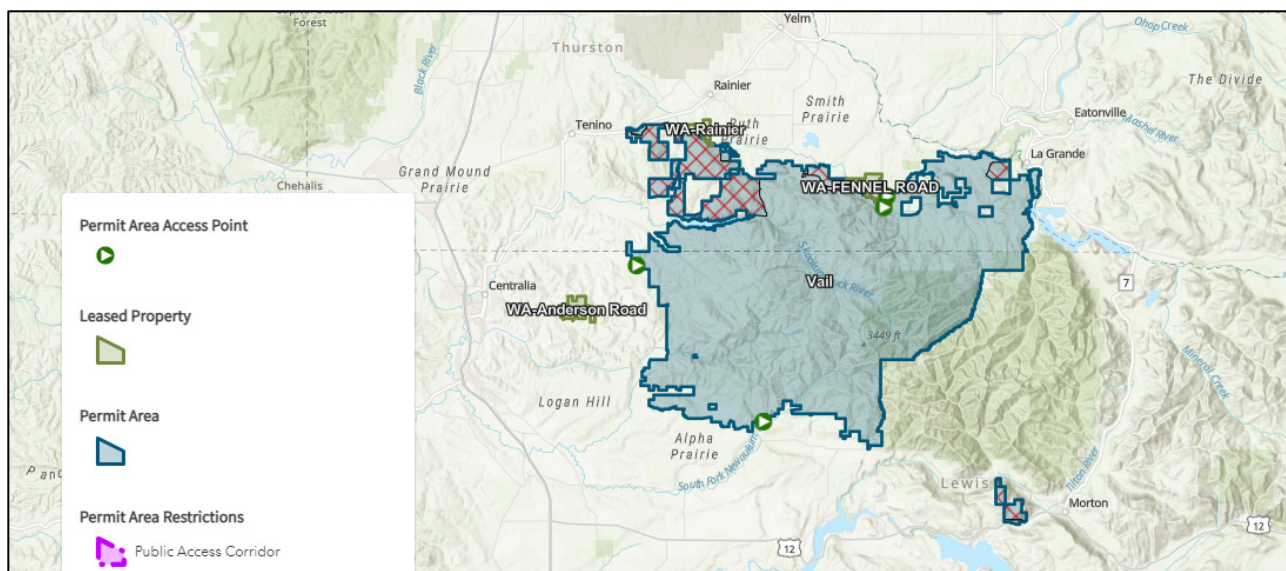


Kapowsin. Access by horseback, walking, or bicycling is also allowed, but only if visitors have a motorized access permit, as there is currently not a separate non-motorized access program for this area. Elk and Deer hunters: reference the Kapowsin Rules for special restrictions on hunting both species on this tree farm. Be advised other timber companies have small inholdings within the Kapowsin Tree Farm that may have additional access restrictions. Currently, most permits allow access from April 1– March 30, with no access the first week of July or during the bull elk seasons. Motorized general public recreation permits are available through Manulife for the White River Forest with the season running April 1 through December 31 with no access the first week of July. A reduced price non-motorized access permit is also available into the White River Forest. The Eatonville Forest (53,000) is owned and managed by [Hampton Tree Farms](#). A recreational access permit is required for the Forest; visit their website for information.



Manulife's Kapowsin Tree Farm (outlined in red; Muckleshoot White River Tree Farm to the northeast).

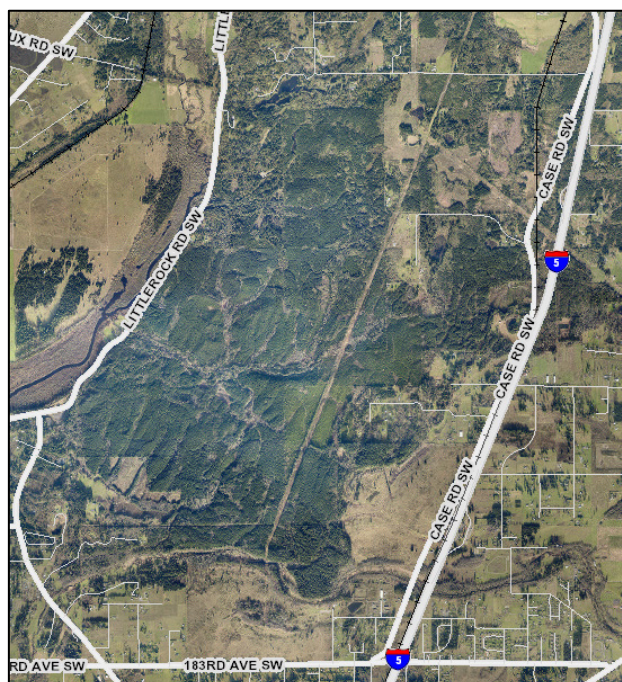
**WEYERHAEUSER** owns property scattered across District 11 including lands in northwestern GMU 653 and the Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667. Weyerhaeuser lands in Washington have NO free access programs; a recreational permit is required to access any of Weyerhaeuser property. A limited access recreation program is in effect for the Vail Tree Farm (152,079 acres) and hunters are required to buy an access permit to access the tree farm. Two programs are available: lease and permit. Motorized and non-motorized permits go on sale in May and allow access for one year (August through following July) and typically sell out well in advance of the hunting season. All forestry operations continue during the permit season. Information on Weyerhaeuser’s recreational program including purchasing leases and permits can be found on [Weyerhaeuser’s recreation page](#).



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm.

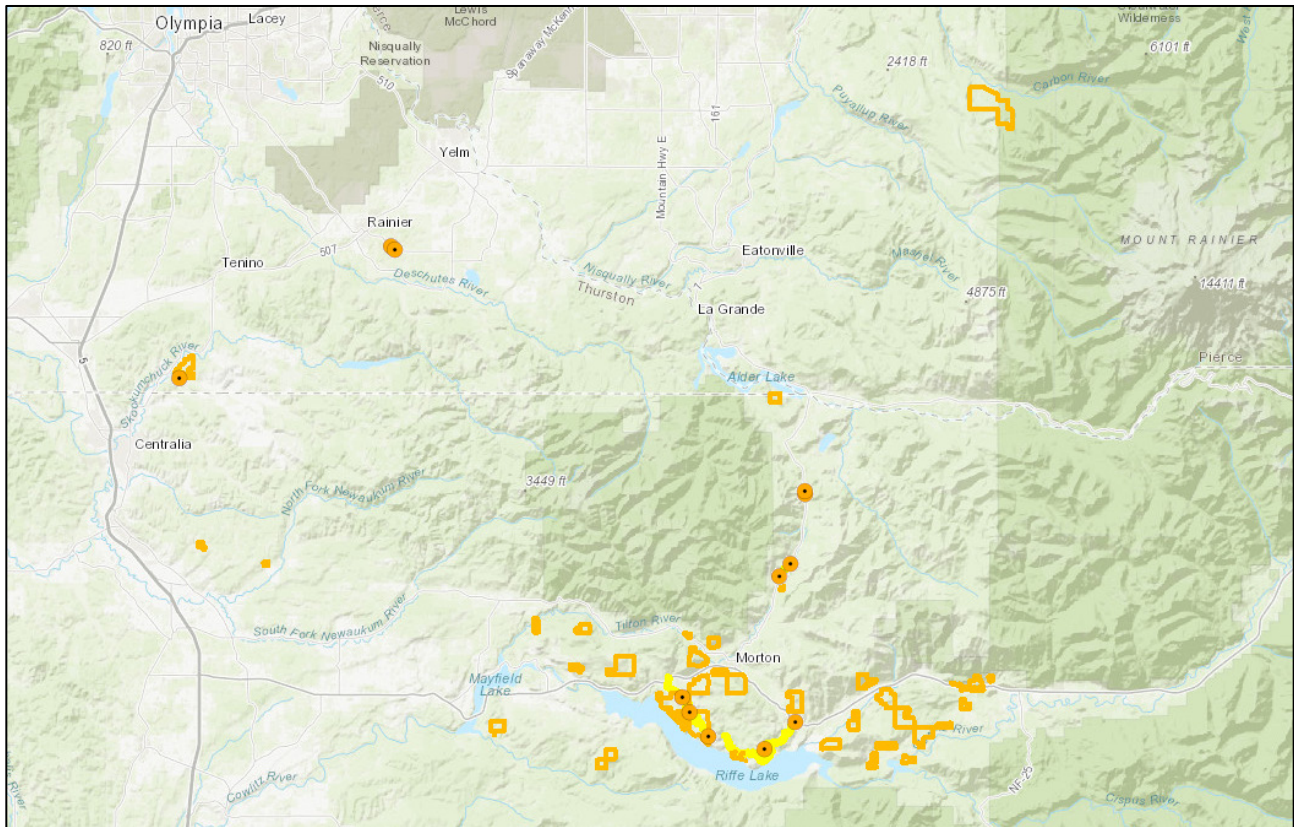
**BASCOM PACIFIC LLC** owns a large swath of forestland in Thurston County bordering WDFW’s Scatter Creek Wildlife Area. Bascom Pacific allows non-motorized access only without the need for permit. Ebikes are also not permitted.

Bascom Pacific LLC timber ownership in Thurston County.





**RAYONIER** owns various properties scattered across Lewis, Pierce, and Thurston counties in District 11 where hunting is permitted. All access to Rayonier lands requires an access permit, some of which is free and some that is fee based. Visitors must have the permit on-hand. Maps of Rayonier's hunting lands (free and fee-based) and information on purchasing permits can be found on Rayonier's [hunting page](#).



Rayonier timber ownership in District 11.

**PORT BLAKELY** owns two parcels just east of Delphi Road SW and three parcels south of Old Highway 99 (just east of the Highway 12/Interstate 5 interchange) that is open for non-motorized public access only for hunting including walking, bicycle, and horse. Information on the Port Blakely public access program can be found [here](#).

**MANKE LUMBER COMPANY** owns a few smaller forestland parcels in District 11. The company website has no information regarding access for recreation; hunters are encouraged to contact the company directly with questions [here](#).

### CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES

In eastern Pierce County (GMUs 652, 653, and 654), the following ownership and contact information may be found:

- [Hampton Lumber/Mid Valley Resources](#) (access managed under Manulife Access Program)

- Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture, [Hancock Recreation](#) (Phone: 800-782-1493)
- Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (access managed by Manulife Access Program), [Home \(muckleshoot.nsn.us\)](#)
- Rayonier [Rayonier | Forest Products, Timber & Land Management Company](#)
- Manke Lumber Company [Manke Lumber Co.](#)

In Thurston County (GMUs 666 and 667):

- Manke Lumber Company: [mankelumber.com/contact.html](#)
- Port Blakely: [portblakely.com/us-forestry/public-access](#)
- Weyerhaeuser: [weyerhaeuser.com/timberlands/recreational-access/](#)
- Bascom Pacific LLC (no website available)

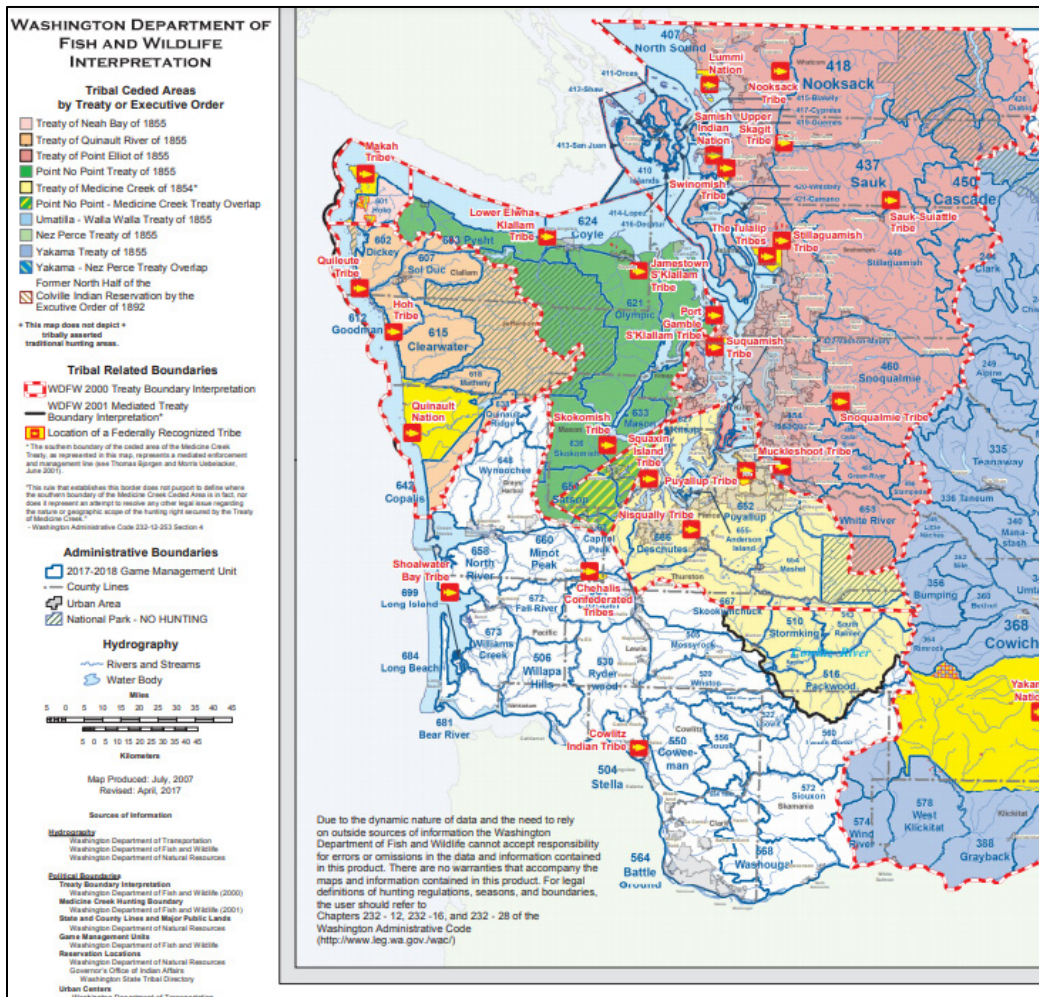
Anderson Island (GMU 655) is almost entirely privately owned with the exception of various small parks that either the Anderson Island Park and Recreation District or [Pierce County](#) own. Hunting and trapping is prohibited on all parks owned by Anderson Island; for location and rules reference [Anderson Island Parks & Recreation District](#). Hunters and fishers visiting Anderson Island should secure permission on private property for access.

# TRIBAL HUNTING

District 11 is within the ceded area of the Treaty of Medicine Creek of 1854 and the Treaty of Point Elliot of 1856 (see graphic below). WDFW and tribal governments cooperatively manage wildlife populations. Treaty tribes with off-reservation hunting rights can hunt within their ceded area or traditional hunting areas. Tribal hunting often occurs concurrent with WDFW hunting seasons. Tribal governments set their own seasons and bag limits. Tribal Enforcement personnel are responsible for ensuring compliance with tribal hunting regulations, which may differ from state regulations. Four tribal hunting co-management agreements include provisions regarding hunting on private industrial timberlands (Point Elliot Agreement, Quileute Agreement, the Skokomish Agreement, and Squaxin Island Agreement).

Current copies of those agreements can be found at:  
[wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/tribal/wildlife](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/tribal/wildlife)

Tribal big game harvest Treaty reports are available at  
[nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/](http://nwifc.org/publications/big-game-harvest-reports/)





## ROAD CLOSURES

The following road closures are in effect in District 11:

GMU	Name	Roads closed	Purpose	dates
653*	Greenwater River/ White River	USFS Roads 7010, 7012, 7013, 7160, 72	Elk winter range	Dec. 15-May 1
		USFS Roads 70 (beyond MP 10.3), 7060, 73	Winter Recreation Sno-Park	Dec. 15-May 1
	Greenwater River	USFS Roads 7012-240, 7020, 70-223, 7080-210	Wildlife closures	Year-round
654	Mashel	Manulife/ORM/Hampton /Muckleshoot forestlands	Private industrial timberland	Year-round except special permittee access**
		DNR Elbe Hills Road 5	Disabled Hunter Program	Sept. 1-March 1 except special permittee access**
667	Skookumchuck	Portions of Skookumchuck Wildlife Area	Restricted dam operation area with exception of Disabled Hunter Program	Year-round except special permittee access***

\*Non-motorized traffic is allowed beyond all these gates.

\*\*Visit Manulife website for fee access program for these areas ([Hancock Recreation](#))

\*\*\*Visit [WDFW disabled hunter road access entry program](#) for these areas

## HUNTING ORGANIZATIONS

Below is a list of known hunting organizations active in District 11. If you know of an organization that should be included in this document, please let us know.

### **ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION**

Website: [Home](#) | [Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation \(rmef.org\)](#)

Douglas Doherty

989-736-4234

[ddoherty@rmef.org](mailto:ddoherty@rmef.org)

### **WASHINGTON WATERFOWL ASSOCIATION**

Grays Harbor Chapter (Thurston/Lewis counties)

[washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Grays-Harbor](http://washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Grays-Harbor)

Southwest Chapter (Pierce County)

[washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Southwest](http://washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Southwest)

### **WASHINGTON MULE DEER FOUNTAIN**

[muledeer.org/state/washington/](http://muledeer.org/state/washington/)

Puget Sound Blacktail Chapter - WA 0115

Tacoma, WA 98360

Stephanie Cordes

253-232-3133

[cordessj@plu.edu](mailto:cordessj@plu.edu)

### **EYES IN THE WOODS**

[eyesinthewoods.org/](http://eyesinthewoods.org/)

### **WASHINGTON BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS**

[backcountryhunters.org/washington](http://backcountryhunters.org/washington)

Max Cole, West Side Co-Chair

[washington@backcountryhunters.org](mailto:washington@backcountryhunters.org)

### **DUCKS UNLIMITED—WASHINGTON**

<https://www.ducks.org/washington>

### **IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA GREATER SEATTLE CHAPTER**

[iwla.org/local-chapters](http://iwla.org/local-chapters)

A. William Way

425-868-4759

[bway@watershedco.com](mailto:bway@watershedco.com)

3451 E. Lake Sammamish Ln. N.E., Sammamish, WA 98074

**WASHINGTON BRANT FOUNDATION**

[wabrant.org/](http://wabrant.org/)

Maynard Axelson

360-445-6681

[info@wabrant.org](mailto:info@wabrant.org)

15929 Fir Island Rd, Mt Vernon, WA 98273

**WASHINGTON OUTDOOR WOMEN**

[washingtonoutdoorwomen.org/](http://washingtonoutdoorwomen.org/)

P.O. Box 1656, Bellevue, WA 98009-1656



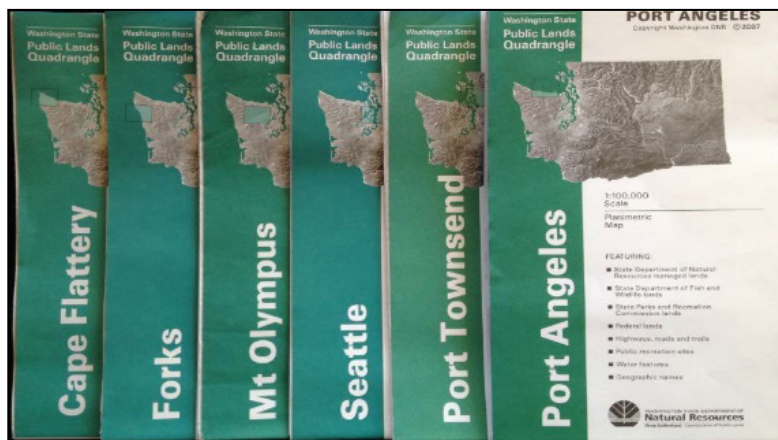
## ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Hunters and anglers can find maps and land ownership information at the following:

- [Pierce County](#)
- [Thurston County](#)
- [Lewis County](#)
- [WDFW statewide](#)
- [WDFW hunt planner](#)

DNR maps have some of the best combination of land ownership and current roads. However, be aware of DNR and private forestland ownership exchanges, which may not show up on older maps. To reference current DNR ownership, visit [DNR Map Resources | WA - DNR](#).

To order DNR maps online visit: [Recreation Guide](#)



Maps of the two state forests within District 11, Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forest, as well as other DNR-managed lands can be found at [Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests | WA - DNR](#).

Questions regarding store purchase of maps can be directed to 360-664-4343. Call the DNR office in Enumclaw if you have a question about a road in District 11 at (360-802-7055).

Other maps that can be helpful for select areas include:

### FOREST SERVICE ONLINE

Many USFS maps can be downloaded for free here [Maps | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

### District 11 USFS Maps

Maps of the two national forests found in District 11, the Gifford Pinchot and the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie national forests can be downloaded or purchased here:

[Gifford Pinchot National Forest - Maps & Publications \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest - Maps & Publications \(usda.gov\)](#)

**Topographic maps** can be custom built and printed at CalTOPO: [Map the Backcountry with CalTopo](#)

**OnX App:** Many hunters use the OnX mobile phone app for on-the-go hunting map application especially since maps can be downloaded for use when cell service is not available: [onX: GPS Map Apps for Hunting, Hiking & Off-Roading \(onxmaps.com\)](#)

WDFW strongly encourages hunters to read more in-depth **WDFW hunting management and planning materials** by visiting the following:

[WDFW Hunting webpage](#)

[WDFW Game Management materials](#)

[The 2015-2021 Game Management Plan](#)

\*note updated Game Management Plan process has begun in 2023

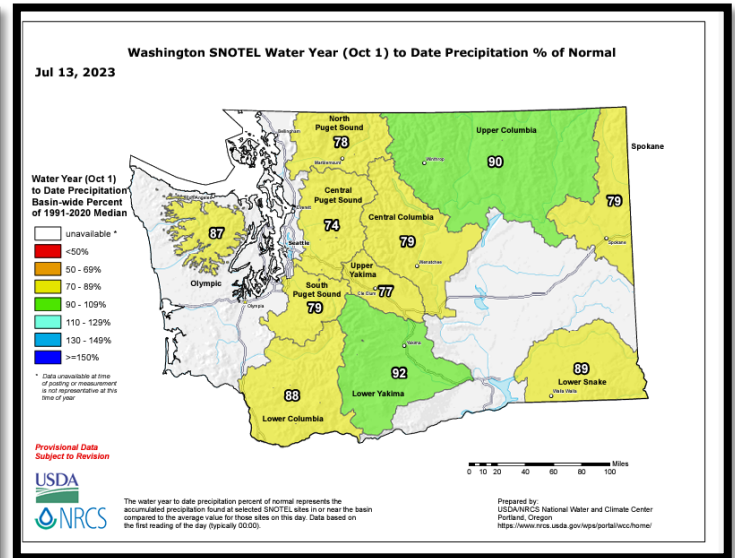
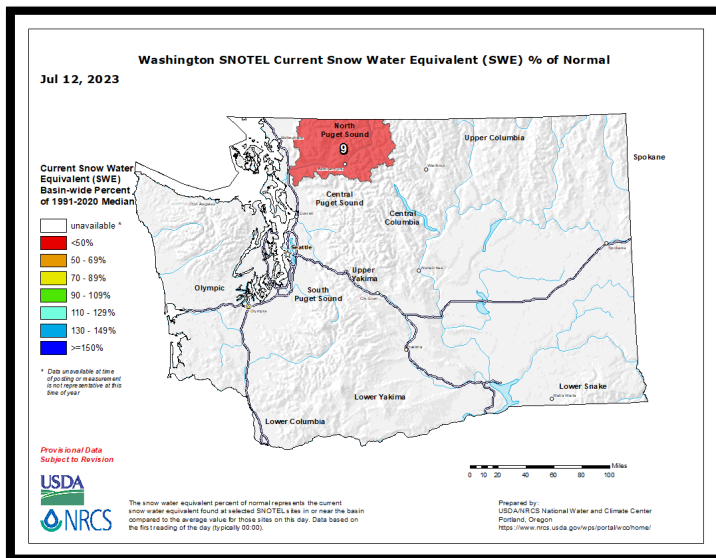
[The Game Status and Trend Report](#)

[Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#)

[Places to Hunt](#)

## 2023 FORAGE MOISTURE CONDITIONS AND FIRE

Snowpack moisture is the most reliable indicator of moisture levels that contribute to forage persistence for both large and small game through hunting seasons. This moisture level also affects the rate and intensity of the fire season, which has additional impact to forage persistence. The precipitation percent of normal from October 2022 to July 2023 is 74-92% over the area of the state where data is available. This may be attributable to late season snowfall in 2023. The best measure of moisture for browse is the Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) and as a comparison to percent of normal. Unfortunately, the SWE is only available for the North Puget Sound at the time of this publication but might be reflective of the remainder of the state and is currently at <50% of normal. Low snow moisture continuing throughout summer and into fall 2023 in Washington will affect forage going into the 2023-24 hunting season. 2023 wildfires are likely to further impact huntable areas of the State, but perhaps less so in District 11, which encounters fewer fires. For the most current information on climate trends and status for Washington state, visit the Office of Washington State Climatologist [here](#)



Snowpack moisture as percent of median and total precipitation October 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021 (Natural Resources Conservation Service). To learn more, visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service webpage [here](#).

The National Park Service released the following park SWE for the three national parks in Washington, including Mount Rainier in District 11:

### A Snowpack Snapshot

Mountain snow in this area typically reaches its maximum in mid-to-late April, marking the beginning of the long summer melt. In the NCCN, snowpack is monitored with the help of both automated SNOTEL sites and traditional snow surveys completed on a pair of skis. While the actual quantity of water contained in the snow (known as snow-water equivalent, or SWE) varies widely from site to site, together these measurements offer a glimpse of how 2023 compares to recent years:

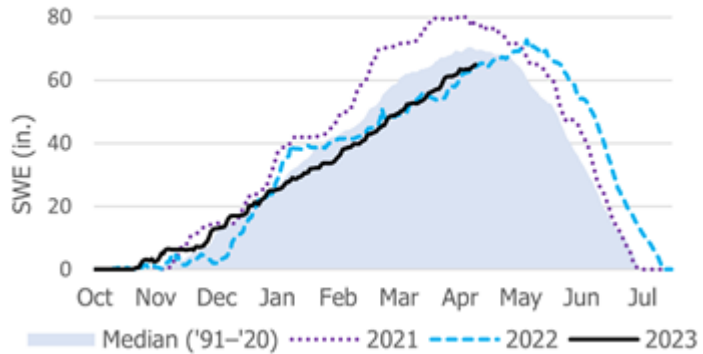


### Mount Rainier National Park

April 1 2023 snowpack as a percentage of the 1991–2020 median:

Cayuse Pass SNOTEL: 89%  
Paradise SNOTEL: 88%

**Mount Rainier Snowpack: Average of SNOTEL sites**

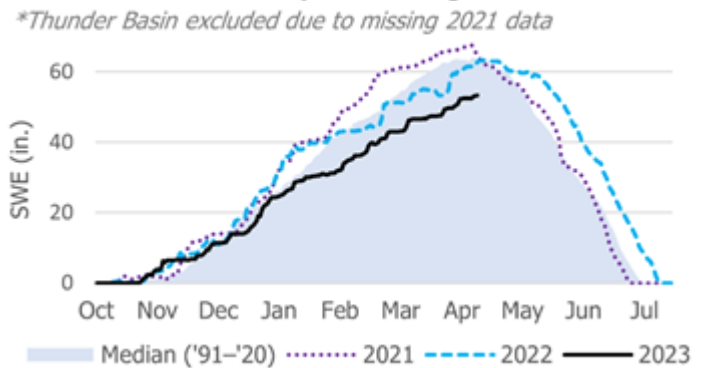


### North Cascades National Park

April 1 2023 snowpack as a percentage of the 1991–2020 median:

Brown Top SNOTEL: 76%  
Beaver Pass SNOTEL: 75%  
Easy Pass SNOTEL: 80%  
Thunder Basin SNOTEL: 94%  
Park Creek Ridge SNOTEL: 83%

**North Cascades Snowpack: Average of SNOTEL sites**

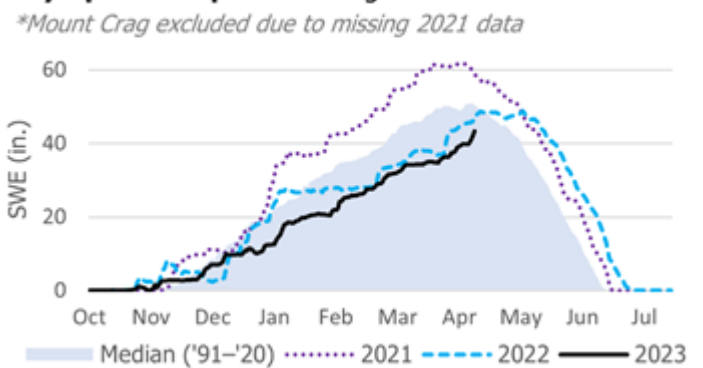


### Olympic National Park

April 1 2023 snowpack as a percentage of the 1991–2020 median:

Deer Park Snow Survey: 60%  
Hurricane Snow Survey: 66%  
Cox Valley Snow Survey: 69%  
Waterhole SNOTEL: 65%  
Mt. Crag SNOTEL: 119%  
Buckinghorse SNOTEL: 74%

**Olympic Snowpack: Average of SNOTEL sites**

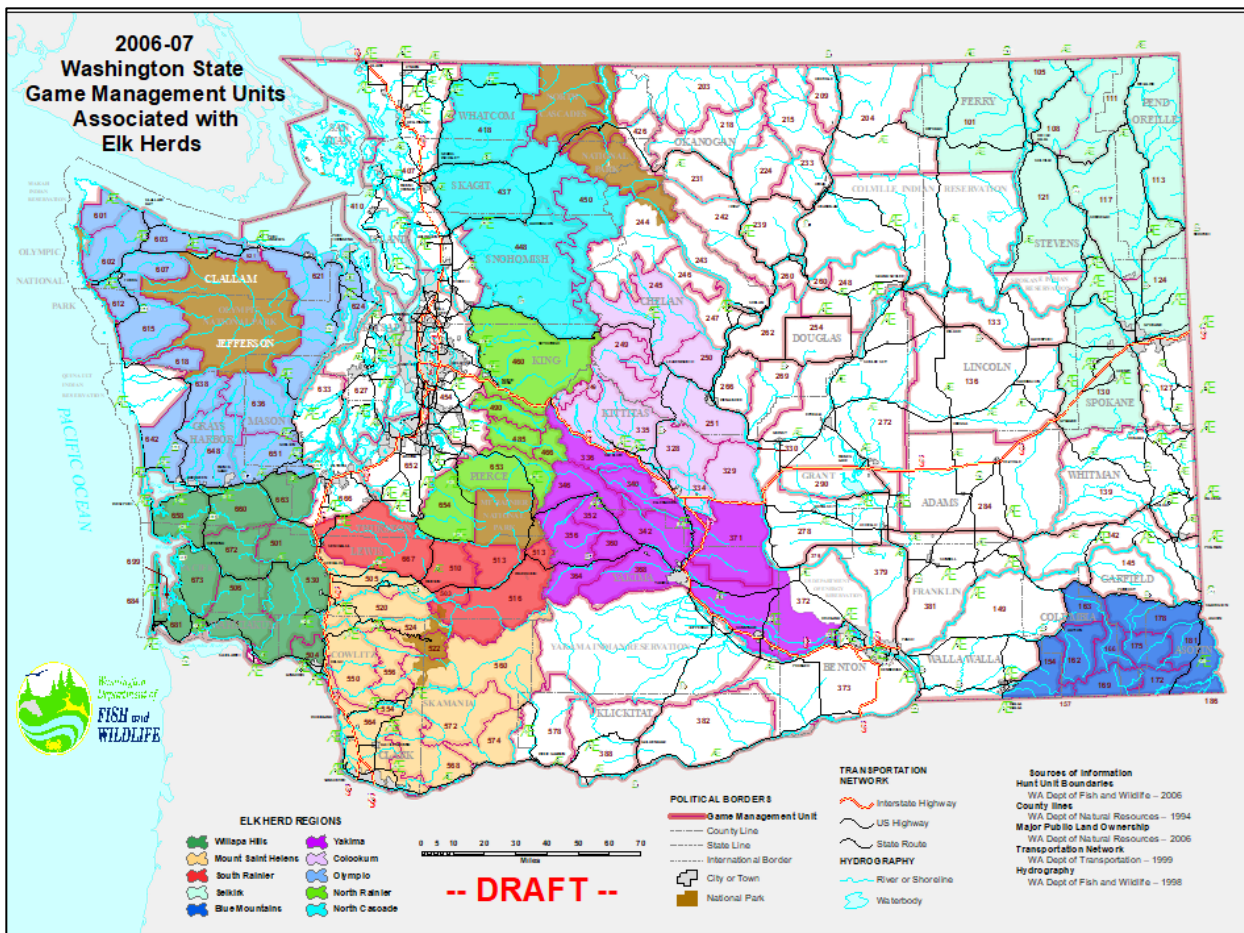


What comes next? The planet is emerging from a long-lasting La Niña climate pattern, which began in late 2020. For the Pacific Northwest, La Niña generally means overall cooler and wetter conditions due to a northerly-veering jet stream. As fall and winter approach, however, we are projected to shift toward warmer, drier El Niño conditions.

On a longer scale, warming trends have driven snowpack across the West down [15–30% since mid-century](#), with further [dramatic declines projected](#) for the Olympics and Cascades in coming decades. As these global trends leave their mark on NCCN parks, snowpack monitoring offers us a tool to better understand the present and plan for the future.

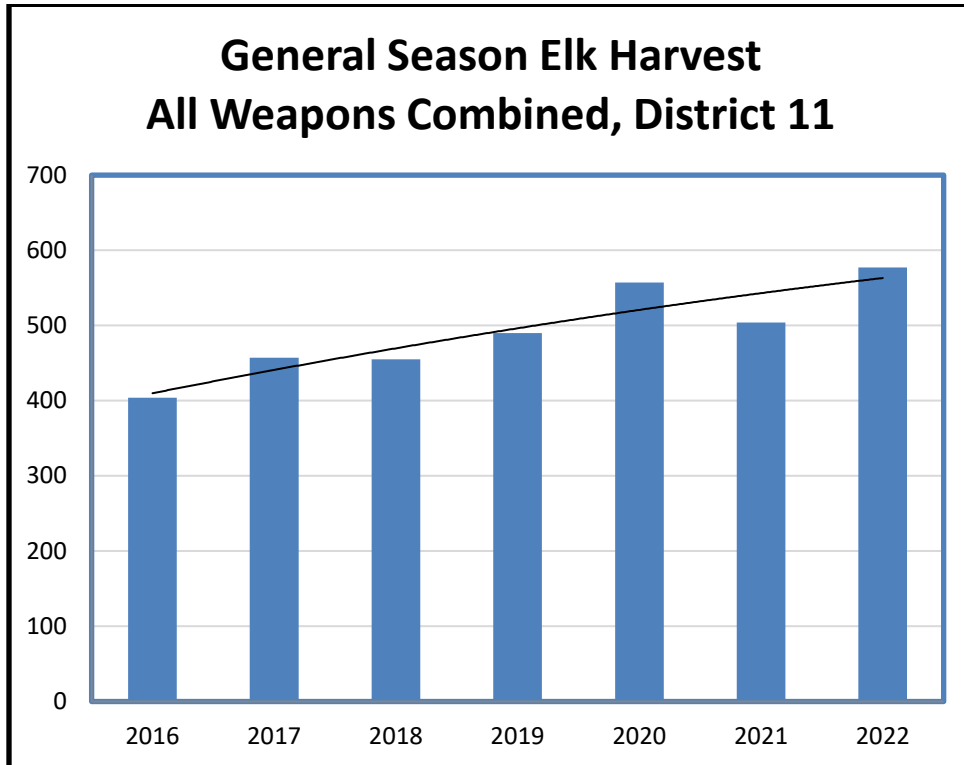
## ELK

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainer high country and follow river drainages to low elevations during the hunting season. The most complete overview of each of these herds can be found in either the [North Rainier Elk Herd Plan \(2020\)](#) or the [South Rainier Elk Herd Plan \(2002\)](#).



The 10 elk herds of Washington State.

Elk harvest has continued to increase in District 11 and the availability of elk should continue to increase in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier Elk Herds continue to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 20 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in the North Rainier herd. Hunters annually report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt. The GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) subherd of the South Rainier Elk Herd has also increased over the years.

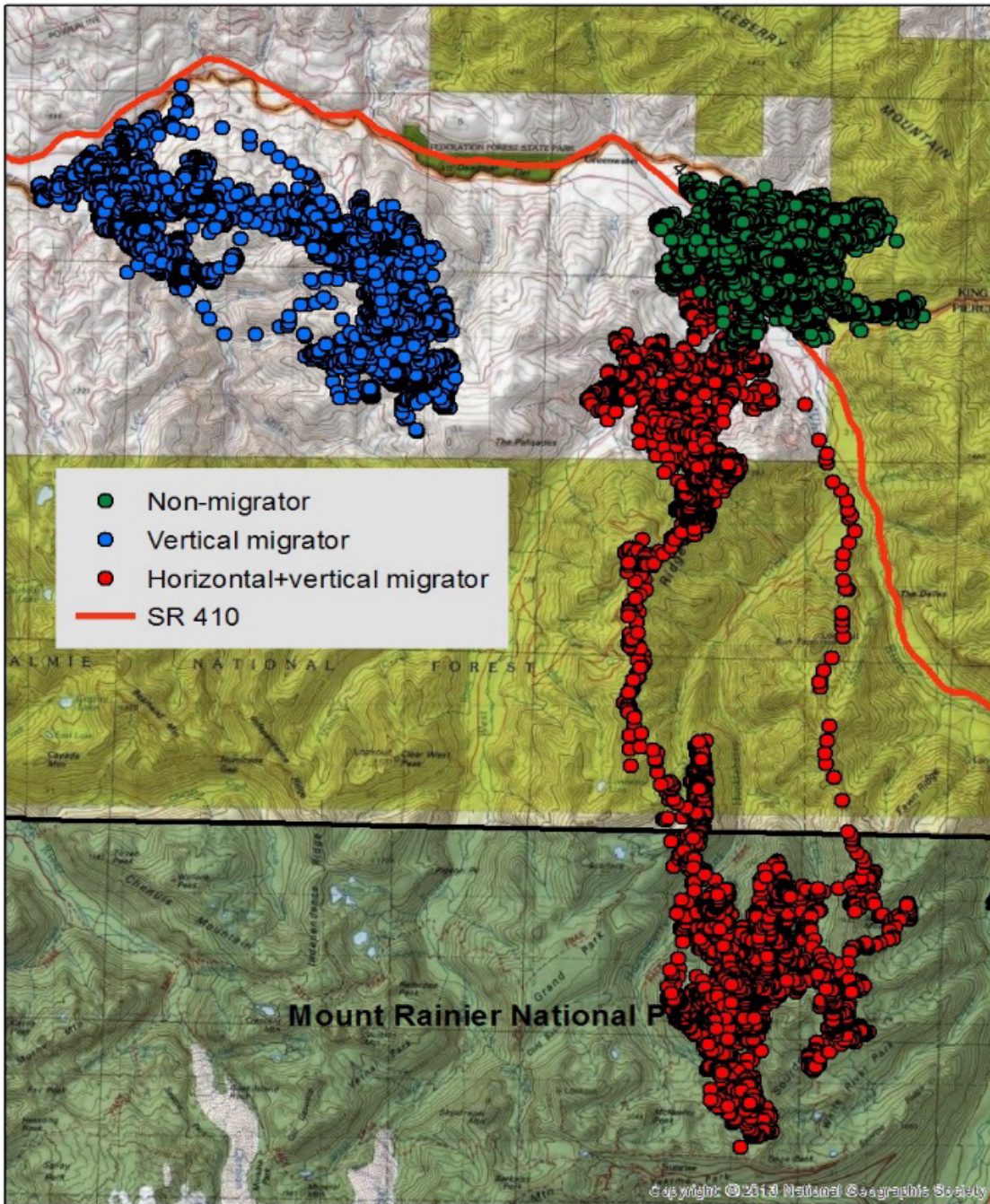


Some elk that summer at mid and high elevations within Mount Rainier National Park migrate out of the park to lower elevation winter range prior to any snowfall, some at the first snowfall, and some remain until there is deep snow, with the majority migrating when there is less than a foot of snow on the ground (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe unpublished data). Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. WDFW encourages hunters to scout for elk leaving Mount Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area, the White River into the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, and the Nisqually River to the southern part of the district. Be aware; hunting is not permitted within Mount Rainier National Park.

USFS-forested areas in GMU 653 off Highway 410, including roads 71, 73, and 74, Bullion Basin/Pickhandle Basin, and Big Crow Basins east of Crystal Mountain Ski Resort (outside ski boundaries once ski season officially opens) offer good opportunity for high-elevation, rugged elk hunting with plenty of robust elk. Hunters can also access this area via the Pacific Crest Trail to the east. Elk begin to come down to the lower elevations bordering H-410 in October when the first higher elevation snows begin, forcing elk to lower elevations. Some resident elk remain at lower elevations year-round but will be joined by the migratory portion of each herd. The White River drainage from Haller Pass west to the White River and both north and south of that area all support high numbers of elk. The timbered areas behind the Greenwater Fire Station along H-410 frequently has elk. Hunters must walk into this area after the gate closes on December 15 (see Road Closure section). High meadows off H-410 such as Grand Park are traditional rut areas for elk and elk may remain in those areas until heavy snows force them lower. Elk across these areas in GMU 653 have been hunted under a bull-only permit hunt since 2006.



0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

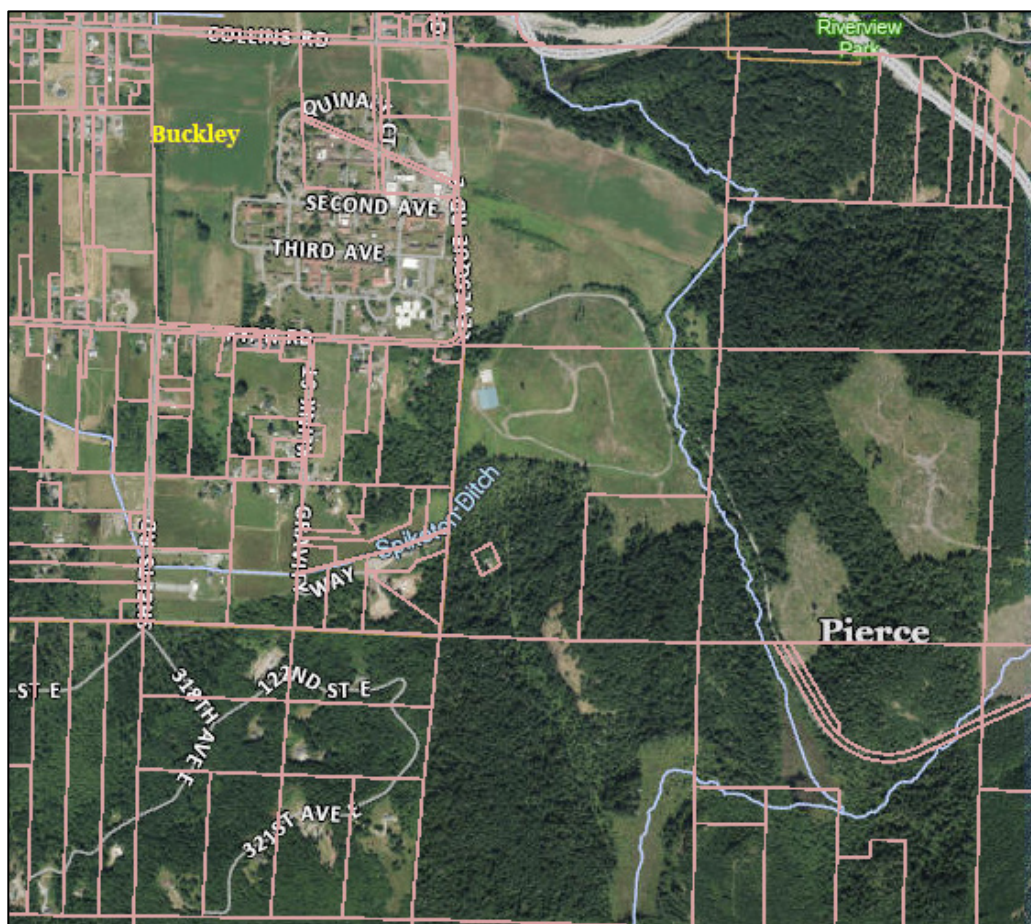


Examples of elk migration for 3 GPS-marked elk in GMU 653, showing non-migrator, vertical migrator, and horizontal+vertical migrator. The horizontal+vertical migrator (57% of study animals) moves to Mount Rainier National Park in summer. The vertical migrator (23%) moves to higher elevation in summer that is adjacent to winter range, but also may use its winter range in summer. The non-migrator (20%) uses the same range year-round. (research provided by Muckleshoot Tribe of Indians unpublished data).



USFS, which permits the Crystal Mountain Ski Resort, reminds hunters that service roads built and maintained by the ski resort are not open to the public. Hunters may ask for permission from the resort to haul out a harvested animal. Hunting is allowed in the [Clearwater](#), [Glacier View](#) and [Norse Peak Wilderness Areas](#) of the district following hunting regulations found [here](#).

Hunters are also likely to find elk outside the western boundary of Mount Rainier National Park in the Carbon River drainage in GMU 653 and accessed via USFS roads south and east of the towns of Wilkeson and Carbonado to the national park boundary. Fewer roads characterize this area but also fewer hunters and recreationists. Be aware that this landscape rises steeply to the east but also provides a decent road network that may be worth scouting, especially timber harvest areas. Obey posted signs regarding quarry truck traffic and especially the speed limit. Forestland between Highway 165 and 162 is dominated by private commercial timberlands that Manulife manages that require a fee access permit. Private commercial timberlands in this area that Weyerhaeuser, Olympic Resource Management, and Fruit Growers Association own are NOT open for public access. A small area of non-developed public land that Washington State Department of Social and Health Services manages lands along Buckley's eastern boundary, which is completely fenced, is NOT OPEN for hunting.



Washington State Department of Social and Health Services lands open for hunting (White River School District).

The Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests and University of Washington Charles Lathrop Pack Experimental and Demonstration Forest (Pack Forest) in GMU 654 are good prospects for deer or elk and can be accessed by foot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. Pack Forest managers caution hunters to be aware of students conducting research in the forest any time of the year. The Elbe Hills State Forest has limited vehicle access during the elk season as follows: entire 5 Road is closed, the 8 Road is open from Ashford to Scott Turner Road, and the 6 Road is closed except for hunters with a disabled access permit (see Road Closure section). Much of the Tahoma State Forest is also closed to vehicle access due to the ski hut management program and various road and bridge washouts. Hunters can legally walk, bike, or horse ride behind locked gates for hunting unless otherwise posted. DNR's Elbe Hills State Forest also provides access for disabled hunters through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early archery, two early muzzleloader, and two modern firearm disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on this state forest through this program.

Subherds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and [Skookumchuck Wildlife Area](#) (GMU 667). WDFW encourages hunters to scout the area from the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is allowed only under specialized permits provided through the Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP). Only elk and waterfowl hunting are allowed on the mine; elk hunting is an escorted hunt only and waterfowl hunting is open but is managed through a sign-up process (see Waterfowl Section). TransAlta, which owns the mine, is once again providing one senior and one disabled permit hunt on the mine for a total of 10 permits over two weekends (reference WDFW Hunting Regulations on applying for special permit hunts). The WDFW Skookumchuck Unit also provides access for disabled hunters through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early muzzleloader, one late muzzleloader, and two modern firearm disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on the unit through this program.

Some elk can occasionally be found and hunted on WDFW's [West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area](#) and on [Joint Base Lewis McChord](#) (JBLM) military property in Thurston County near the town of Rainier (GMU 666). Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through Northwest Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744) or through the [JBLM website](#).

In northwestern Thurston County, elk are found off Delphi Road SW and neighboring power lines (GMU 666). Elk cannot be hunted on property owned by USFWS near 123rd Avenue SW in the Black River refuge of GMU 666 (e.g., former Weaks Dairy) but can be hunted by landowner permission on private lands surrounding the refuge property.



North Rainier elk wintering in the Crystal River Ranch area, District 11.

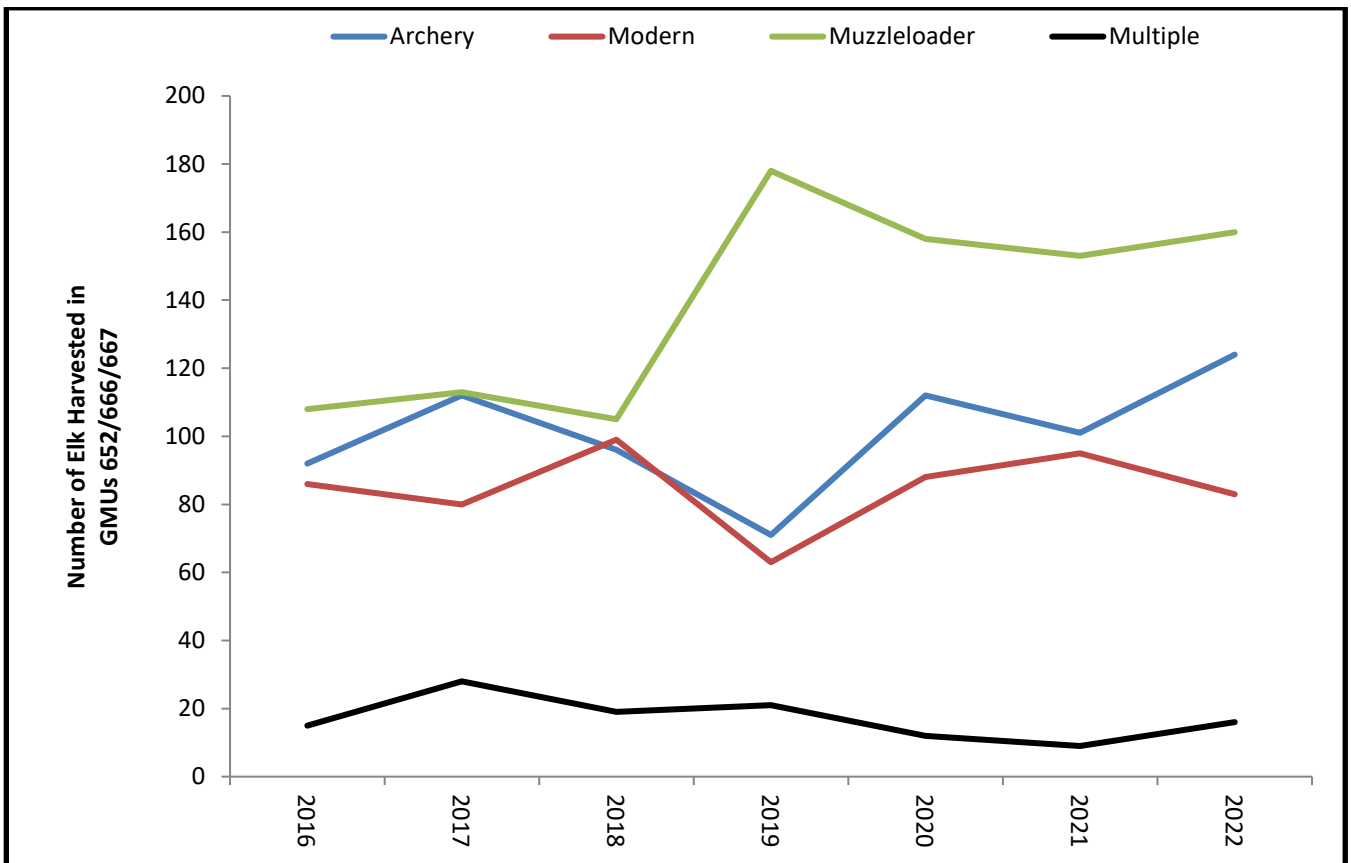
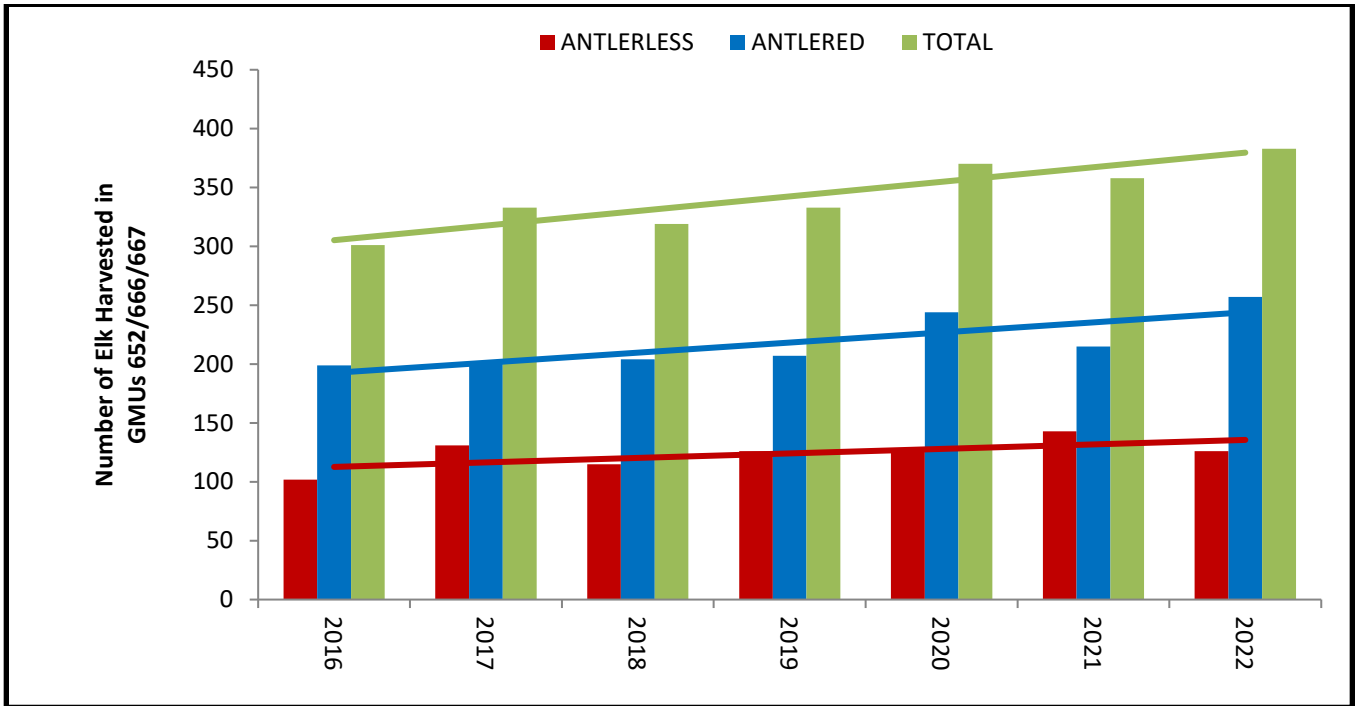
Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Road SW). Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation. Hunters must request permission to access private lands and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g., visit property and ask for permission). Elk Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced in size to encompass primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. There were several new hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aimed at conserving elk for tribal purposes on the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 was expanded and provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season; both early and late archery and muzzleloader seasons; and three separate winter antlerless hunts allowing up to 10 elk per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is made up mostly of agricultural lands,

hobby farms, and ranch homes, and supports about 150-200 total elk. Access to these properties is limited and hunters interested in these hunts are encouraged to obtain access before applying for these permits.

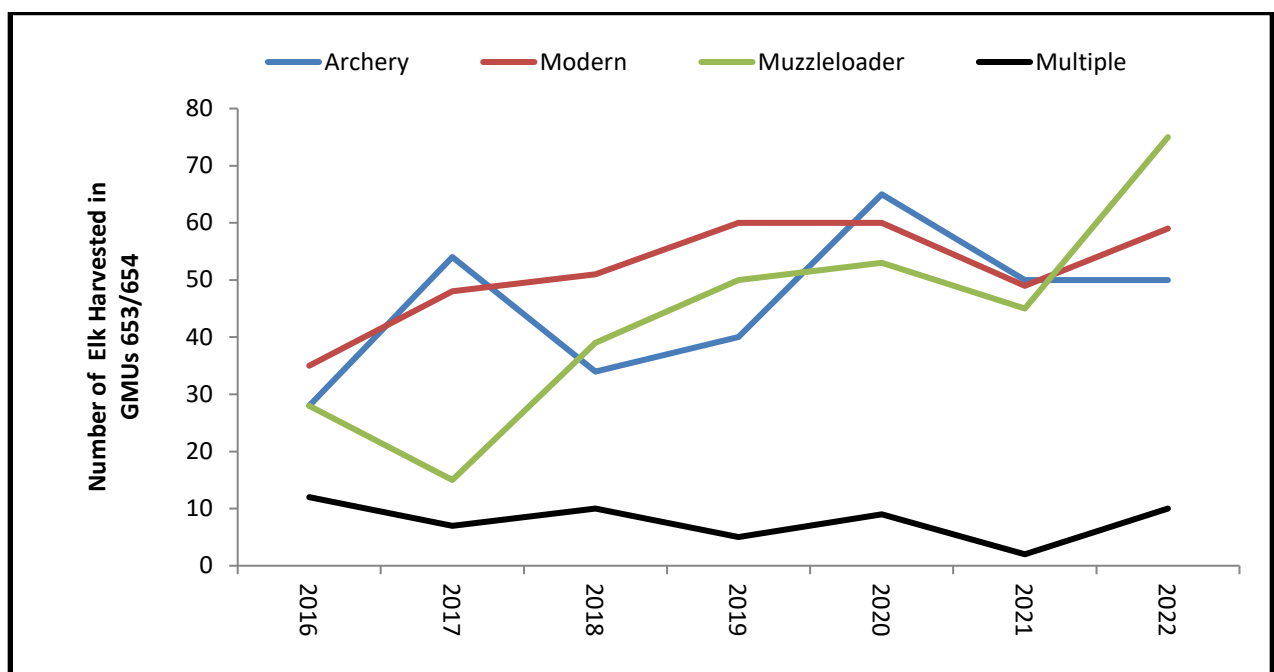
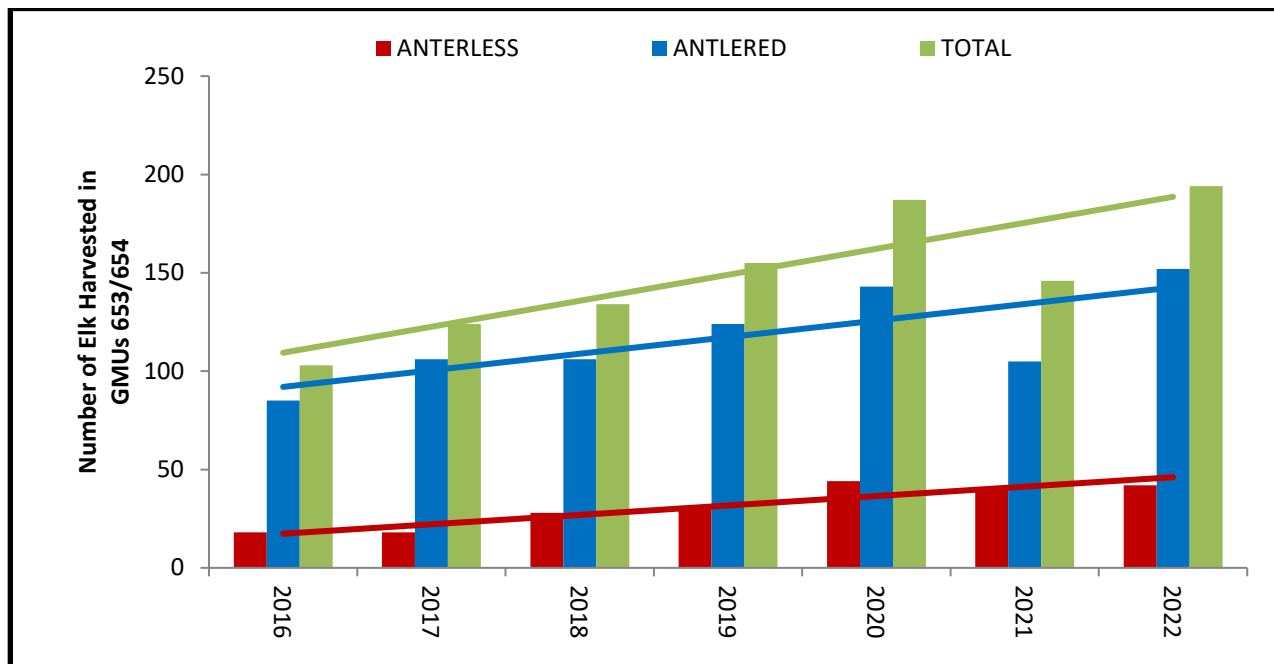
Two senior permit elk hunts (10 permits total) for controlling private property damage are also provided in the Hanaford Elk Area 6069 of GMU 667. Finally, general Coastal Region (Region 6) Master Hunter elk permits are also available. Hunters drawn are often sent to damage properties in both the Buckley/Enumclaw and Hanaford area, as needed, and elsewhere in the region but must be available to hunt on a 24-hour notice.

General season elk harvest has been increasing over the past seven years within GMUs 652, 666, and 667 (combined these make up Elk Population Management Unit 62) with a slight decline for modern firearm in 2022. This makes for good prospects for harvesting an elk in those GMUs. Muzzleloaders typically have the highest harvest over those years followed by archery and modern firearm.





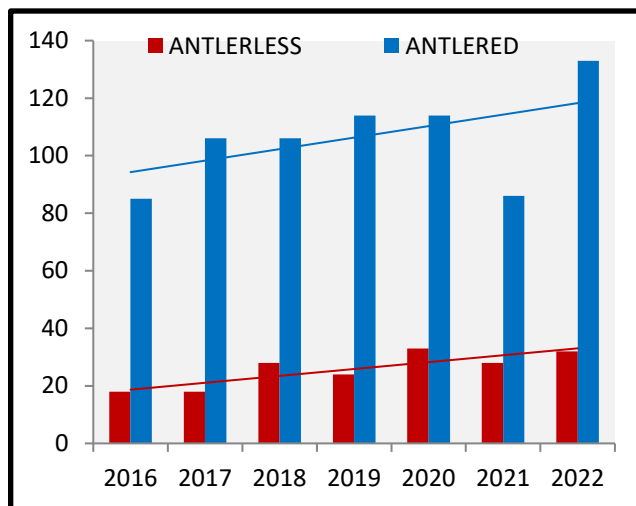
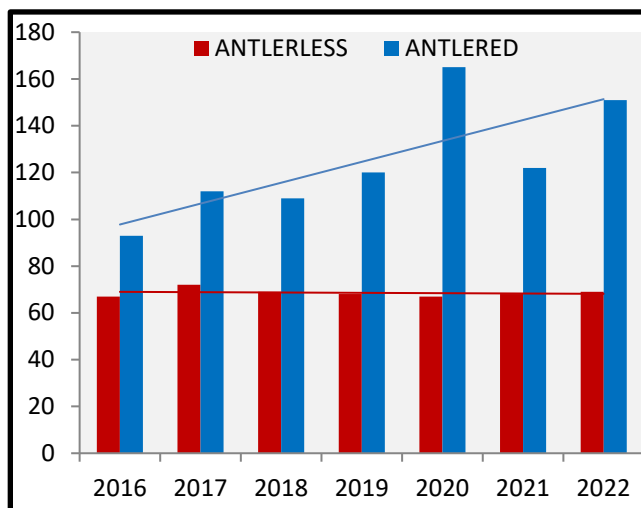
Elk harvest trends have also increased in GMUs 653 and 654 over the past seven years (combined these make up Elk Population Management Unit 67) with the same slight decline in 2021. Antlerless harvest is only permitted in GMU 654 of PMU 67 (cow harvest not allowed in GMU 653) and this harvest trend is increasing slightly spurred by damage removal hunts for elk to abate increasing property damage caused by an increasing elk subherd. District 11 changed the boundaries of Elk Damage Hunt Area 6054 in 2019 to focus the hunt on those properties experiencing damage.



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Manulife managed forestland (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653) all support elk but require a vehicle access permit from the company directly (see Private Commercial Timberland for information). Individuals who buy a Manulife recreational access license may enter a free drawing to participate in the GMU 654 limited elk hunt each year. Eleven (11) recreational access licenses are drawn to hunt elk on the Kapowsin timberlands as follows: five (5) modern firearm, three (3) archery, and three (3) muzzleloader. One recreational access license holder is also drawn to hunt elk on the Eatonville timberlands under the GMU 654 elk season. No recreational access is allowed on the Buckley timberlands in GMU 653 during any bull elk season. Interested hunters who have purchased a Manulife access license will find the drawing application [here](#) (open the PDF titled “Promotional Contest of Chance”). Hunters must be drawn for a WDFW bull elk permit to hunt elk on the White River timberlands in GMU 653. The Kapowsin and Eatonville drawing occurs in early May and once winners have been notified, names are posted on the Manulife recreation website. Only drawn permittees can hunt elk on the Kapowsin or Eatonville timberlands during elk seasons.

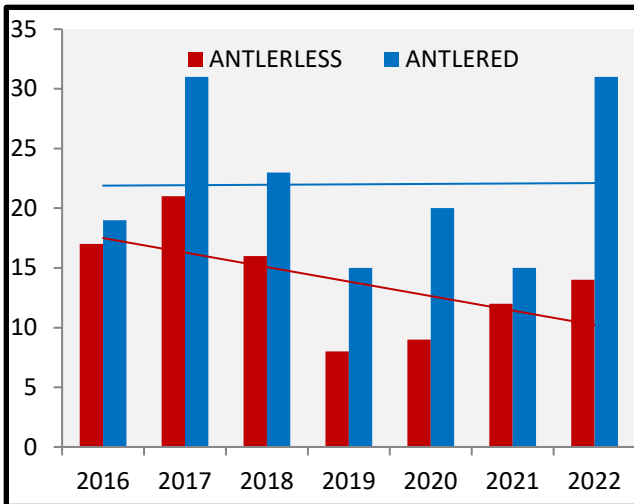
Hunters harvest the greatest number of elk in District 11 in GMUs 652 and 654 (see charts below). Harvest spiked in GMU 652 in 2020 possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed hunters more recreation time. The increase may also be due to the additions of archery and muzzleloader opportunity in the 6014 elk damage hunt area of GMU 652. GMUs 666 and 667 both have significantly lower harvest because of fewer elk in both GMUs and difficult access onto private properties in GMU 666.

GMU 653 is restricted to a bull-only permit season during general firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The only allowance for antlerless harvest is in that section of elk damage area 6014 that overlaps GMU 653 in the northeastern portion of the GMU near Buckley. Trends in elk harvest in the GMU 653 permit hunt have fluctuated slightly over the past six years except for a slight dips in 2017 and 2020. Hunter success has averaged 65% in this permit hunt making it a good prospect for those lucky enough to be drawn for the hunt.

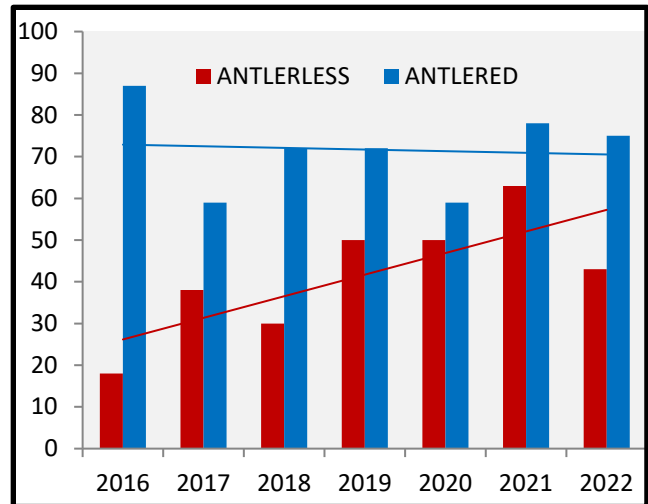


GMU 652 general season harvest (all weapons combined)

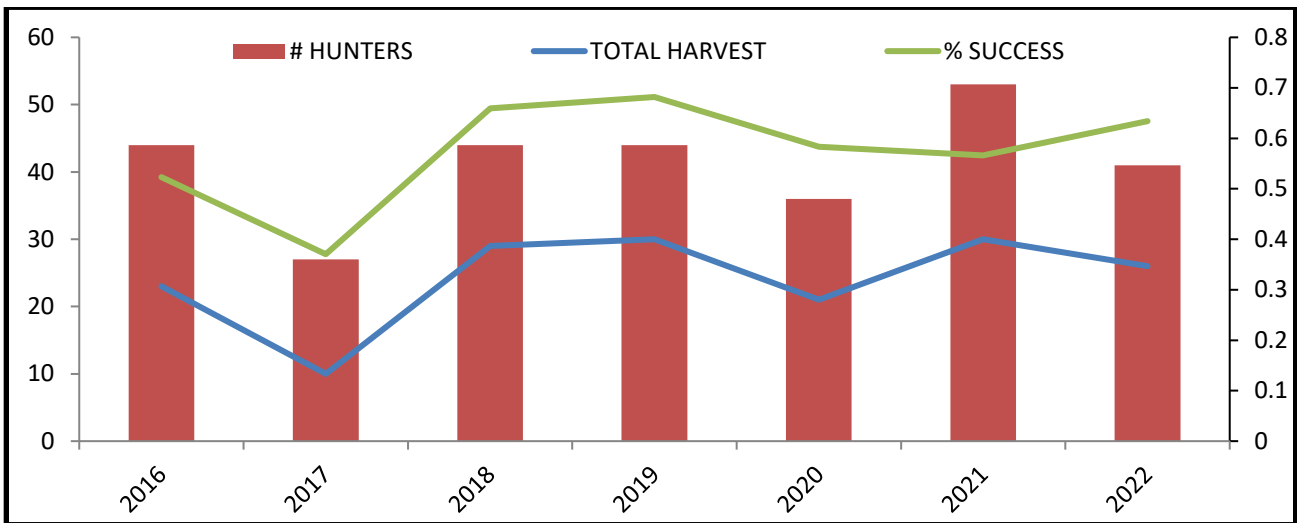
GMU 654 general season harvest (all weapons)



GMU 666 general season harvest (all weapons)



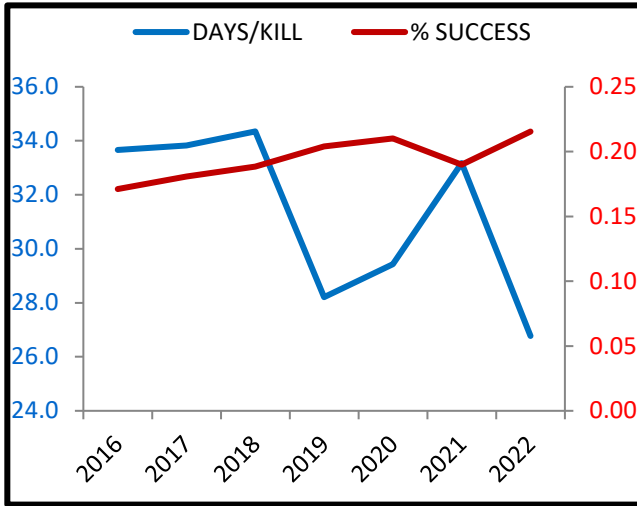
GMU 667 general season harvest (all weapons)



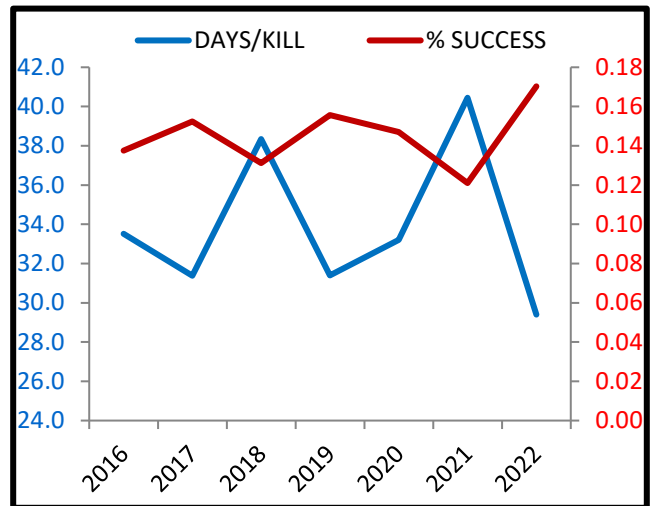
GMU 653 bull only permit hunters, harvest, and success (all weapons)

Hunter success is expressed as both the percentage of hunters that reported successfully harvesting an elk and by the number of days it took to harvest an animal in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (GMU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk; reference charts below). The 6-year trend shows an increasing success rate for every District 11 GMU. This is tracking elk population recovery in both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. GMU 667 has the lowest success rate while GMU 652 has the highest with the exception of the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt, which is holding steady at around 65%. This is a rugged, high alpine hunt, but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit. That success is followed by GMU 652 currently around 20%, GMUs 654 and 666 around 16% (note significant increase in 666 in 2022) and finally GMUs 667 around 10%.

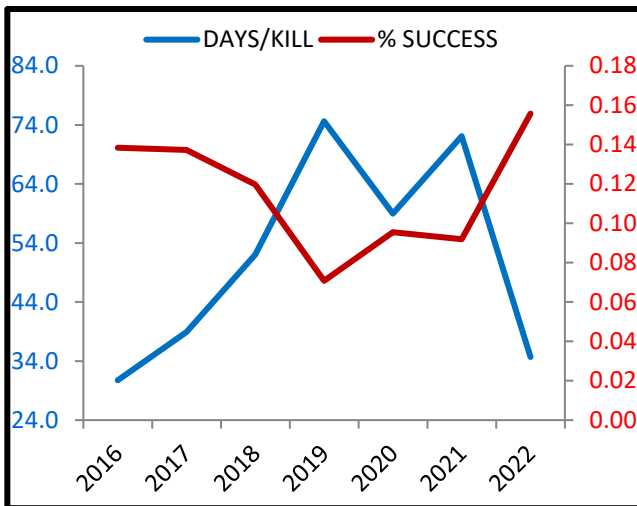




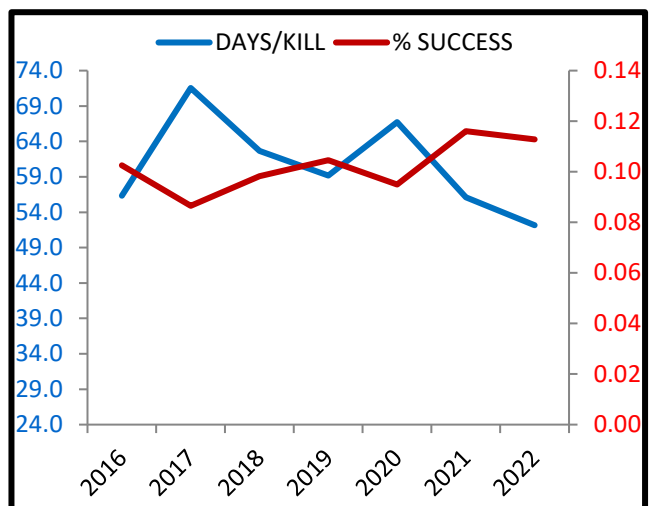
GMU 652 general season (all weapons combined)



GMU 654 general season (all weapons combined)



GMU 666 general season (all weapons)



GMU 667 general season (all weapons)

GMU 653 bull only permit hunt success in chart previously.

## ELK BACTERIAL HOOF DISEASE - TAHD

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within District 11. While elk are susceptible to many conditions that result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area including elk from the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds that occupy District 11.

TAHD is more prevalent in the South Rainier elk herd of Lewis and Thurston counties in District 11 and less prevalent in the Pierce County GMUs associated with the North Rainier elk herd. This is likely due to the South Rainier's proximity to the core of the disease, the Saint Helens elk herd. WDFW has confirmed the presence of TAHD from elk sampled in all GMUs of District 11 except for Anderson Island, which has no elk.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but no evidence shows that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male, or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

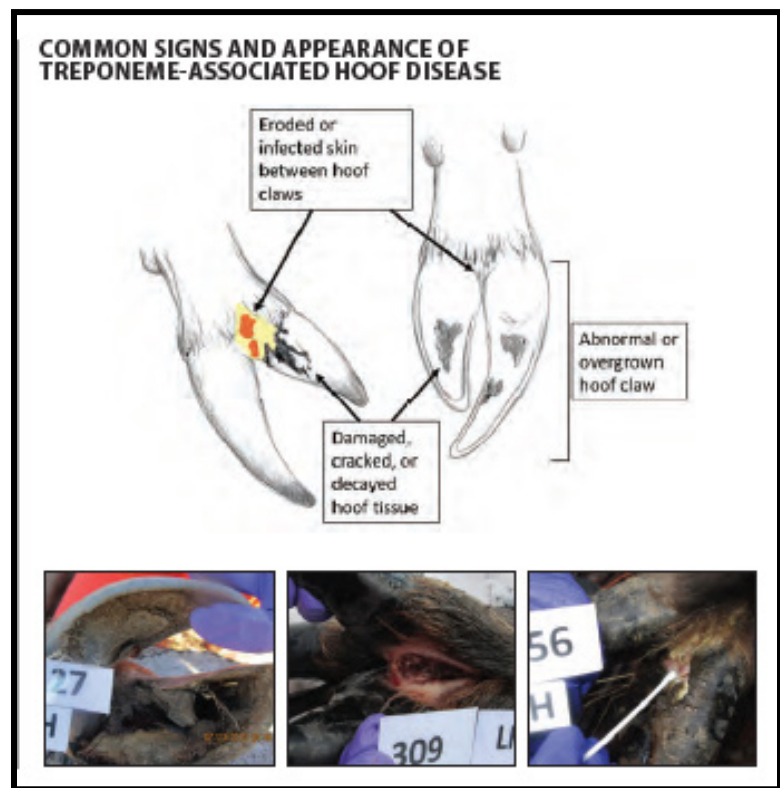
**How hunters can help:** In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600-series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The objective of this program is to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of September 1 – December 31 are awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder. This incentive-based program is continuing in the 2023-24 season. Additionally, WDFW is offering special permits under the Master Hunter permit category that are intended to target diseased elk. Reference this WDFW [page](#) for updated information on these incentive based hunts.

What hunters can do to help:

- **Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600-series GMUs**
- **Turn in elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington**
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the Department’s online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

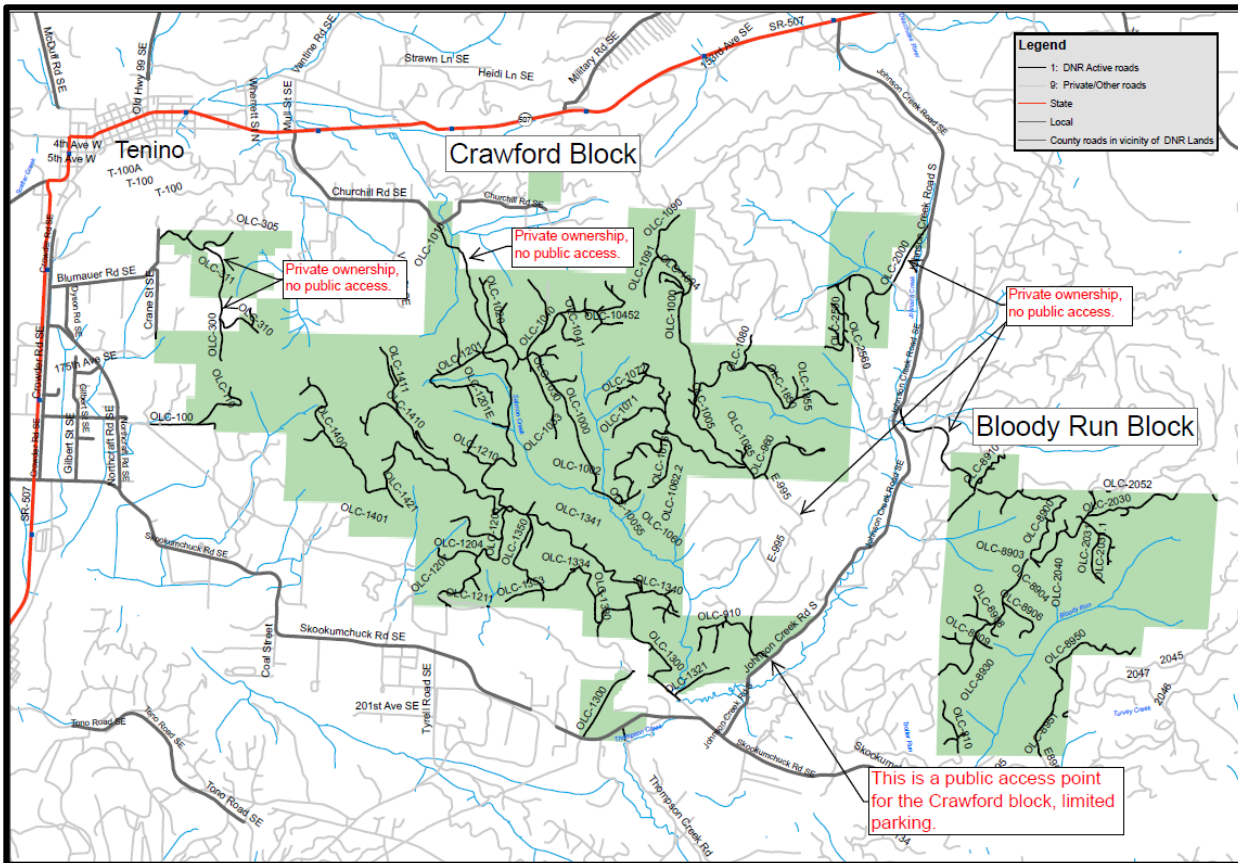
WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, Tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD.

For more information about TAHD, reference WDFW’s [website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found in the annual Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.



## DEER

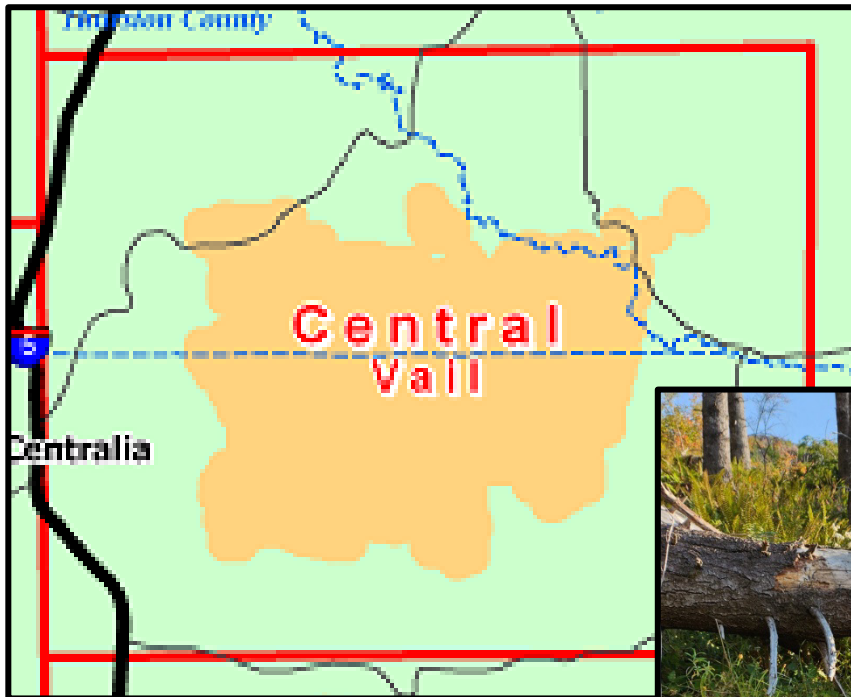
Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited. The Department does not conduct surveys annually, and when it does, surveys have typically been done in the highest quality location in the District and Region (Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667). Commercial and state-managed timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, timberlands worthy of scouting for both deer and elk include Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm and DNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks in GMU 667; Manulife managed properties (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653); DNR's Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMUs 654) and DNR and USFS-managed lands (scattered across District 11).



WDNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks.



Hancock (now Manulife) has a 2-point minimum buck harvest restriction for all deer seasons and weapon types on all its timberlands except for the White River Tree Farm. Further, the Kapowsin and Eatonville permits do not allow general season antlerless deer hunting. Antlerless deer harvest is only allowed if the Licensee is drawn from the Youth, Disabled, or 65 and Over WDFW special permit categories. Manulife’s reasoning is “an effort to increase deer populations over time and ultimately provide a better hunting experience, long term.” There are no additional deer hunting restrictions on the White River, except for the winter motorized access restriction.



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm.



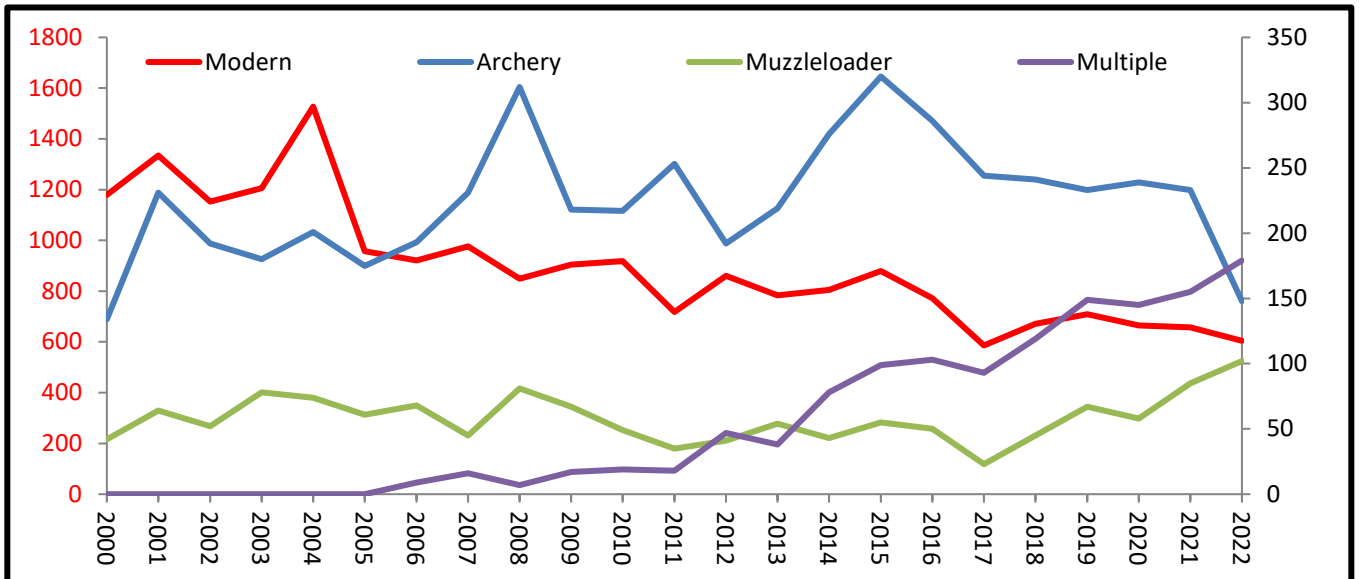
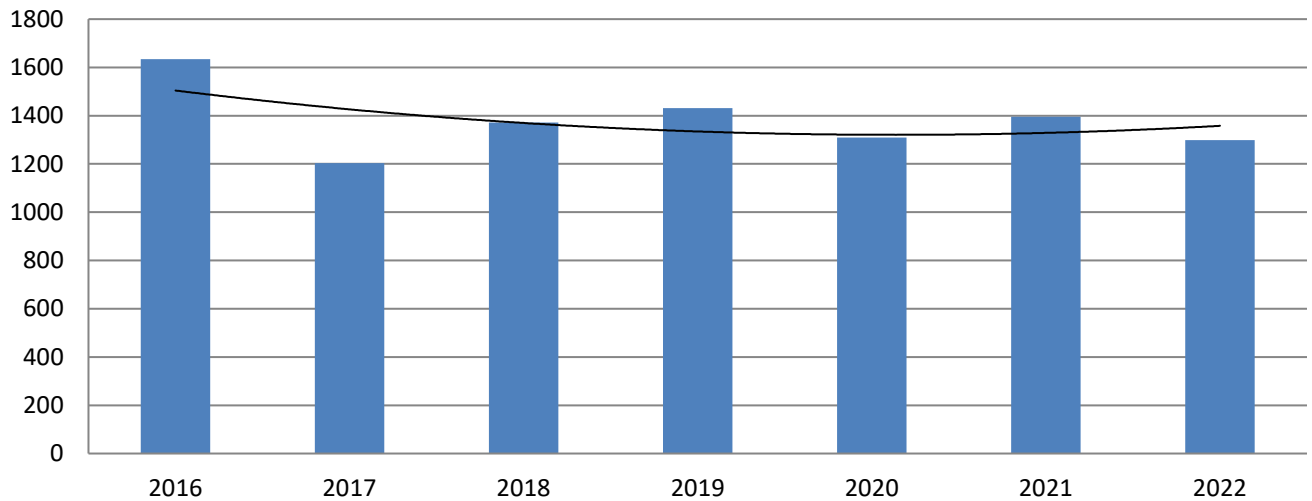
Local youth hunter with a nice buck harvested in GMU 667 (see her bear on front cover)

Hunters can find high-elevation trophy black-tail hunting experiences in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654. Hunters can access these areas via USFS road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (see description under Elk). DNR's Elbe Hills State Forest in GMU 654 provides access for disabled hunters through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early archery, six modern firearm, two late modern firearm, one late muzzleloader, and two late archery disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on this state forest through this program.

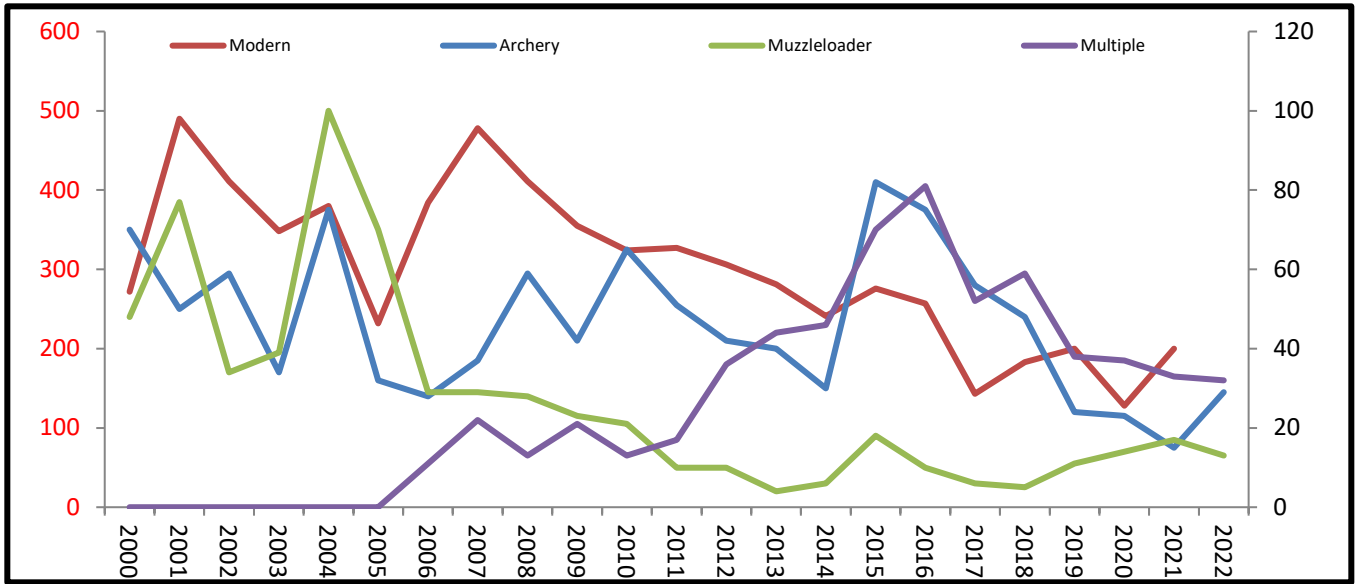
Deer harvest in District 11 is average for the state but fairly high for western Washington. Deer harvest across District 11 has been holding steady over the past 7 years (see graphs below). Declining harvest occurred in GMUs 652, 654 (although steady last 6 years), 655 (from spikes in 2018-19), and 666 (although steady last 4 years). One factor in these trends is the decreasing number of deer hunters in the District; deer hunters declined from approximately 10,000 in 2000 to just over 5,000 by 2022. GMU 653 has a fluctuating but increasing trend. GMU 667 has remained stable over the past 7 years and has significantly higher harvest than any other GMU in District 11. Hunter harvest success has remained fairly stable across the District with the exception of GMU 654 over those same years.

Harvest regulations have altered somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the years, which plays a role in harvest trends. Limited access combined with antler and doe restrictions may ultimately increase deer numbers over time especially in GMUs 653 and 654 where success is around 15% compared to roughly 20% in GMUs 652 and 666. GMUs 655 has the highest success rate in District 11 at around 50% with limited numbers of hunters suggesting that those hunters lucky enough to obtain access onto private lands on Anderson Island are being relatively successful. Be aware that 655 has a much lower overall harvest than the remaining GMUs in the District. GMU 667 had the second highest harvest success in District 11 at about 30% annually, suggesting that while Weyerhaeuser's access permit requirement is limiting overall hunters, those that do obtain a permit are doing well. That is occurring despite GMU 667, which includes Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm, hosted some 2,100 hunters in 2022 (the most heavily hunted deer area in the district). GMU 652 and 666 are comparable both in number of hunters and hunting success which is not surprising considering they are both urbanized GMUs. Anderson Island (GMU 655) was previously Deer Area 6014 and had antlerless permit hunts only. The entire island became GMU 655 in 2013 and has since provided both general seasons (both sex) and antlerless permit hunts. Thus, the increase in harvest is not surprising, keeping in mind that the island has significantly lower harvest of all GMUs in the district. Ferry logistics and property access reduce the actual harvest despite plentiful deer on the island.

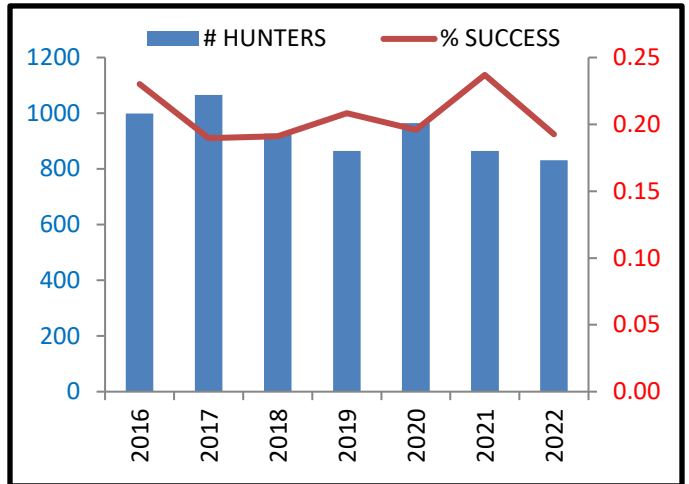
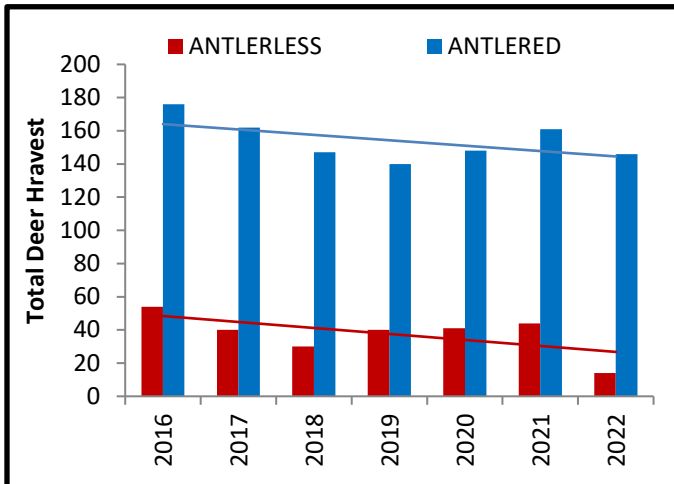
## General Season Deer Harvest All Weapons Combined, District 11



Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 62 (comprised of GMUs 652, 655, 666 and 667). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.

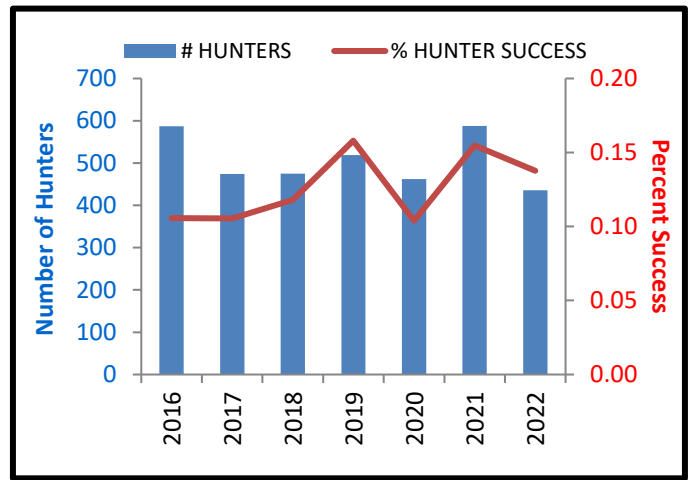
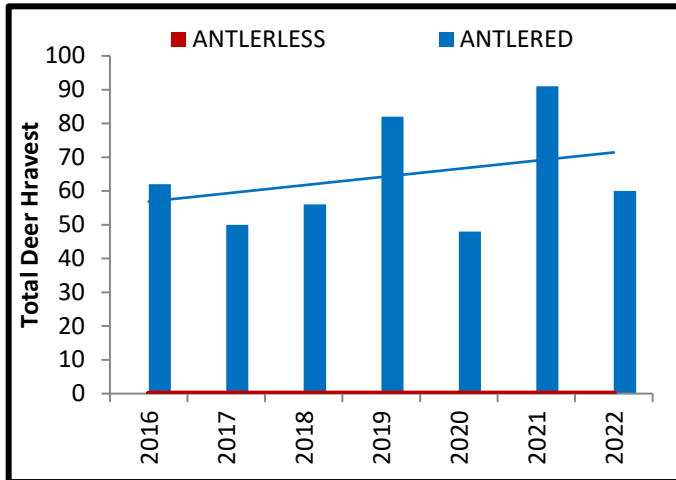


Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 67 (comprised of GMUs 653 and 654). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.

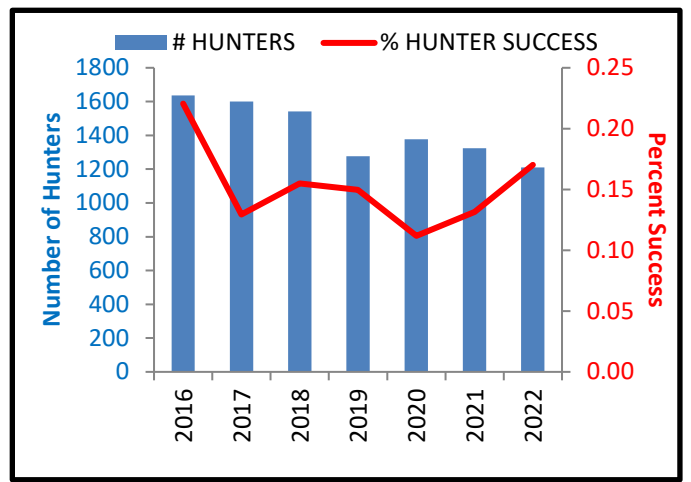
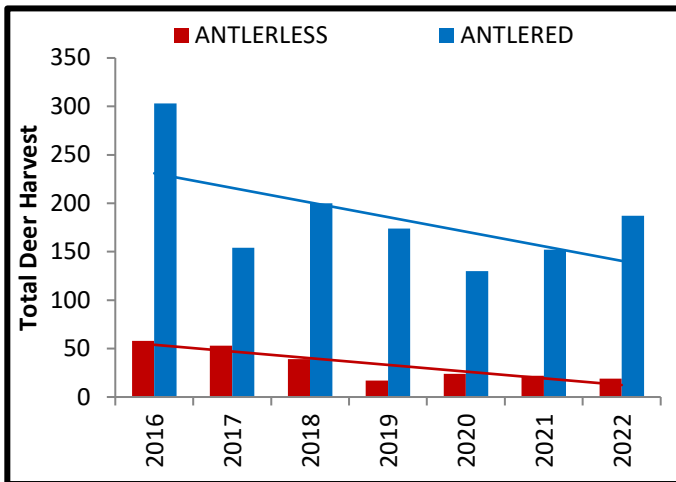


GMU 652 (Puyallup) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).

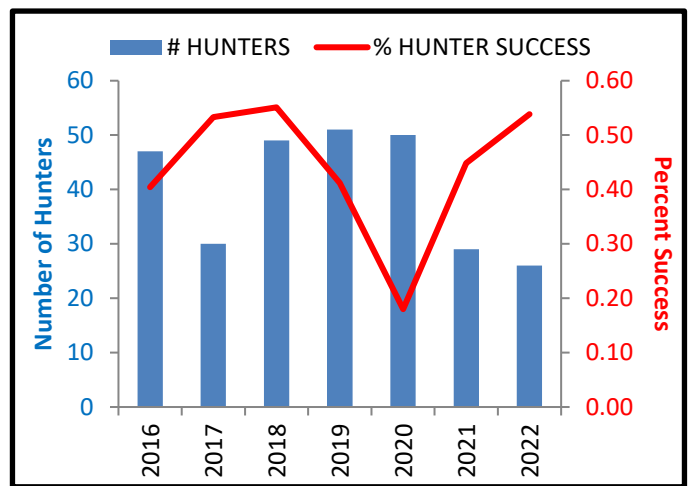
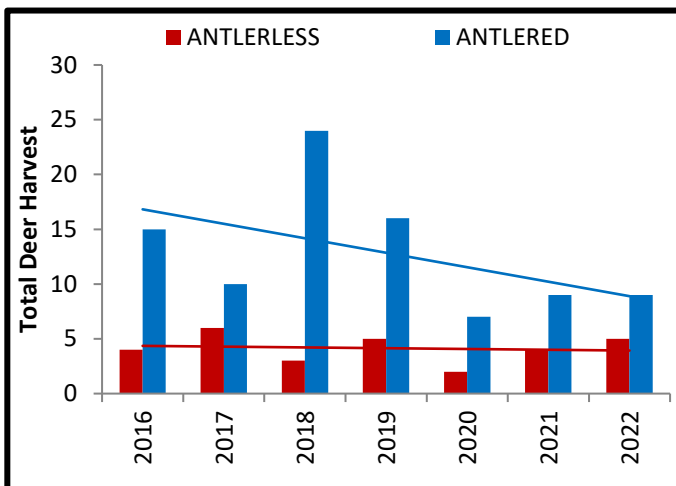




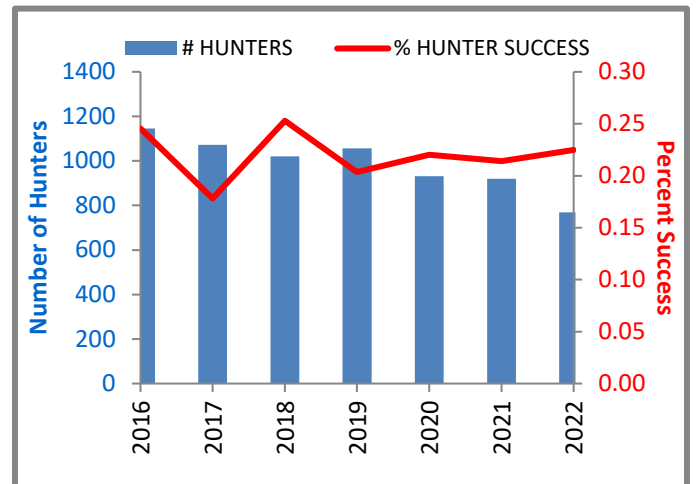
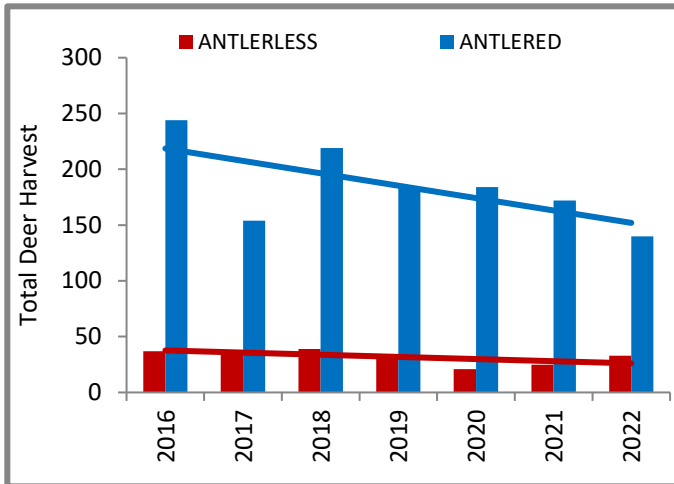
GMU 653 (White River) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



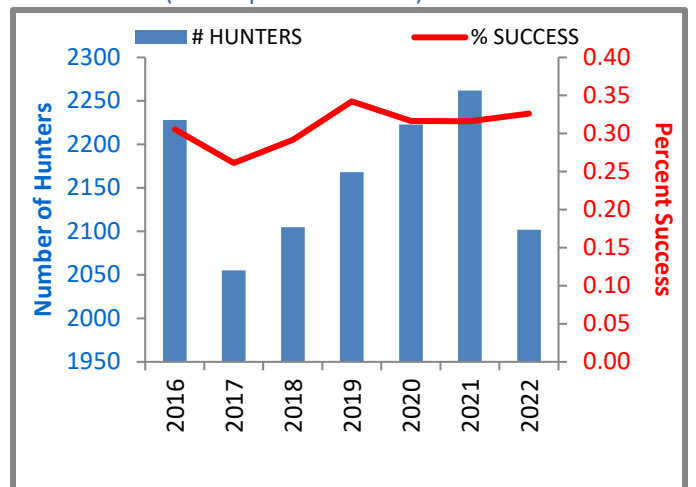
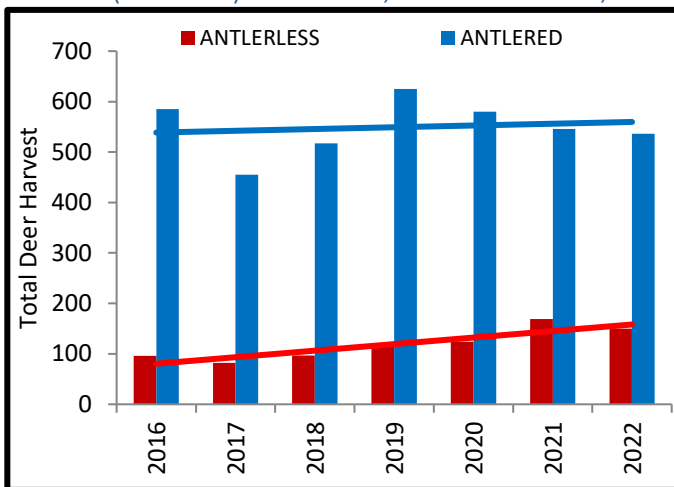
GMU 654 (Mashel) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



GMU 655 (Anderson Island) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



GMU 666 (Deschutes) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



K. Hailstone with her first spike (2017)

## BEAR

WDFW's goals for black bear management are to:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage black bear and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize threats to public safety from black bears, while at the same time maintaining a sustainable and viable bear population.
3. Manage black bear for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography; and
4. Manage populations statewide for a sustained yield. Wildlife managers use three statistics to assess black bear harvest:
  - Proportion of females harvested (no more than 35-39% of harvest)
  - Median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years)
  - Median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years)

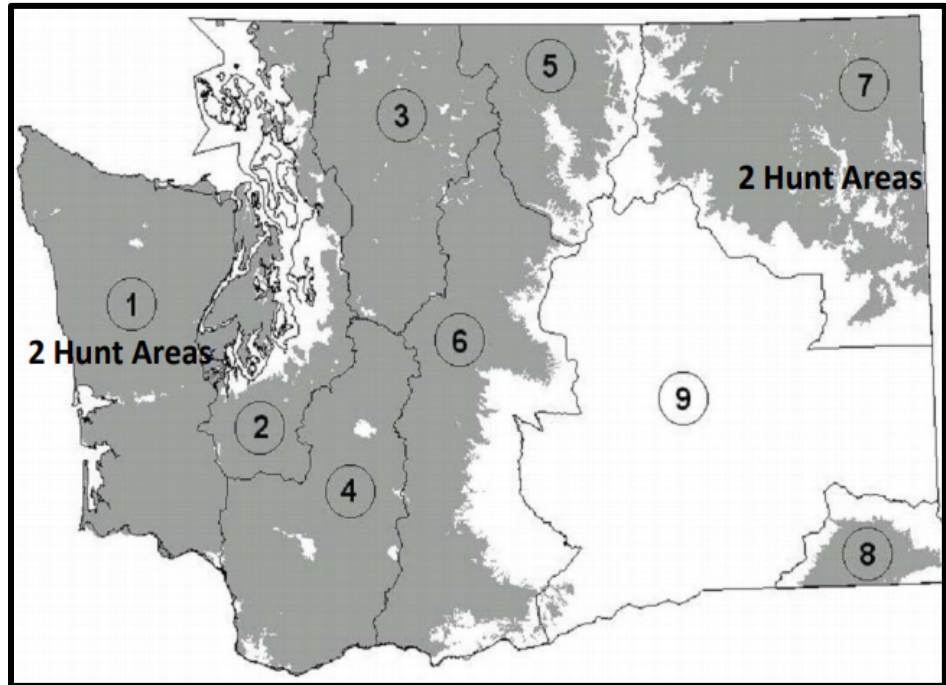
WDFW does not conduct annual surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size and instead uses harvest data trends for population estimates or indices. Wildlife managers believe black bear populations, which occur across the district but are most prevalent on commercial timberlands in GMUs 653 and 654, are stable in District 11.

For management purposes, the state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions. District 11 contains parts of two Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs): South Cascades (BBMU #2 containing GMUs 653 and 654) and Puget Sound (BBMU #4 containing GMUs 652, 655, 666, and 667). Each of these BBMUs also contains additional GMUs outside the boundaries of District 11. A spring bear hunt season is currently not provided in Washington (reference WDFW link [here](#)).



Local District 11 hunter T. Cavin displaying his spring harvested cinnamon black bear.

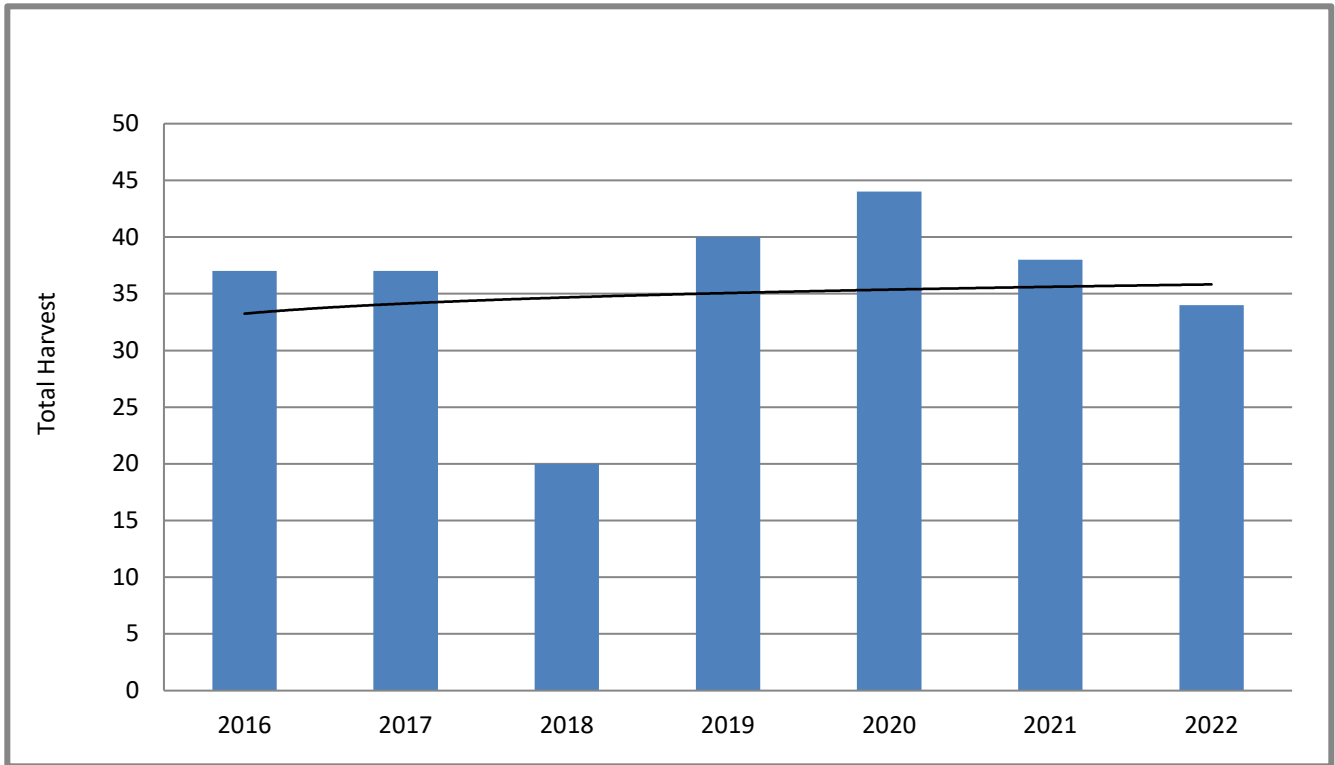
Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Manulife managed lands (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMU 654), and Joint Base Lewis McChord offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district.



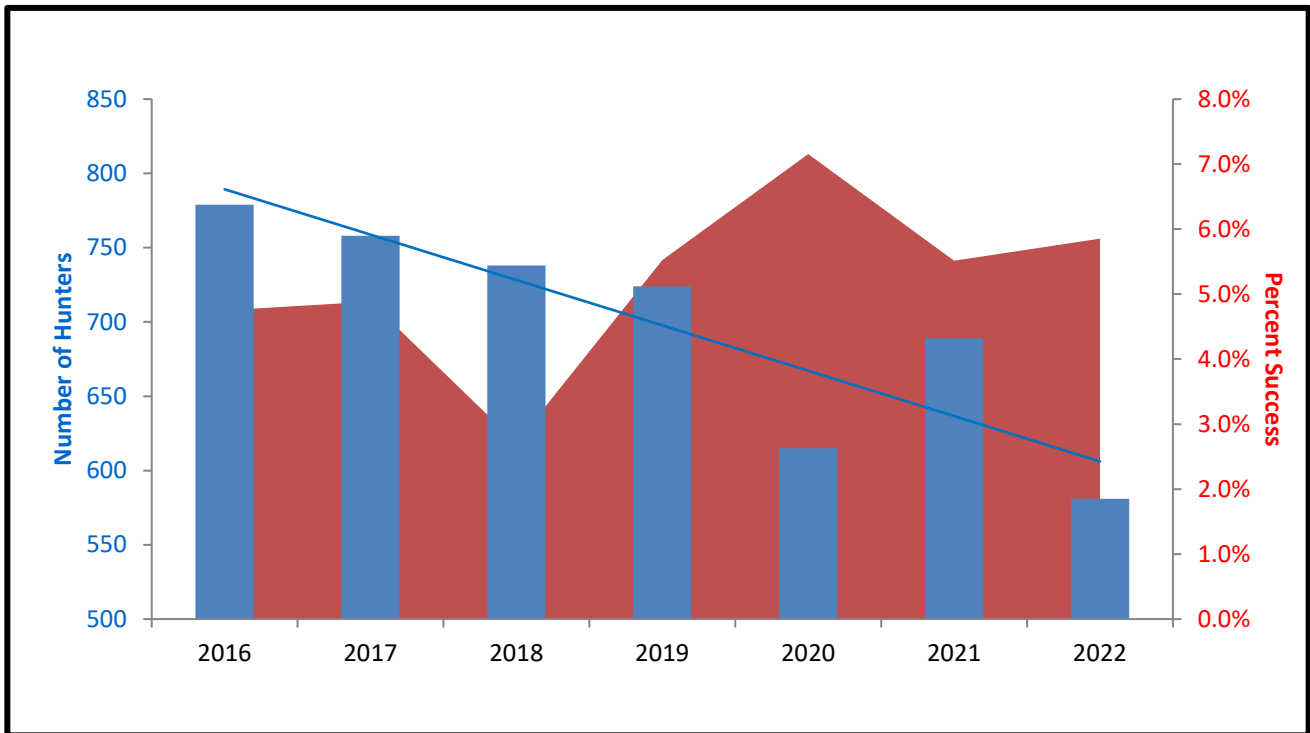
Black bear management units (BBMUs) in Washington State.

General fall season bear harvest in the GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (GMUs 652, 655, 666, 667 combined) have remained stable over the past 7 years except for 2018, which saw a one-year significant decline. Although bear hunting is legal in GMU 655 Anderson Island, bear have never been reported harvested nor hunters reported hunting the island. The number of hunters hunting this BBMU has been declining since 2019 which may have influenced increasing success rates for those that continue to hunt this BBMU. Success across District 11's portion of this BBMU was 6% in 2022, primarily driven by success in GMU 652 (7.6%) and GMU 653 (8.6%). Prospects for harvesting bear in GMU 652 and 653 are good for the 2023 season while in GMUs 666 (3.2%) and 667 (4.7%) much less so. Last winter's snowpack and the resulting soil moisture levels should result in good berry and mast production this year.





Puget Sound BMMU General Fall Bear Harvest (GMUs 652, 666, 667 only combined).

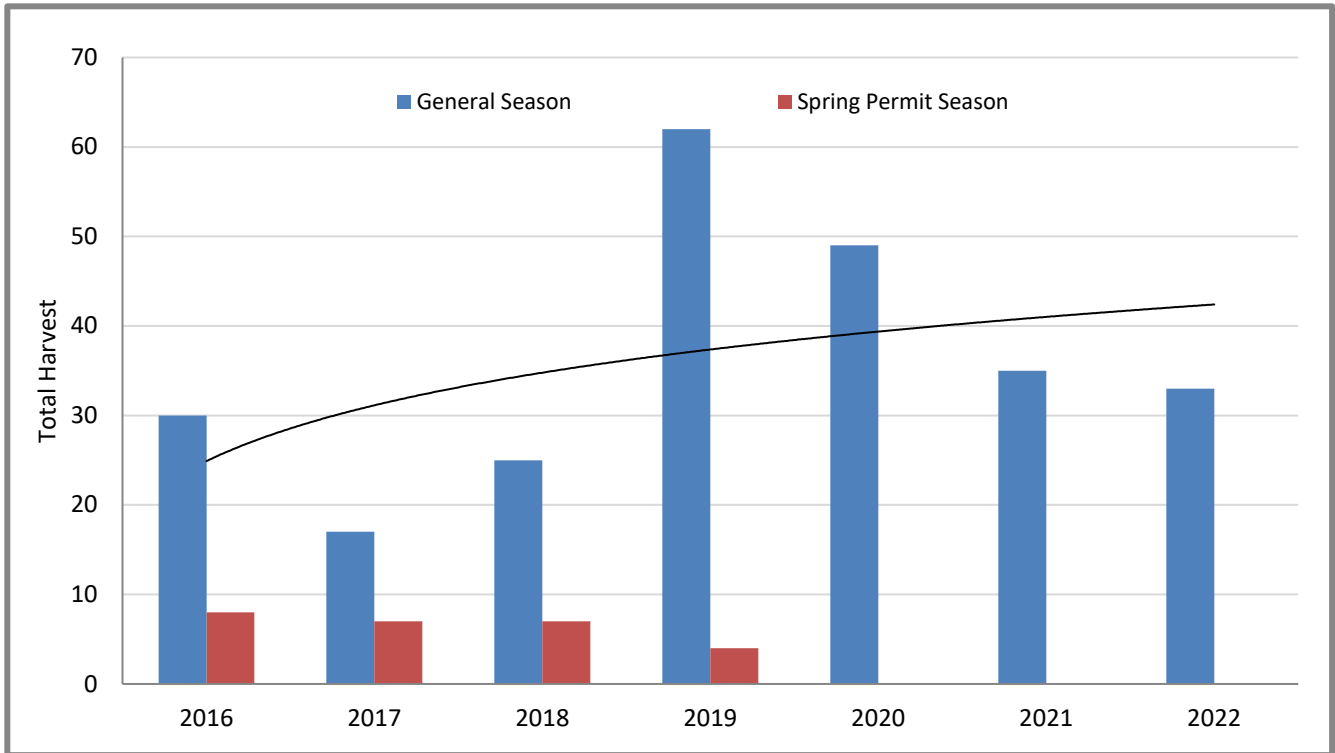


Puget Sound BMMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMUs 652, 655, 666, 667 only combined).

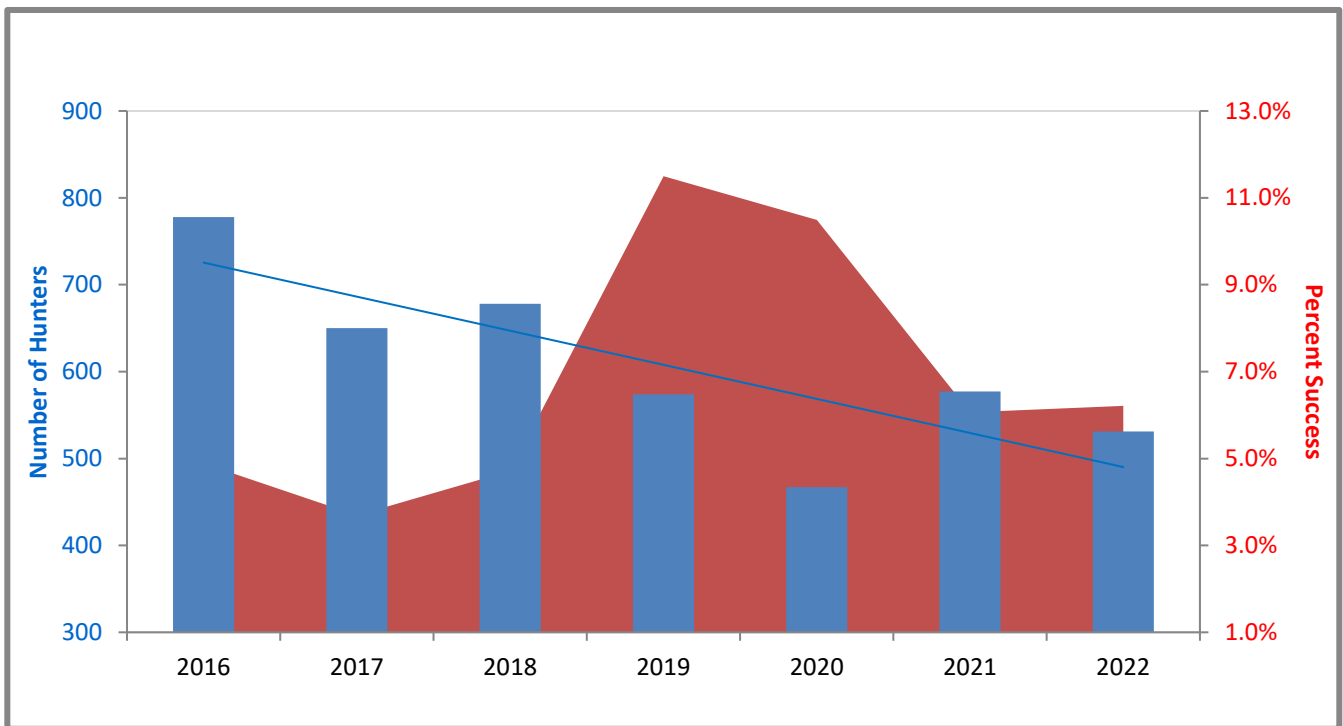
BBMU	GMU	Total Fall Male Harvest	Total Fall Female Harvest	Total Harvest	Total Number Hunters	Average Hunter Success	Total Hunter Days	Average Days/Kill
Coastal #2	652 - Puyallup	61	26	87	1139	7.64%	10,288	118
	655 – Anderson Island	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	666 – Deschutes	17	11	28	864	3.24%	7,955	284
	667 - Skookumchuck	98	37	135	2,881	4.69%	27,527	204
South Cascades #4	653 - White River	79	37	116	1,342	8.64%	9,380	81
	654 – Mashel	90	45	135	2,630	5.13%	21,931	162

Black bear harvest statistics by GMU for the Coastal and South Cascades BBMU, past 7-year totals and averages.

Bear harvest in District 11 and portions of the South Cascades BBMU (GMUs 653 and 654 combined) remained stable from 2015-2018 and then increased threefold in 2019 in response to an earlier start date (August 1) and a new two-bear bag limit statewide. This high has continued to decline since. In response to the new regulations, hunter success rates doubled in 2019 compared to the previous six years despite a decline in the number of hunters. The Kapowsin spring bear season was eliminated in 2020 (previously averaging six bears harvested per year) and statewide in 2022. Number of hunters declined and then stabilized around 550 in 2021 but success rates have been declining since a high in 2019.



South Cascade BBMU bear harvest (GMU 653 and 654 portion only combined. Kapowsin spring bear permit season was eliminated in 2020).



South Cascade BBMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMU 653 and 654 portion only combined).

In 2019, WDFW developed a rigorous monitoring protocol to estimate black bear population densities on a large scale. Using the results of the North Cascades density analysis (Welfelt et al. 2019), WDFW developed a sampling design that relies on selecting 2-3 project areas annually across the 17 WDFW districts where bears occur. Within each project area, the Department establishes density estimates based on non-invasive DNA collection through bear hair samples.

As wildlife managers conduct more surveys, additional capture results will further inform the model, therefore making density estimates more robust. In 2020, District 11 applied this protocol within GMU 654 to obtain a more accurate bear density estimate. The resulting density estimate was 16.9 bears/100 km<sup>2</sup> and the estimated population obtained by extrapolating that density across available habitat in GMU 654 was 142 (with 114 greater than 1-year-old). For GMU 654, the 5-year average harvest was 23 bears (6 in spring and 17 in fall), which would yield an average harvest rate of 20 percent; an additional 0-15 bears are taken annually for timber damage removals for a combined mortality rate up to 33 percent of the estimated population in that unit. The district is eager to conduct the same project in its remaining five GMUs over time to aid bear management and harvest analysis.



### IMPORTANT BEAR HUNTING CONSIDERATIONS

WDFW strongly urges bear hunters not to shoot sows with cubs. Cubs tend to lag behind sows and may not be easily seen. Cubs may also be present in trees or hidden in dense vegetation in the vicinity. Observe and be patient before shooting. The past few seasons, several orphaned cubs were reported in WDFW's Coastal Region (Region 6). Some were captured and taken to rehabilitation facilities. However, space and funds are limited for rehabilitation and the outcome for bears questionable so hunters should avoid this by NOT shooting sows with cubs.

It is mandatory that hunters who harvest a bear, submit a premolar tooth for aging (per [WAC 220-415-090](#)). The use of hounds and/or bait to hunt black bear is prohibited statewide ([RCW 77.15.245](#)).



## COUGAR

Cougar are widespread in the forestlands of District 11. Areas that support a lot of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for harvesting cougar. The statewide goals for cougar are: 1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage cougar and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations. 2. Minimize human/cougar conflict. 3. Manage cougar for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, wildlife viewing, and photography. 4. Manage statewide cougar populations for a sustained yield. 5. Improve our understanding of predator-prey relationships.

WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012 by shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougar harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines (see the WDFW [website](#)). The intent was to have a longer season, without any hunting implement restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline. The harvest guideline is based on cougar social structure research dynamics. WDFW administers this hunt structure within 50 PMUs. District 11 comprises three PMUs made up of GMUs containing similar habitats and having similar cougar population objectives: GMUs 652/666, GMUs 653/654, and GMU 667. Cougar hunting is not provided in GMU 655.

In 2019, in response to concerns that cougar populations levels were getting too high in certain areas of the state, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission directed WDFW with to create various options for cougar management. A subcommittee of WDFW staff crafted options, which can be referenced [here](#). Ultimately, the previous cougar hunting quota system set to harvest 12-16% of the population was adjusted in the 19 GMUs in the state with the highest number of cougars. Within these GMUs, the upper limits of the quota were expanded. This change in management



does not affect GMUs in District 11, which remain at the same quota level as previous. Subadult cougars will no longer count toward the cougar harvest guideline.

Local District 11 hunter D. Colvin with his cougar harvested in GMU 667 (2022).

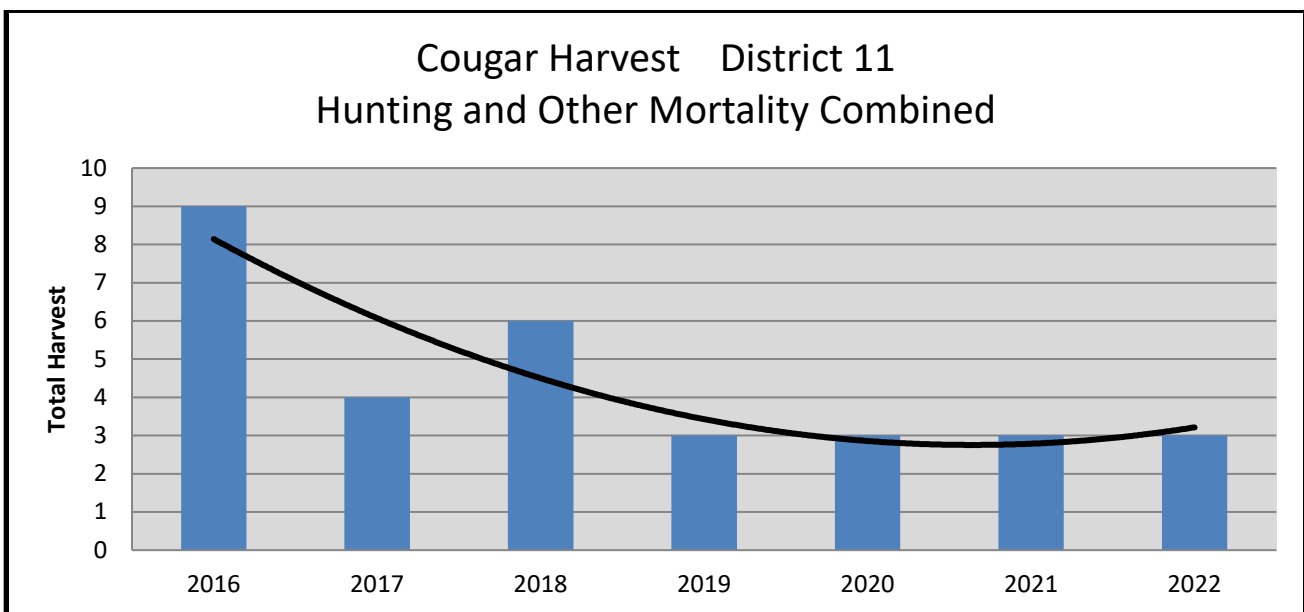
Two general cougar seasons are offered:

- Early: Sept. 1 – Dec. 31
- Late: Jan. 1 – April 30 OR when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever occurs first.

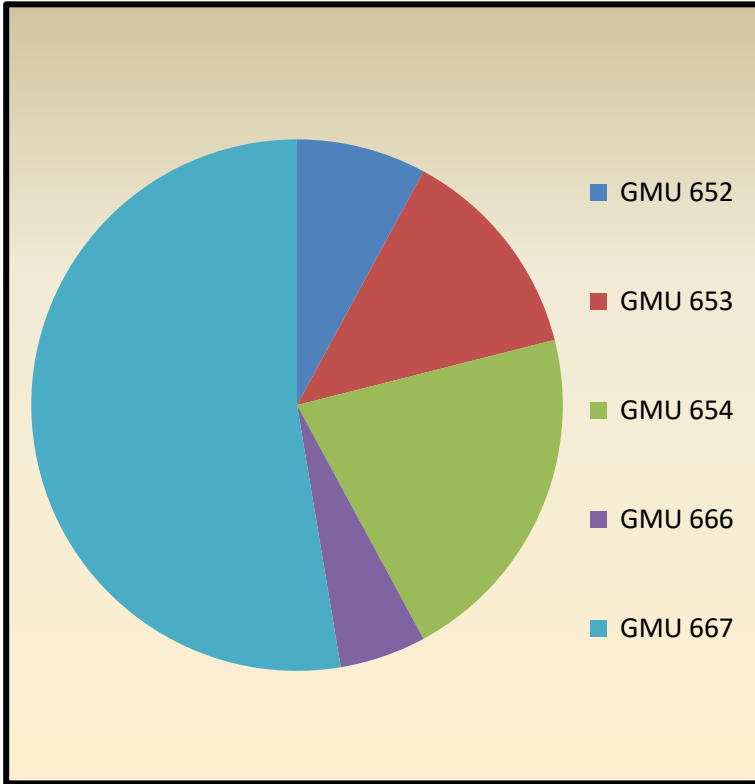
To hunt cougars after March 31 in a unit open for cougar harvest, **hunters must buy the current year’s hunting license and cougar tag for the year they intend to hunt** (Meaning a valid 2023-24 cougar license and tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2023). WDFW examines harvest numbers starting Jan. 1 and may close any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline. WDFW advises anyone planning to hunt cougar after Jan. 1 to confirm the cougar season is open in the desired hunting area by visiting the [WDFW website](#). Hunters can call 1-866-364-4868 to determine if a specific hunt area is open after Dec. 31.

GMUs 652 and 666 have no cougar harvest quota limit, GMUs 653 and 654 have a quota of four to five cougars (combined), and GMU 667 has a quota of six to seven cougars. When the lower level of each quota is reached, the District 11 biologist determines if other non-hunting forms of mortality have occurred and whether the GMU should be closed.

Following a significantly high year in 2016, cougar harvest has remained stable over the last seven years in District 11, averaging four cougars harvested per year (all mortality combined). Annual harvest is often a reflection of hunter participation and winter conditions; a poor snow year can significantly affect cougar harvest success. Downward trends may reflect the annual hunting pressure more so that a reduction in the cougar population. Three cougars were reported killed in the district in 2022 not including tribal harvest. The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the district. Prospects for hunting cougar in the district remain fair.



Cougar harvest District 11 general season and other mortality combined.



Cougar harvest ratios by GMU in District 11, 2016 to present (all mortality).



Three juvenile cougars captured on District 11 trail cameras in GMU 653 (2023)

### IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually less than 80 pounds) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. WDFW strongly encourages cougar hunters to search for possible multiple tracks when pursuing an animal. Female cougars may have kittens in trees or in dense vegetation nearby. Please be very observant and patient before shooting. During the 2015 – 2016 season, WDFW enforcement officers and biologists had to capture two orphaned cougar kittens near Joyce. One kitten later died, and the other kitten



will remain in captivity at a zoo. Remember, if you harvest a cougar, there are mandatory reporting and sealing requirements. Voter initiative 655 banned the use of hounds to hunt cougars in the state in 1996. Hunting of the aid of hounds is prohibited statewide except during cougar management removals authorized by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.



## MANDATORY REPORTING/SEALING

All successful cougar hunters must report their cougar harvest to the cougar hotline at: 1-866-364-4868 within 72 hours of harvest and have the cougar pelt sealed within 5 days of notification. This is the same hotline hunters can use to check if Cougar Hunt Areas are open or closed. A premolar tooth and tissue sample will be taken. Reference the [Washington Big Game Hunting Seasons and Rules](#) for more specific details about cougar sealing requirements.



Local District 11 hunter L. Burgett with her first cougar harvested on the Vail Tree Farm, GMU 667, 2022.

## COUGAR OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Fatal cougar encounters are extremely rare. With the increase of human populations, development patterns, and increasing human presence in rural areas, it is essential to raise public awareness and keep both people and cougars safe. Please reference WDFW's [Cougar web page](#) to learn more about cougar/human interactions.



## SMALL GAME: BOBCAT, FOX, RACCOON, COYOTE, RABBIT

**NOTE for all small game data provided below:** WDFW fundamentally changed the method for small game data collection and analysis in 2023 (for 2022 data) compared to previous years. The change should increase the accuracy of small game harvest and hunter data and provide a measure of true annual variation. However, because this is a new method, comparing 2022 data to previous years should be done with caution (i.e., changes in trend may reflect the method rather than the actual harvest/hunter effort). County level estimates should be compared relative to each other or as proportions of the statewide estimate and not to past estimates (but comparing to long-term averages could be appropriate). Moreover, estimates are likely lower in 2022 than prior for some species/counties both for statewide and county small game data due to the change in method. It is unknown at this time if this new method will become the norm as it will be tested in 2023 and 2024.

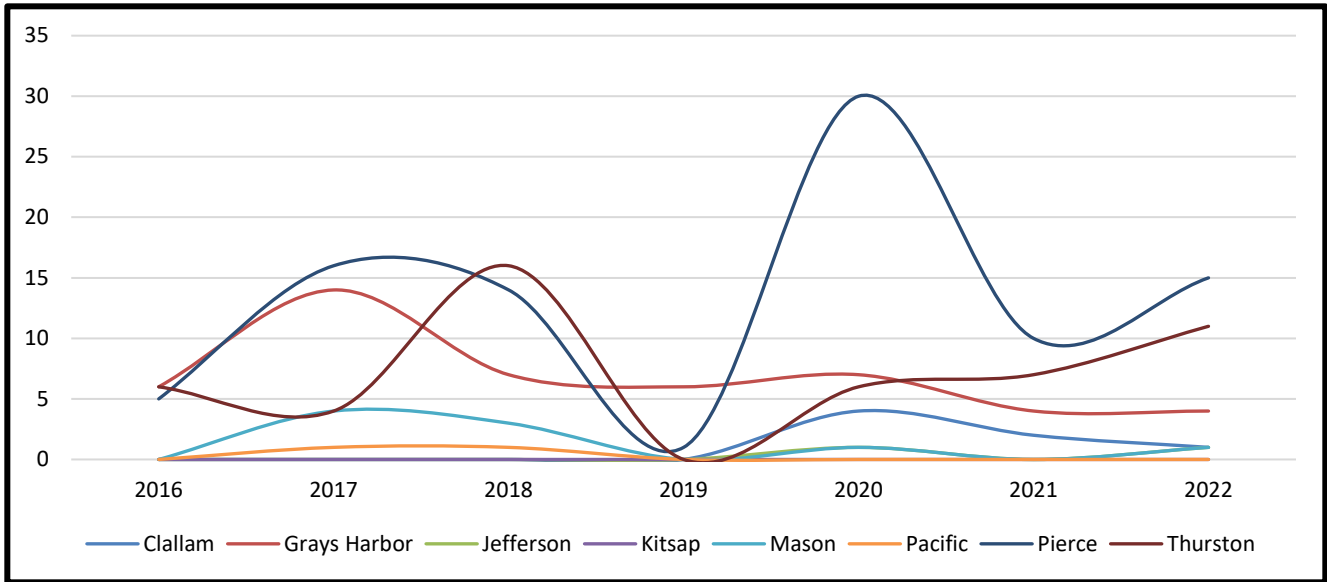
**BOBCATS** are plentiful in the wooded lands across District 11 and many hunters successfully harvest bobcat each season. Bobcat may be hunted statewide with no bag limit from September 1 – March 15. A small game license is required to harvest a bobcat. Bobcats are exempt from hunting hour restrictions except it is unlawful to hunt bobcat at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons that occur in October and November in both eastern and western Washington. Hunting or pursuing bobcat with dogs is prohibited in Washington. **Successful bobcat hunters or trappers must contact a WDFW office**



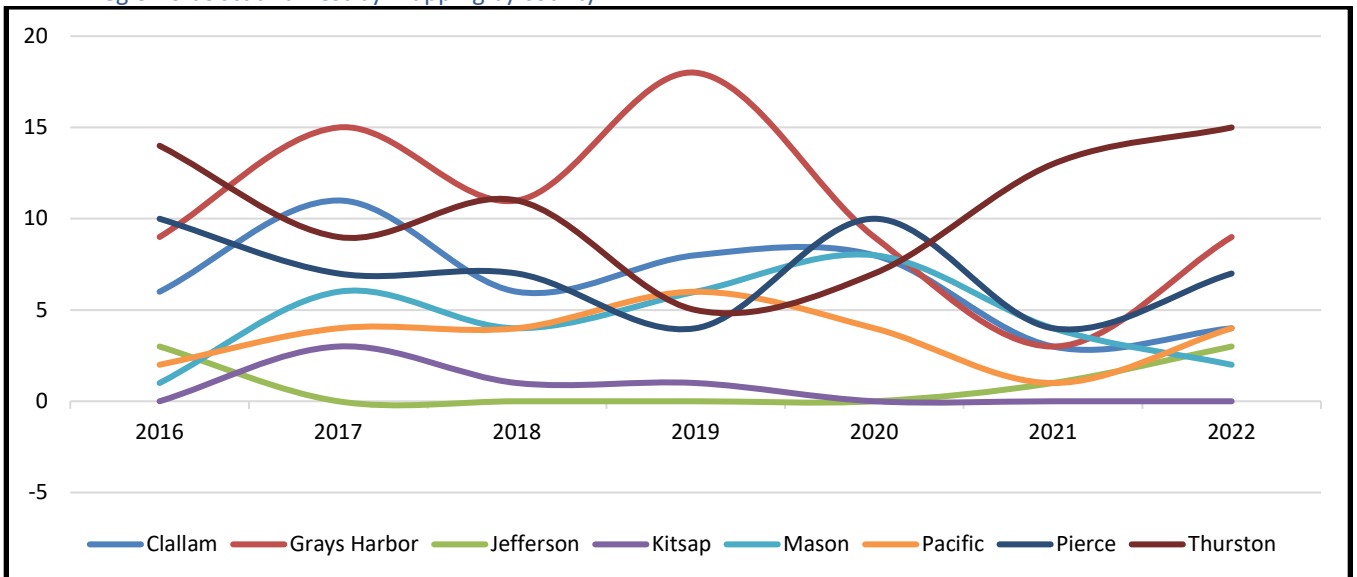
Local District 11 hunters with a beautiful bobcat harvested in GMU 667, Vail Tree Farm.

**to have the bobcat pelt sealed and submit the associated harvest report to the WDFW by April 20 of each year.** The bobcat hide must not be frozen so a seal may be attached. No one may possess an open WDFW bobcat seal unless it has been cut by a licensed taxidermist or fur dealer who has received and invoiced the pelt for processing.

Generally, more bobcats are harvested through hunting than trapping in Region 6 (see charts below). Pierce and Thurston counties both provide great opportunity for harvesting bobcat and typically have the highest rates of harvest in the region. Harvest trends increased in 2022 and prospects for hunting or trapping bobcat in 2023 remain good. Public and private forest remain the best locations for locating and harvesting bobcat in the district and the region.



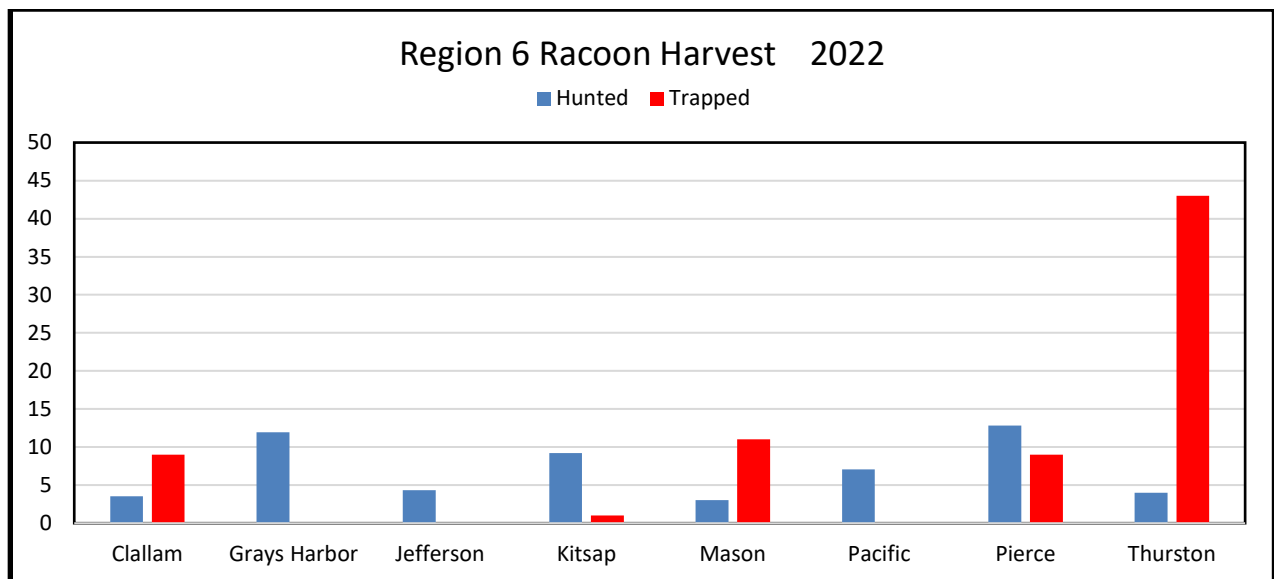
WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by Trapping by county.



WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by Hunting by county.

**RED FOX (*VULPES VULPES*)** are native to central and eastern Cascades but introduced in the western Cascades. Although not considered abundant, they may be found on farmlands, developed areas and forested areas of District 11. People can hunt them with no bag limit from Sept. 1 – March 15 with a small game license across the district except for the exterior boundaries of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and Gifford Pinchot national forests. Very few red foxes are harvested across Region 6 including District 11. The Cascade red fox (*Vulpes cascadenensis*), an endemic subspecies that occupies alpine and subalpine habitats in the southern Cascade Mountains including Mount Rainer in District 11, is a rare to vulnerable [species of greatest conservation need](#) and a [priority species](#) to WDFW and cannot be hunted.

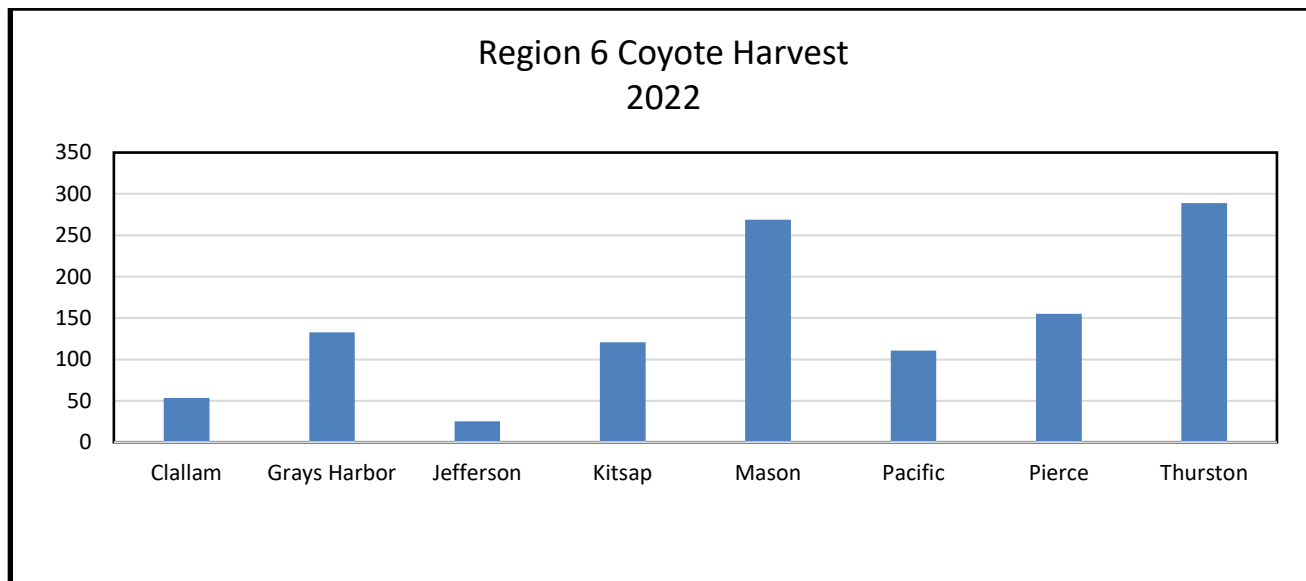
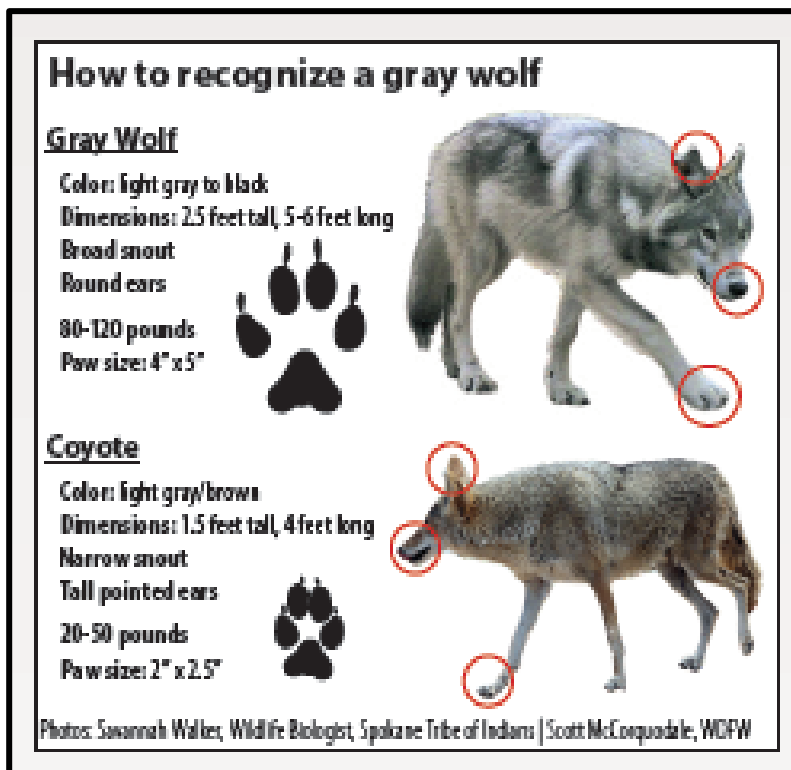
**RACCOONS** are also very plentiful across District 11, particularly around suburban neighborhoods where they feed on garbage, fallen fruit, dogfood, artificial pond fish, and various other opportunistic food sources. They are helped by a lack of natural predators within these areas. Raccoons are also found in the less developed forests of the eastern district. Raccoons can be hunted across the district with no bag limit from Sept. 1 – March 15 with a small game license. Dogs may be used to hunt raccoon and they may be hunted at night, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt with dogs or at night during the months of October or November during the dates established for modern firearm deer and elk general seasons in eastern and western Washington. Raccoon harvest data prior to 2022 was highly biased; 2022 data is more accurate and is provided below. Most raccoon harvest is via hunting with only a few trapped as nuisance animals annually except for Thurston County (at least in 2022).



WDFW Region 6 raccoon harvest by Hunting by county, 2022.

**COYOTES** are another small game animal abundant across District 11, both in the urban and non-urban areas. They have also benefitted from a lack of large predators in the urban and suburban areas. Coyote are an unclassified species and can be hunted or trapped without a bag limit year-round under a small game or big game hunting license. Coyote may be hunted at night with lights year-round, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt coyote at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons that occur in October and November in eastern and western Washington. The use of dogs to hunt coyote is prohibited. Hunters could mistake wolves as coyotes, especially juvenile wolves. Wolves are protected under both federal and state law and MAY NOT be shot or killed. Be sure of identification if you are hunting coyote. Report all wolf observations [here](#).

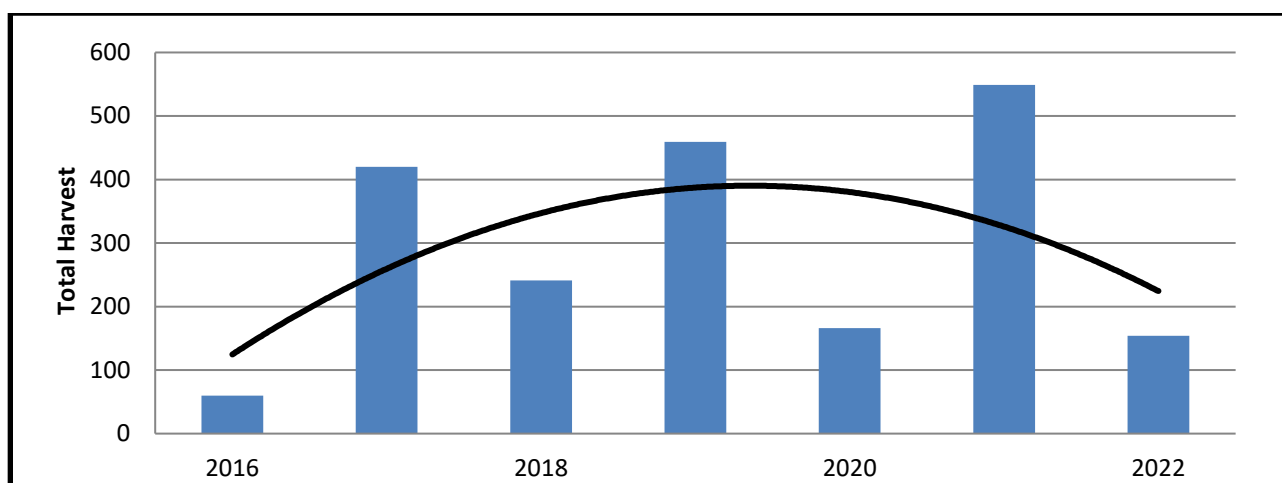
Most coyote in the state are harvested via hunting with only a very few killed via trapping as nuisance animals. Coyote harvest data prior to 2022 was highly biased; 2022 data is more accurate and is provided below. Thurston County in District 11 provides one of the highest coyote hunting opportunities.



WDFW Region 6 coyote harvest by hunting by county, 2022.



**COTTONTAIL RABBIT:** District 11 provides the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in Region 6, and some of the best in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce, Thurston, and northcentral Lewis counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the District fluctuates depending on hunter annual participation. The average harvest in Pierce and Thurston counties combined over the past 6 years has remained steady at around 300 annually but significantly increased every other year. Cottontail populations cycle from highs to lows but normally on a 7–10-year basis and not annually; so this data reflects participation and success more than natural population cycles. Pierce and Thurston counties’ success rates are comparable most years but do vary with normally more hunters in Pierce than Thurston. Lewis County has much less harvest than either Pierce or Thurston. Prospects for cottontail hunting in District 11 remain high.



Cottontail rabbit harvest; Pierce/Thurston counties only (combined).



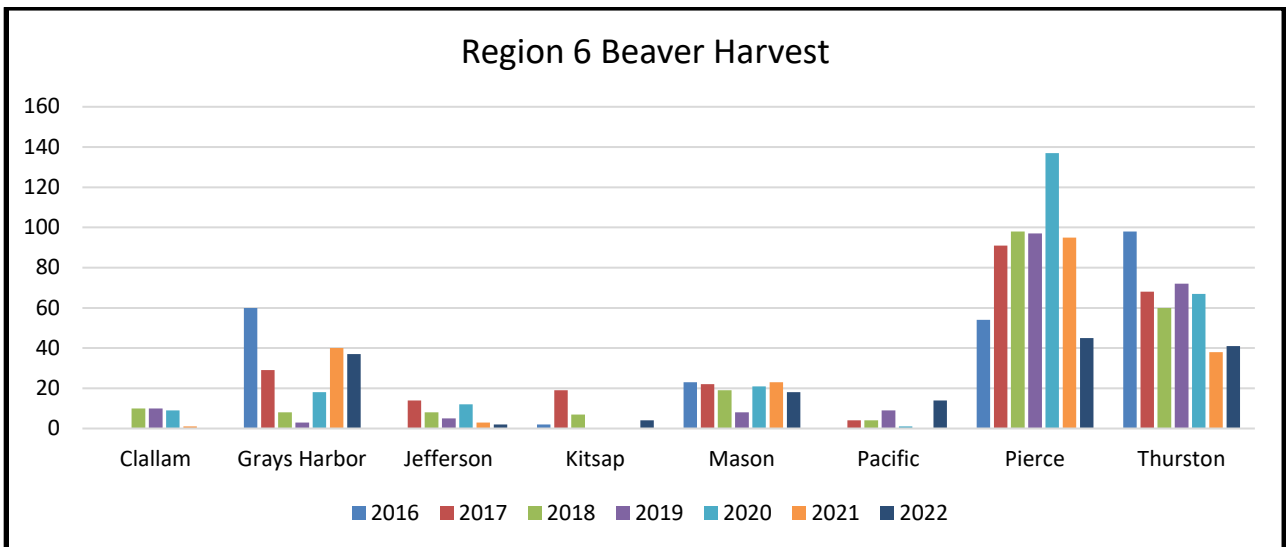
Falconer J. Knudson with his newly banded peregrine falcon, Pierce County. Falconers often hunt rabbits and other prey with their beloved raptors.

**SMALL GAME: BEAVER, WEASEL, MARTEN, MINK, MUSKRAT, RIVER OTTER**

**NOTE for all small game data provided below:** WDFW fundamentally changed the method for small game data collection and analysis in 2023 (for 2022 data) compared to previous years.

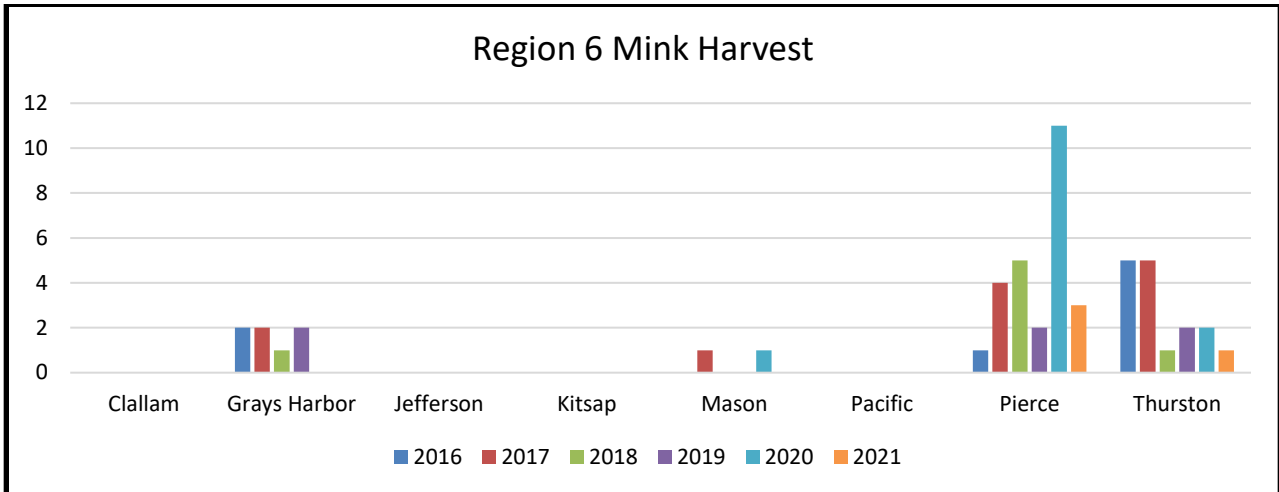
**BEAVER, WEASELS, MINK, MUSKRAT, SKUNK AND RIVER OTTER** are all plentiful across Region 6, including District 11. Long-tailed weasels occur in District 11 primarily on pasture, cropland, fields, and grasslands although few are harvested in the district or region. Hunters may only harvest beaver, weasel, marten, muskrat, and river otter by trapping with a [trapping license](#) during the trapping season (Nov. 1 – March 31). Skunks are an unclassified species and can hunted or trapped year-round without limit.

Beaver harvest in Thurston and Pierce counties (District 11) is the highest in Region 6 by a significant amount. Considering lakes, wetlands and waterways exist across the region, the difference is likely due to more hunter participation and more removal of nuisance beaver in these highly urbanized counties.



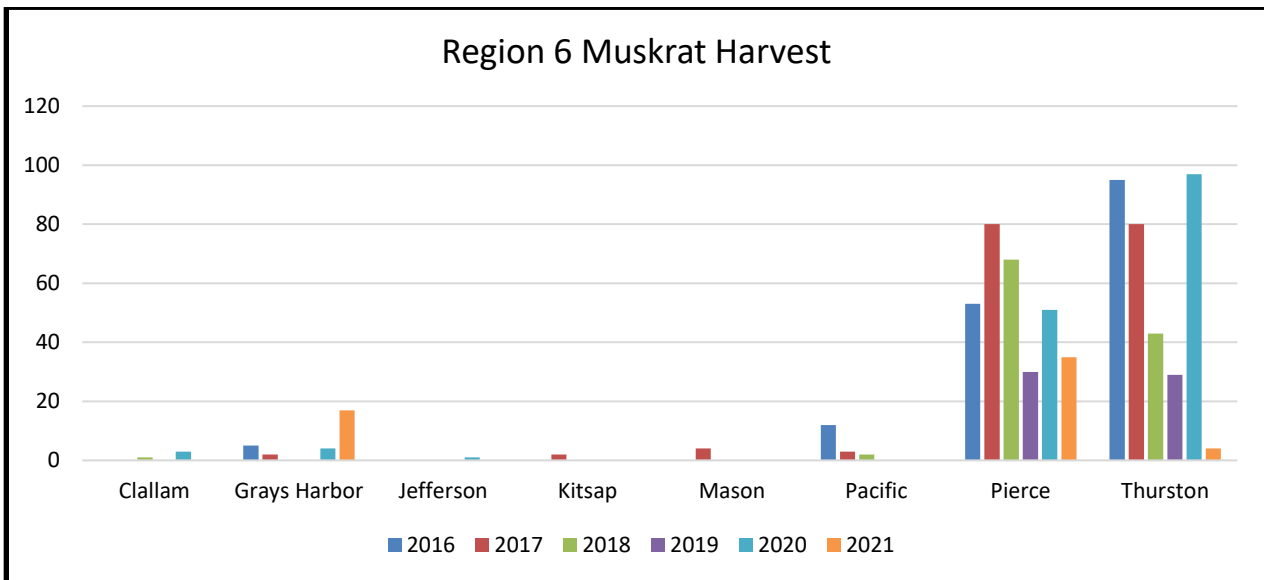
WDFW Region 6 beaver harvest by trapping by county.

Mink are common across Region 6 but not plentiful. Regardless, District 11 typically provides the most, and sometimes only, annual harvest in the region.



WDFW Region 6 mink harvest by trapping by county.

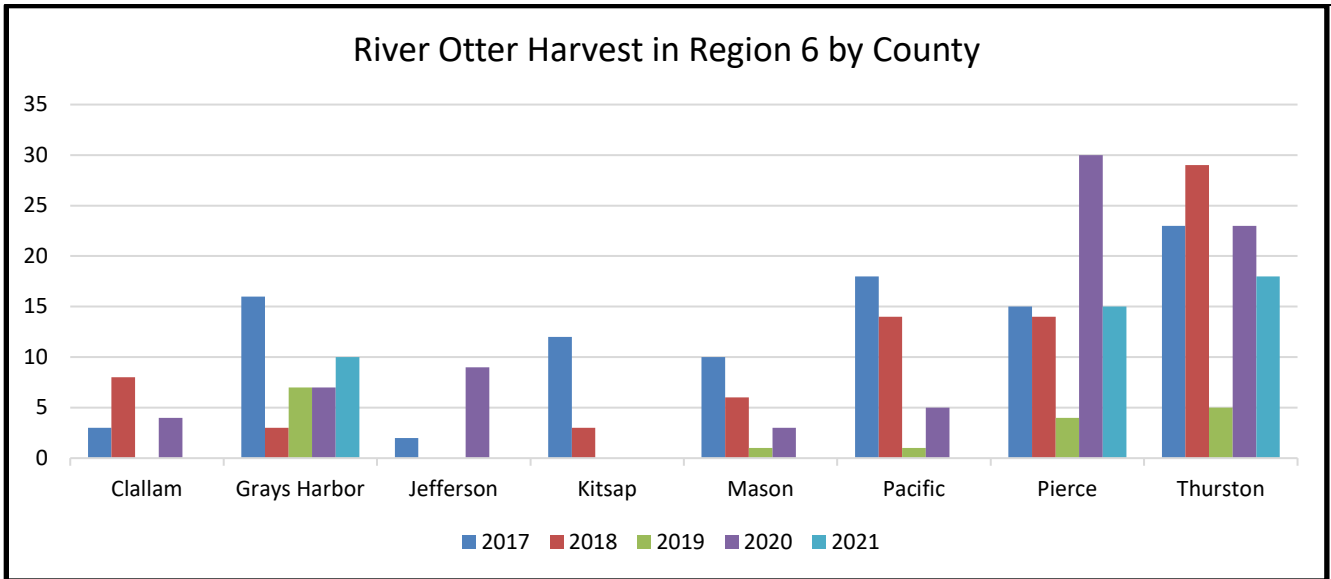
Muskrat are also common across Region 6 but few hunters specifically target them and most are likely trapped incidentally to other species. District 11 typically provides the most annual harvest in the region.



WDFW Region 6 muskrat harvest by trapping by county.

River otter (*Lontra canadensis*) is plentiful in the freshwater lakes, streams, and wetlands across District 11 and less so in the saltwater of the Puget Sound inlet. Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) are found in the saltwater of Puget Sound and the outer coast and cannot be trapped or hunted. **Successful river otter trappers must contact a WDFW office to have their otter pelt(s) sealed and submit the associated harvest report to the WDFW by April 20 of each year.** Pelts must be presented in a way that the hide can be sealed. No frozen hides or carcasses will be accepted (see [Trapping Regulations](#)). Pierce and Thurston counties within District 11 consistently provide some of the highest trap rates for river otter within Region 6.





WDFW Region 6 river otter harvest by trapping by county.

**AMERICAN MARTEN** inhabits eastern District 11 as part of the Cascade population, which is considered stable. American martens are difficult to trap; none were reported harvested 2018-2022. Fisher may be misidentified as a marten; fishers are a protected species in Washington under both federal and state law and **MAY NOT** be trapped or killed. Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten. Report all fisher observations [here](#) or by emailing [wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov).

## Identification of Fisher and Marten in Washington

Fishers are protected under both federal and state law and may not be trapped or killed.  
**Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten or mink.**

**Pelage Colors**  
 Fisher — dark brown with lighter shading on head, back of the neck and back.  
 Marten — light brown to brown (cinnamon, russet), with creamy brown/ beige face and occasionally chest with darker brown legs, feet and end of tail.

**Size**  
 Fishers are bigger, darker and have noticeably longer and fuller tails than marten. Fishers tails average 14-15 inches in length and Martens tails average 6.5-7.5 inches in length.

**Ear Shape**  
 Fishers — rounded “teddy-bear” shaped ears  
 Martens — more pointed ears

**Elevation**  
 Fishers and martens overlap in elevation. Therefore, elevation should not be used as an indicator of species presence.

**FISHER**





Photo by Paul Bannick

**MARTEN**



WDFW Staff

**Trapping Information**  
 Use cubby boxes, with a closed front and 2.5 inch entrance hole, to avoid catching fishers.

## DUCKS

The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, primarily Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Waterfowl Population Status report for 2022, habitat conditions during the 2022 Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey deteriorated relative to 2019, the last survey year due to the COVID-19 (SARSCOV-2) pandemic. For the latest information regarding waterfowl species status, reference the USFWS' [2022 Waterfowl Status report](#)



[fws.gov/refuges/RefugeUpdate/MarApr\\_2012/fourflyways.html](https://fws.gov/refuges/RefugeUpdate/MarApr_2012/fourflyways.html)

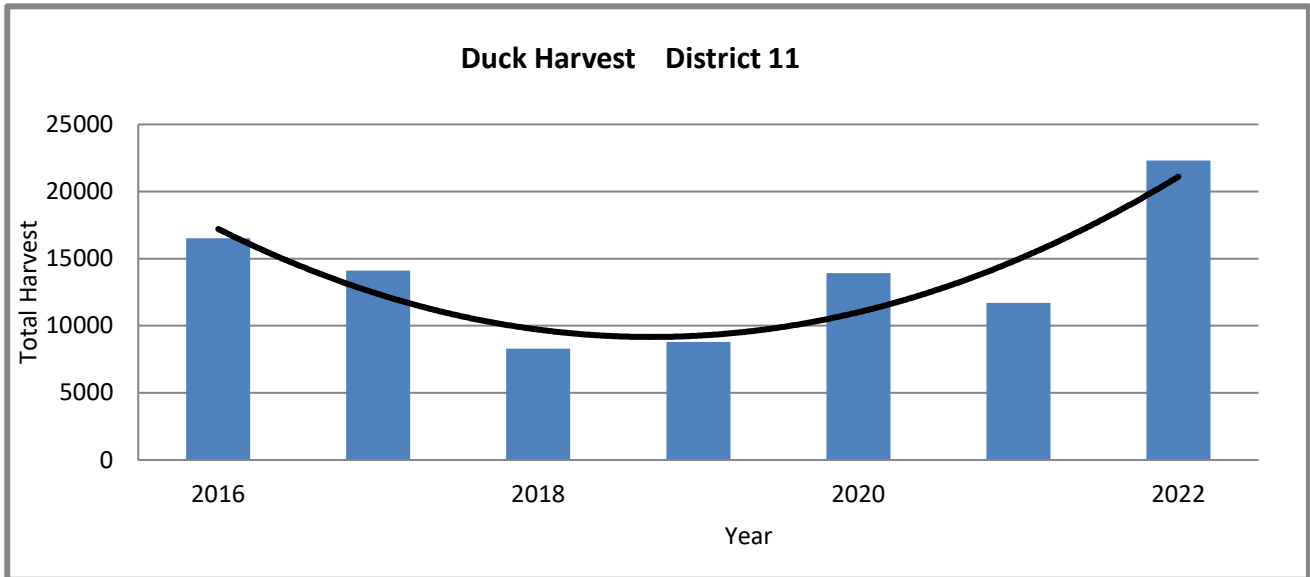
Total duck breeding population estimates were down 12 percent in Washington in 2022 compared to 2019, the last time the surveys were conducted but 13% higher than the long-term state average (1955-2019). In Washington for 2022, the total duck estimate was unchanged from the 2019 estimate and the long-term average (2010–2019). Prospects for waterfowl hunting in District 11 remain good.

Information on the **Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Surveys and the Mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory** can be found [here](#). Population trends for ducks found in District 11 are:

Species	Breeding Population Estimate Trend North America
Mallard	Estimated abundance was $7.2 \pm 0.2$ million, which was 23% below the 2019 estimate of $9.4 \pm 0.3$ million and 9% below the long-term average of $7.9 \pm 0.04$ million.
Green-winged teal	The estimated abundance was $2.2 \pm 0.2$ million, which was 32% below the 2019 estimate of $3.2 \pm 0.2$ million and similar to the long-term average.
Gadwall	Estimated abundance was $2.7 \pm 0.1$ million, 18% below the 2019 estimate and 30% above the long-term average of $2.0 \pm 0.2$ million.
American widgeon	The abundance estimate for American widgeon ( <i>Mareca americana</i> ; $2.1 \pm 0.1$ million) was 25% below the 2019 estimate and 19% below the long-term average of $2.6 \pm 0.02$ million.
Northern shoveler	Estimated abundance was $3.0 \pm 0.2$ million, 17% below the 2019 estimate of $3.6 \pm 0.2$ million and 15% above the long-term average of $2.6 \pm 0.02$ million.
Northern pintails	Northern pintail ( <i>Anas acuta</i> ) abundance ( $1.8 \pm 0.2$ million) was 21% below the 2019 estimate of $2.3 \pm 0.1$ million and 54% below the long-term average of $3.9 \pm 0.03$ million.
Scaup (combined)	The combined estimate of lesser and greater scaup ( <i>A. afnis</i> and <i>A. marila</i> ; $3.6 \pm 0.2$ million) was similar to the 2019 estimate and 28% lower than the long-term average of $5.0 \pm 0.04$ million.
Canvasbacks	Abundance estimate of $0.6 \pm 0.05$ million was similar to the 2019 estimate and the long-term average.

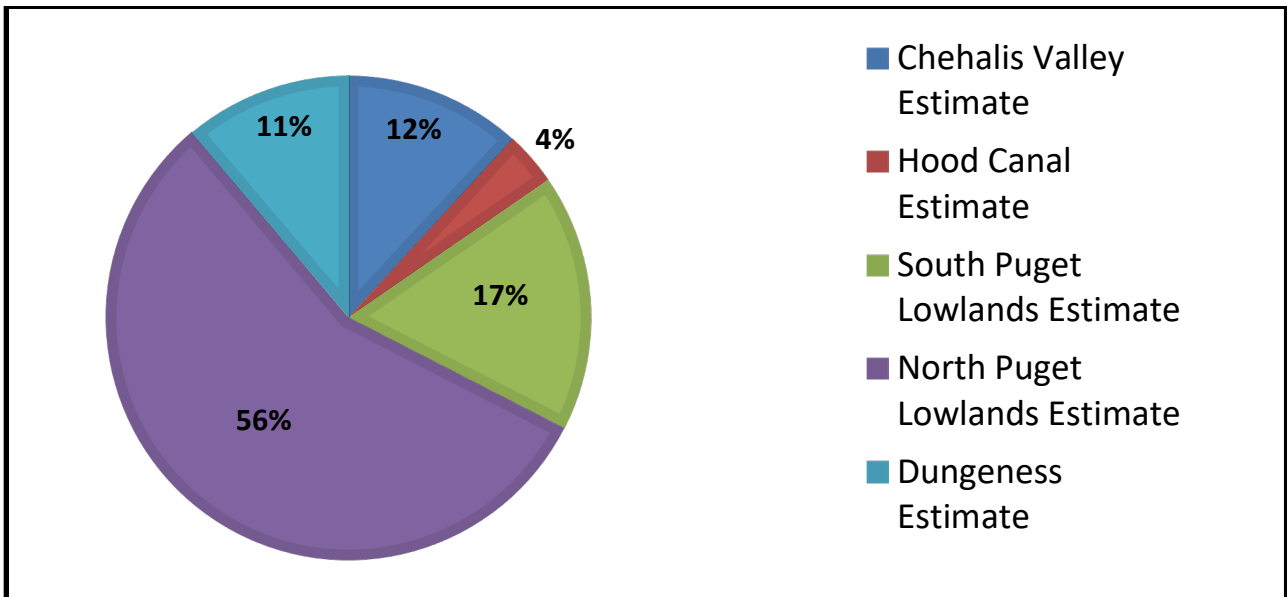
Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, off Anderson Island (GMU 655), and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in south Puget Sound. Duck harvest in District 11 has increased over the last few years following a noticeable decline in 2018 and 2019. A decline in hunter participation may partially explain that decline considering breeding duck surveys show an increase in breeding ducks in the district over the past 7 years.

Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily because of Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. Hunting prospects for waterfowl hunters remain good in the District in 2023 with the best prospects being in Thurston County.



Combined duck harvest in District 11.

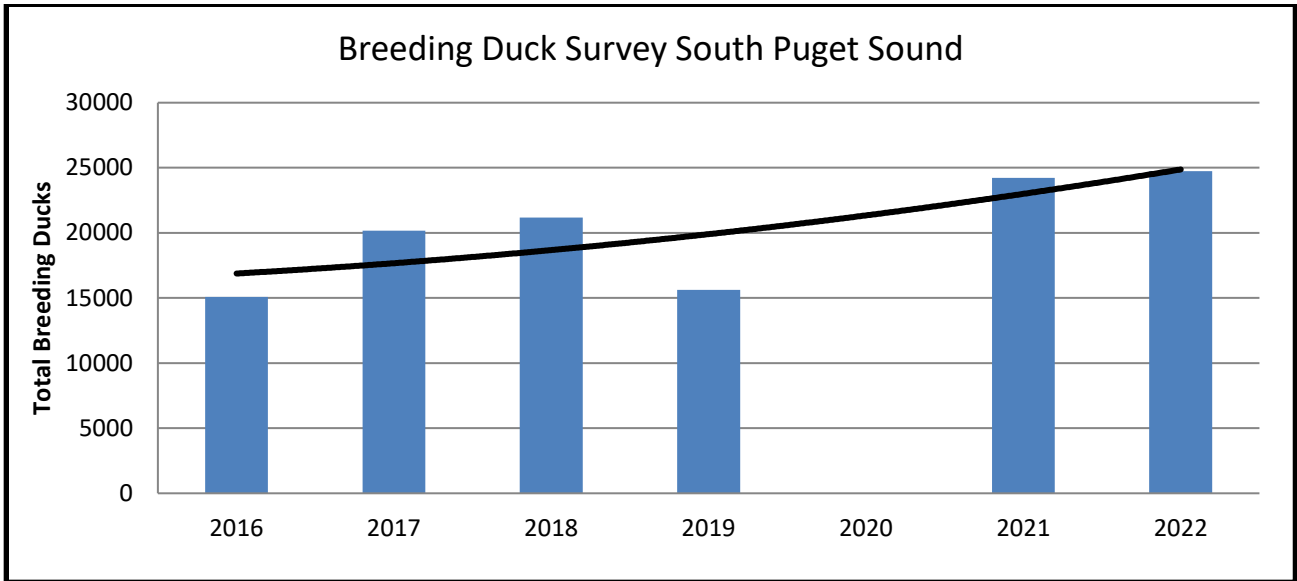
The south Puget Sound lowlands have the second highest percent of breeding ducks in western Washington according to WDFW’s annual breeding duck surveys. Typically, breeding season duck estimates are highest in North Puget Sound with Hood Canal having the least. District 11--the South Puget Lowlands—normally supports the next highest concentrations of breeding ducks which makes the District a great place to hunt for waterfowl.



WDFW breeding duck survey results for Western Washington, 2023

Breeding duck surveys in the south Puget Sound, which encompasses District 11, show an increasing trend since 2016 with a slight decline in 2019 (duck surveys not conducted in spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on flights). Prospects for duck hunters remain stable to increasing for 2023.





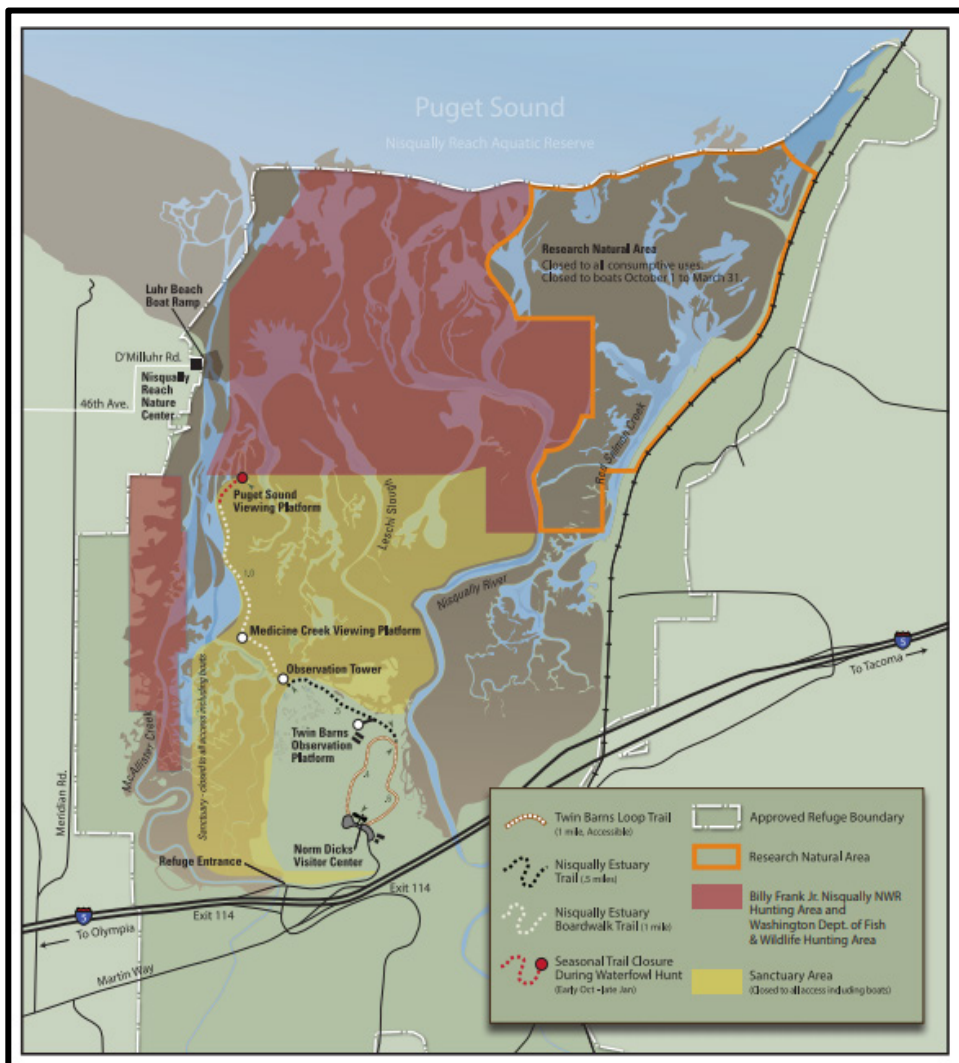
WDFW breeding duck survey, South Puget Sound.

The Washington Duck Breeding Population Survey is the basis for tracking trends in breeding waterfowl and can be read in detail in the annual [WDFW Game Status and Trends reports](#). The revised survey design for western Washington estimated the total breeding duck population at 97,823 (SE 10,318) in 2023. Mallards were the highest for 2023 survey at 59,012 (SE 9,404), followed by green-winged teal at 9383 (SE 2,206), bufflehead at 6,826 (SE 1,402) and wood duck at 5,752 (SE 676). The greatest factor influencing brood production in the district continues to be habitat loss due to development and increasing human disturbance. Wildlife managers expect waterfowl numbers to remain stable in District 11.

## WHERE TO HUNT WATERFOWL IN DISTRICT 11

### **Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge**

One of the best waterfowl hunting areas in District 11 is the [Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge](#), located on the border between Pierce and Thurston counties. The USFWS has 570 acres of refuge waters and tidelands open to waterfowl hunting at Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. This includes an expanded area in 2020 that extends north of and adjacent to the previous hunt area. This provides a total of 1,197 acres of USFWS and WDFW-managed lands within the Refuge



boundary that are open to waterfowl hunting. Hunting access is by boat only. The estuary restoration area (Sanctuary) and Research Natural Area (RNA) remain closed to hunting and boating to provide adequate wildlife sanctuary. Full regulations and the refuge hunting brochure can be downloaded and printed the [Refuge hunting page](#).

[Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge recreation map.](#)

## Centralia Mine

Centralia Mine provides limited entry quality hunting opportunity. This limited hunt is managed as a sign-up on a first come basis. In early September, the mine sends out a notice to all its employees (TransAlta employees) informing them of the date and time the sign-up is opened. Only TransAlta employees are allowed to sign up for the first week the calendar is released, after which the public may sign up for hunting any calendar dates still available. All hunters must sign up in person at the main Centralia Mine security gate shack. Hunting is allowed on Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays that fall within the waterfowl season. Hunters are required to check in at the security gate on their day of hunting. Hunters cannot sign up for others and are limited to two days per person (and towards the end of the season can sign up for additional two days if there are still dates available). Hunters are required to sign a waiver. Hunters are only allowed to hunt on one site located in a hay field immediately east of the mine facilities (see map below). Digging pit blinds is not allowed. Hunters can only hunt waterfowl and not big game. Hunters can send questions to [bill\\_scheer@transalta.com](mailto:bill_scheer@transalta.com).



Centralia Mine waterfowl hunting area map.

## Lakes and Flooded Agricultural Fields

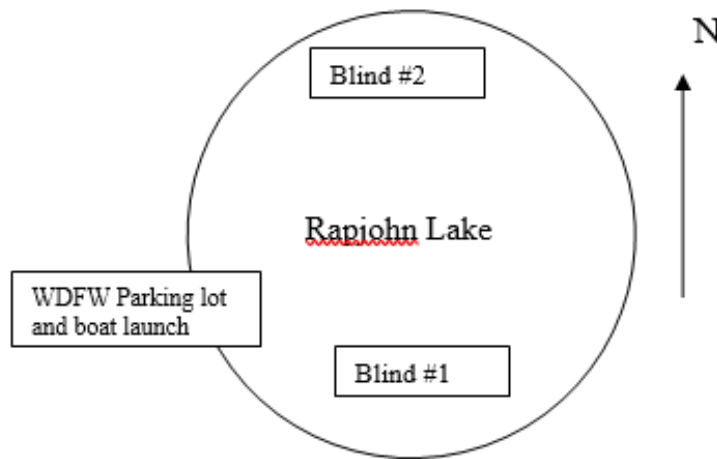
The following lakes and agricultural fields have the highest mid-winter waterfowl counts in District 11 and may be good sites to scout for waterfowl hunters (be advised of those in **firearm restriction areas**—see Introduction section):

Pierce County: American Lake, Lake Bay, Flett Dairy, Hylebos Waterway, Kreger Lake, Lake Chalet, various fields around McKenna, Puyallup Valley ag fields, Spanaway Lake, Steilacoom Lake, Waughop Lake.

Thurston County: Black Lake, Capitol Lake, Case Road at 113th, Evergreen Valley, Lake Lawrence, Long Lake, McIntosh Lake, Pattison Lake, Smith Prairie, Zeller Loop Road.

Puget Sound shorelines: District 11 has abundant marine shorelines both on the mainland and the various islands of the south Puget Sound. The small inlets throughout across those shorelines support high numbers of ducks and seabirds and may be hunted provided they are not within firearm restriction areas.

Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies in the district that are surrounded by housing. Hunters are urged to obey all hunting regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county firearm restriction area (see Introduction). [Rapjohn Lake](#) in Pierce County has a Register to Hunt Program and requires hunters to hunt from two established blinds. Registration for the blinds is on a first come basis and is established by parking in one of the two mandatory parking lots at the WDFW Rapjohn Lake Access Site.

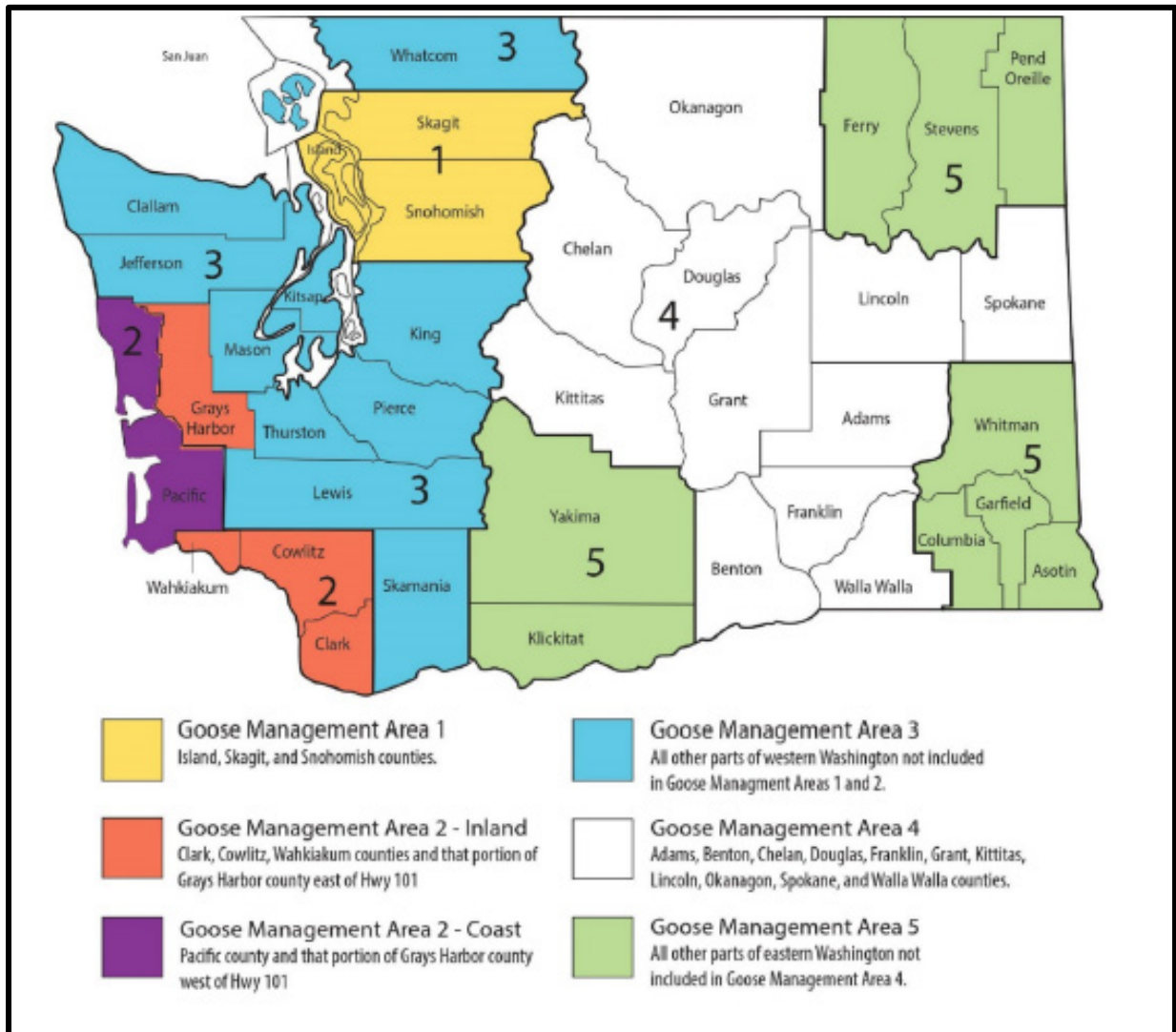


Members of the Washington Waterfowl Association assisting with construction of the Rapjohn Lake duck blinds, 2018.

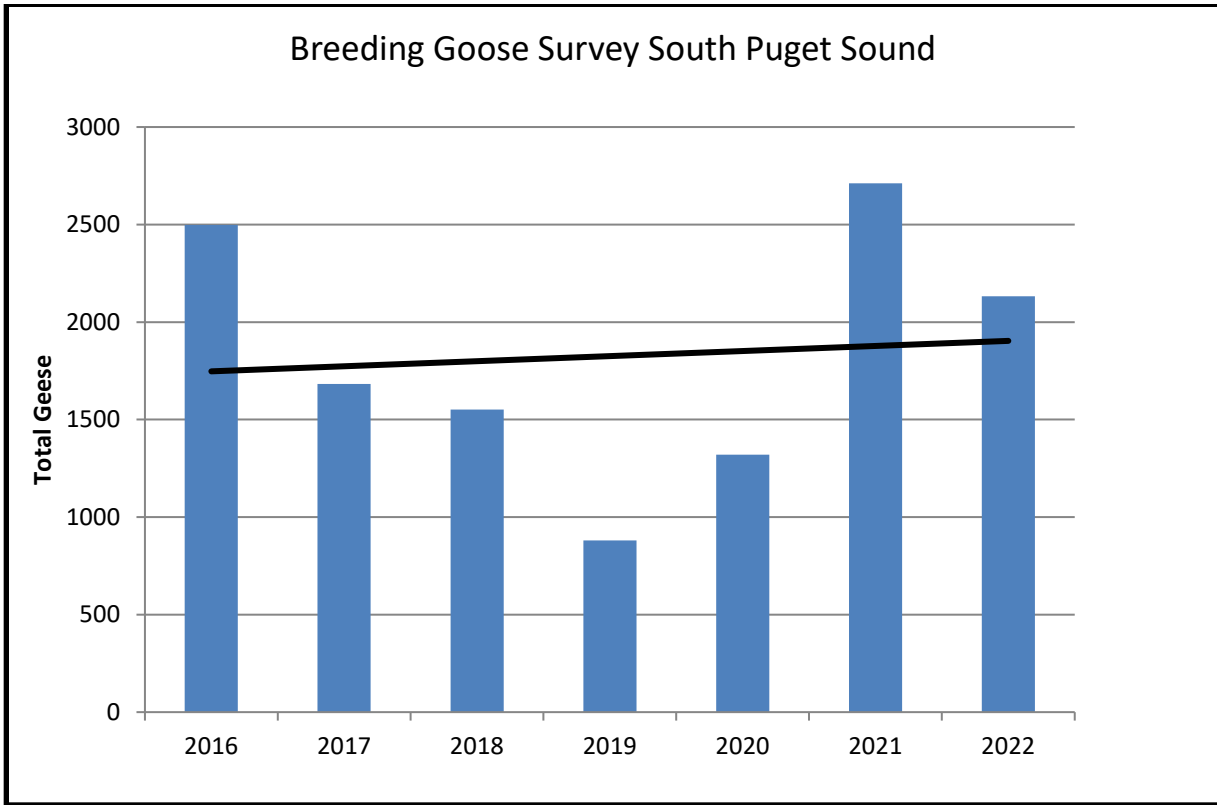


## GEESE

Most goose hunting opportunity in District 11 is for Canada geese. All of District 11 is within the Goose Management Area 3 with an open season Sept. 5-10 with a daily bag limit of 5 and possession limit of 15 Canada geese. Canada Geese are all types of Canada geese including cackling, Taverner's and Aleutian geese. White geese are snow and Ross' geese.

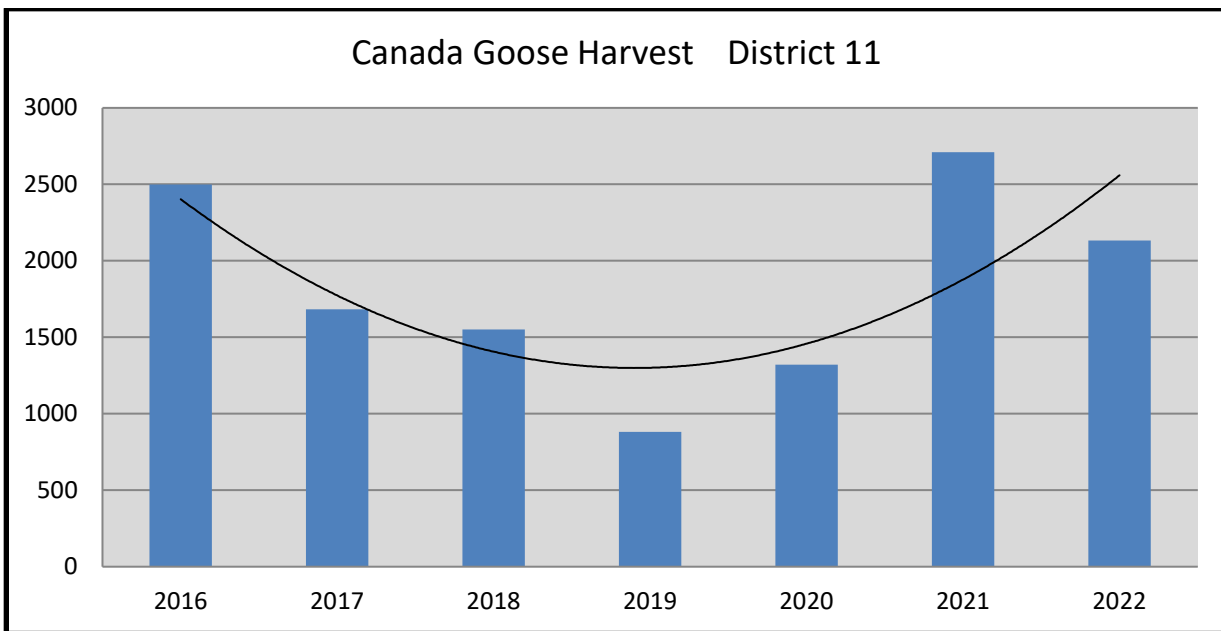


Resident geese are increasing in distribution, especially within urban and rural areas. Goose breeding survey trends have been relatively stable in the South Puget Sound since 2017 with the exception of 2021 (surveys were not conducted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 epidemic). Prospects for goose hunters in District 11 remains stable to slightly better in 2023.



WDFW breeding goose survey South Puget Sound.

Areas reported earlier for good waterfowl hunting include good goose hunting, particularly the inland (e.g., western) agricultural fields of Pierce, Thurston, and Lewis counties. The goose harvest in the District rose sharply in 2021 and remained high in 2022. Prospects remain good in 2023.



Canada goose harvest in District 11.

**SWANS** are protected by federal and state laws and are closed to hunting statewide. WDFW encourages all waterfowl hunters to know all identification features for swans as compared to snow geese.



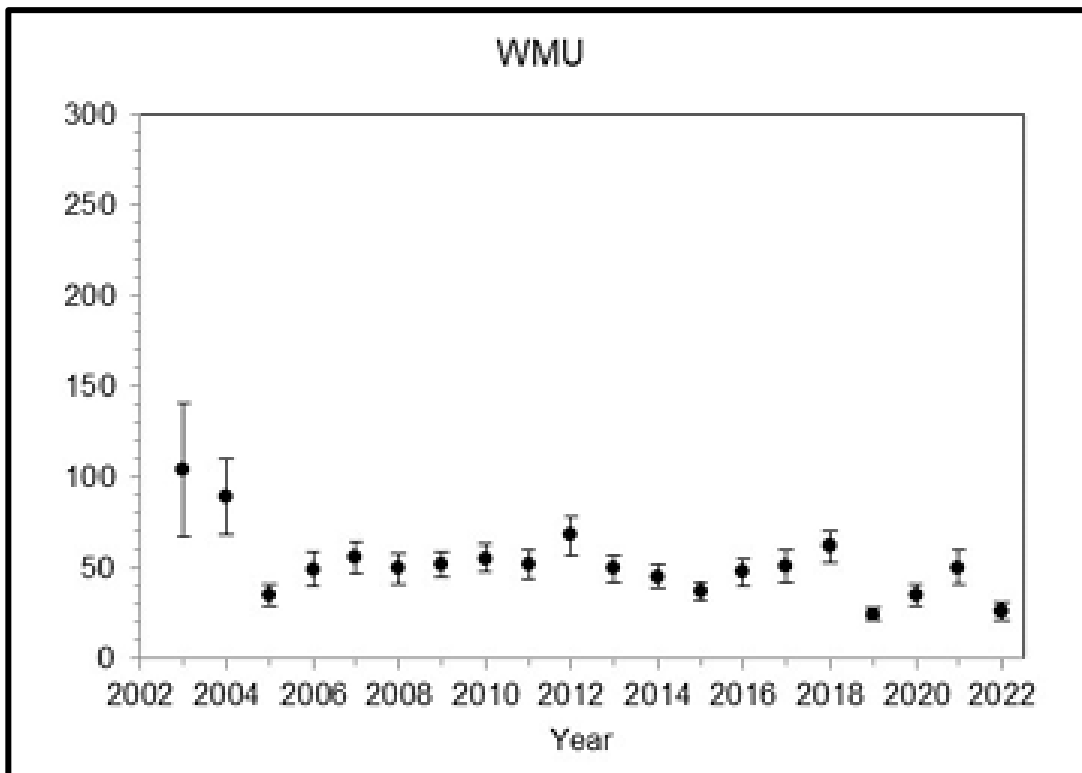
## MOURNING DOVE

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit:

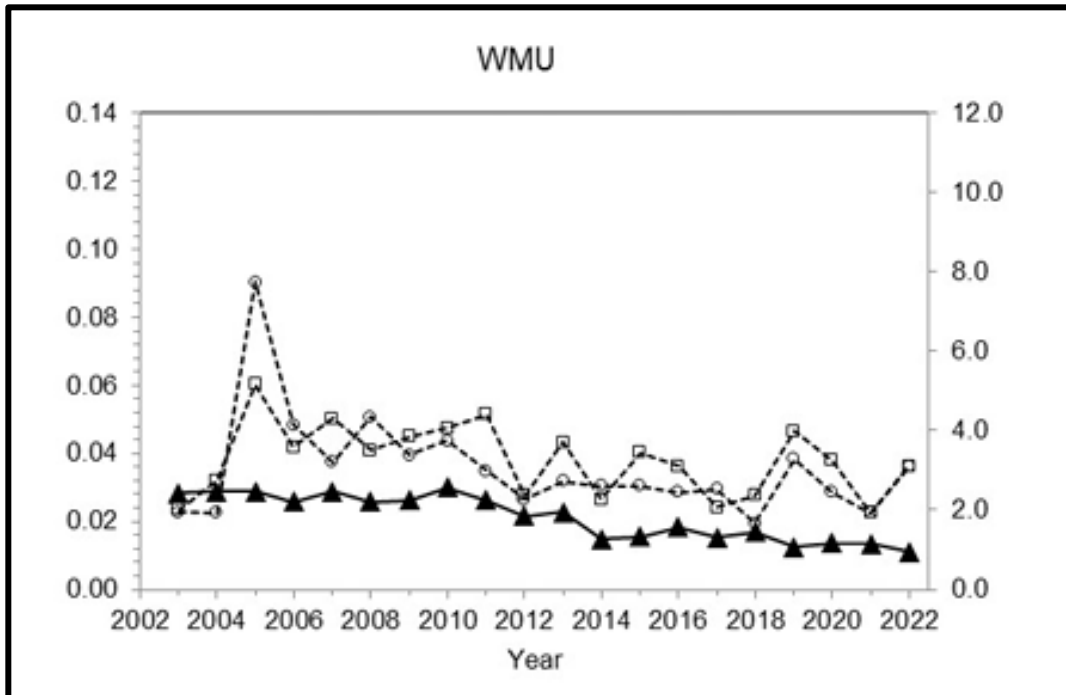
- [Upland Bird Hunting webpage](#)
- [The Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)
- [Where to Go Upland Bird Hunting](#)

WDFW uses the annual USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status Report to analyze trends in mourning dove populations. The report summarizes trends in the number of doves heard and seen per route from the all-bird Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and provides absolute abundance estimates based on band recovery and harvest data. Harvest and hunter participation are estimated from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP).

BBS data suggested that the abundance of mourning doves over the last 57 years decreased in the western management units, which is composed of the seven western states, including Washington, but remained unchanged during the most recent 10 years. Estimates were lowest in 2019 and 2022. The most recent estimates indicate that there were 161 million mourning doves in the U.S. immediately prior to the 2021-22 hunting season. Abundance estimates were highest in the central and eastern U.S. management unit in 2022 and lowest in the western management units.



Estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the western management units combined, 2003–2022. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data.



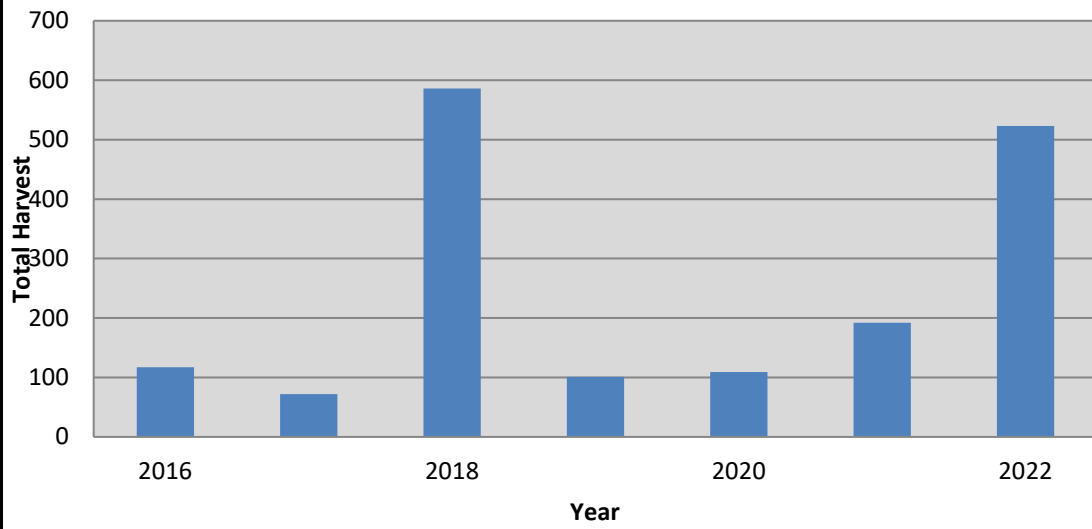
Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove in the western management units combined, 2002–2022. Harvest rates presented separately for hatch-year and after-hatch-year (USFWS 2022).

Approximately  $31,100 \pm 5,000$  mourning doves were harvested by  $3,400 \pm 500$  active hunters in the 2021-22 season in Washington, for an average of  $9.1 \pm 1.9$  doves per hunter according to the USFWS report. This is a slight decrease over 2021-22 estimates. More information on mourning dove and other migratory bird harvest and data collection can be found [here](#).

District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area in Washington, averaging 242 doves harvested per year over the past 7 years (Figure below, WDFW collected harvest data). This includes only Pierce and Thurston counties of District 11 since GMU 667 of Lewis County, which is part of District 11, cannot be separated from the remainder of that county. Mourning dove harvest exponentially increased in 2018 and 2022 in District 11. Lewis and Thurston counties traditionally provide higher harvest in the District, with Pierce County less. Harvest depends greatly on hunter participation, which fluctuates year to year. Using the new WDFW harvest data collection and analysis methodology (see explanation providing previously under Small Game section) the harvest estimates for 2022 were 174, 143, and 111 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties respectively. A total of 81 hunters reported hunting dove in District 11 in 2022 (Lewis County included). The best locations for dove hunting in the District are agricultural areas, especially orchards.



Mourning Dove Harvest  
District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only)



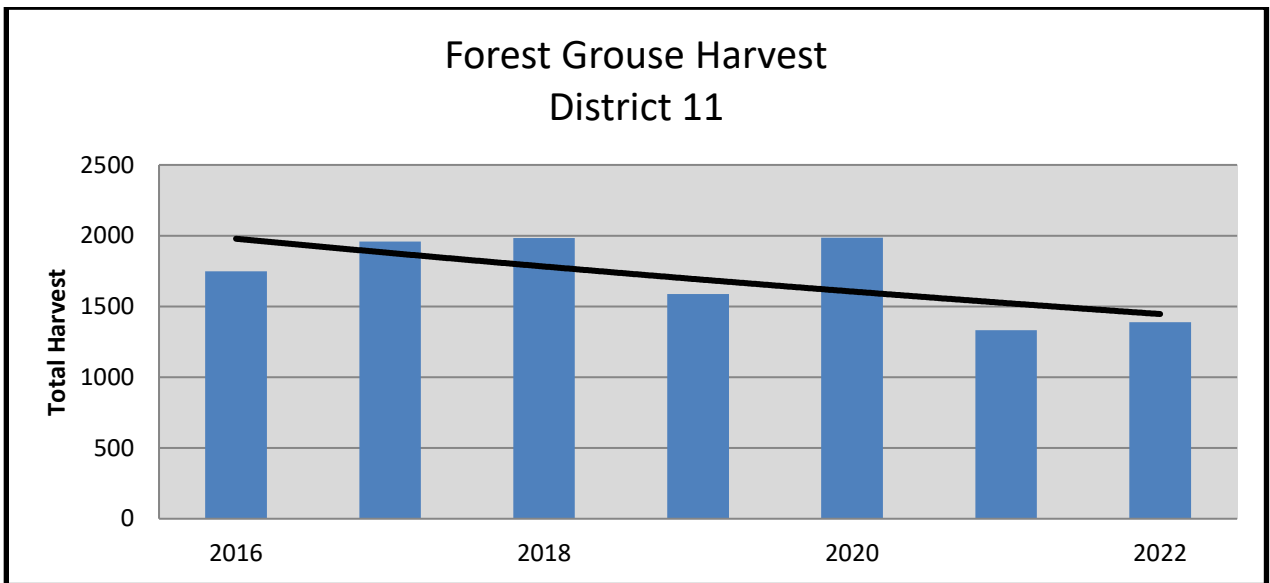
Mourning Dove harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).

## FOREST GROUSE

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit the weblinks listed previously under Mourning Dove.

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails, and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting will be near fruiting shrublands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Forest roads use to support timber harvests are particularly good locations since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. Look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse. Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500', particularly in forest habitats near streams and rivers, young forests (5-25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMU 654), Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 663).

Forest grouse harvest has trended downwards in District 11, primarily caused by declined in harvest in 2019, 2021 and 2022. Harvest has averaged 1,712 grouse annually over the past 7 years in the District. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and then Thurston counties.



Forest grouse harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).

A hunter must buy either a big game license or a small game license to hunt grouse. Grouse hunting is included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs Sept. 15 through Dec. 31, with a daily bag limit of four of any species (to include not more than three of each species) and a possession limit of 12 (to include not more than nine of any one species).

WDFW collects wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse (spruce, ruffed, dusky and sooty species) during the Sept. 1 – Dec. 31 hunting season. The goal of this collection effort is to build estimated population trend datasets for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse harvested into wing collection barrels placed around the state or by bringing them to the closest WDFW district or regional office. Wing and tail collection locations and instructions can be found [here](#). Hunter participation in wing submission declined in District 11 in 2022 versus 2021, the first year of the program (74 total wings vs 57, respectively). The annual analysis and results of wing monitoring can be found in the [WDFW Status and Trends reports](#).



Number of Wing Bags Collected in 2022 at District 11 Barrels					
Barrel Name	Collection Month				
	September*	October	November	December	Total
North Vail	0	29	9	1	39
Skookumchuck	0	0	1	0	1
West Vail	0	10	6	1	17
<b>Total</b>	0	39	16	2	57

\*First Check Occurred October 4th

## PHEASANT

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining populations of pheasants primarily due to the wet climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting pheasant in western Washington is dependent upon releases of pheasants in the fall. District 11 is fortunate to contain three of the 24 pheasant release sites in western Washington. For that reason, pheasant hunters continue to have great prospects for harvesting pheasant in this district. In addition, WDFW often releases pheasants into District 11 via the network of collaborators used across the state. The shorter distance means less travel time, stress, and fatigue for the birds prior to release. According to WDFW's pheasant production manager, this equates to more consistency and stronger birds at release, which should improve hunting opportunity for District 11 hunters.



Game farm-produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites, which are described and mapped the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) and the [Upland Bird Hunting](#) websites. The release program uses state (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federal (JBLM) managed lands in District 11.

Note: to protect wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is now required for all upland bird, dove and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant

release sites statewide. Hunters visiting any of these release sites may possess and use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Some of these sites have further restrictions. Reference the [Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) for more information.

The following outlines the pheasant season in western Washington:

<u>Youth only season:</u>	Sept. 16 – 17, 2023
<u>65 or over and disabled:</u>	Sept. 18 – 22, 2023
<u>General Season:</u>	Sept. 23 – 30, 2023 (last pheasants released on Thanksgiving morning)
<u>Extended Season:</u>	Dec. 1-15 includes both Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck wildlife areas (no pheasants released)

Western Washington pheasant hunters must choose to hunt only on odd-numbered or even-numbered weekend days from 8 - 10 a.m. at all units of Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek Wildlife Areas with a daily bag limit of two (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). Hunters must indicate their choice of odd-numbered or even-numbered weekend days on the Western Washington Pheasant Permit by choosing "odd" or "even." Hunters who select the three-day option, hunters possessing a valid disabled hunter permit, hunters 65 years of age or older, and youth hunters may hunt in the morning on both odd-numbered and even-numbered weekend days.

Youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult 18 years of age or older, and the adult must have an appropriately marked pheasant permit if hunting. An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at the Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek wildlife areas and JBLM release sites from December 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as the general season. Pheasants are **not** released as part of the extended season. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. Additional information on hunting pheasants can be found on the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program website noted above.

Pheasant release in western Washington will be similar to last year, with an estimated 37,000 pheasants to be released at 24 pheasant release areas in 2023 compared to 35,741 in 2022. Be aware that total production could still be affected by seasonal temperature fluctuations and other mortalities in 2023 and these are estimates only. Approximately 1,800 pheasants (5% of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays beginning Sept. 16 through Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 3,600 pheasants (10% of total production) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 120-135 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays.

WDFW pays close attention to balancing management of [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#) and the recovery of [state and federally listed species](#) on WDFW-managed lands while simultaneously maintaining and maximizing recreational access and opportunity. This is particularly true where remnant native prairie remains on WDFW wildlife areas in the South Puget Sound including on Scatter Creek Wildlife Area where some areas are off limits to hunters so, please **obey all posted signs**. The same balance of needs is a goal on the federally managed JBLM remnant prairies. While WDFW and JBLM have been able to keep lands open for pheasant hunting, some areas must be closed to access or seasonally or permanently to allow for species and habitat recovery. This will remain in place and may increase as funds coming into the Agency allow for further recovery efforts.

Approximately 3,800 pheasants (10% of total production compared) will be released on JBLM training areas as those areas become available. Military training and listed species management dictates which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. There were 4,782 pheasants released on JBLM during the 2022 season. The Department anticipates the same number or slightly higher to be released in 2023 but it will depend on military, recreation, and environmental scheduling. There are special access processes in place for JBLM including:

**NOTICE: JBLM has changed its recreational access management system in 2023.** Starting this year, JBLM will be implementing a computer and smartphone-based platform called iSportsman. Read here the details [iSportsman coming to JBLM | Article | The United States Army](#) and [here](#).



### **JBLM PHEASANT RELEASE**

Pheasant release site hunting at JBLM will consist of a morning hunt (8–11 a.m.) and an afternoon hunt (1–4 p.m.). Wednesday, federal holiday, Thanksgiving Day through the following weekend, areas are a single release all-day hunt. Reservations for pheasant hunts will start in the morning on the day before the hunt on a first-come, first-served basis. WDFW reminds pheasant hunters to wear minimum of 400 square inches of blaze orange visible front and back. Parking – All individuals MUST park by designated sign-in board. Parking in any other areas is prohibited. On residual non-release days, you may park anywhere, but ensure that parking doesn't impede safety or conflict with other hunters. Pheasant release sites, and a listing of areas open for both pheasant and waterfowl hunting can be found at iSportsman site.

### **JBLM YOUTH AND SENIOR ONLY PHEASANT HUNT**

Youth Hunt (Under 16 years old); Senior Hunt (65 years and older): Check Washington state regulations for September dates for junior and senior hunts. A state hunting license will be required, and successful completion of the Washington Hunters Education Program is required. Youth must be accompanied by an adult (at least 18 years or older). Volunteers will be assigned to assist all youth and hunting dogs will be available. Normal sign-up/reservations are required as well as a JBLM Lewis registration permit. A special pheasant area will be set aside for senior hunters, 65 years and older, in accordance with state regulations. This senior area will be made available only if enough sites are available to the public.

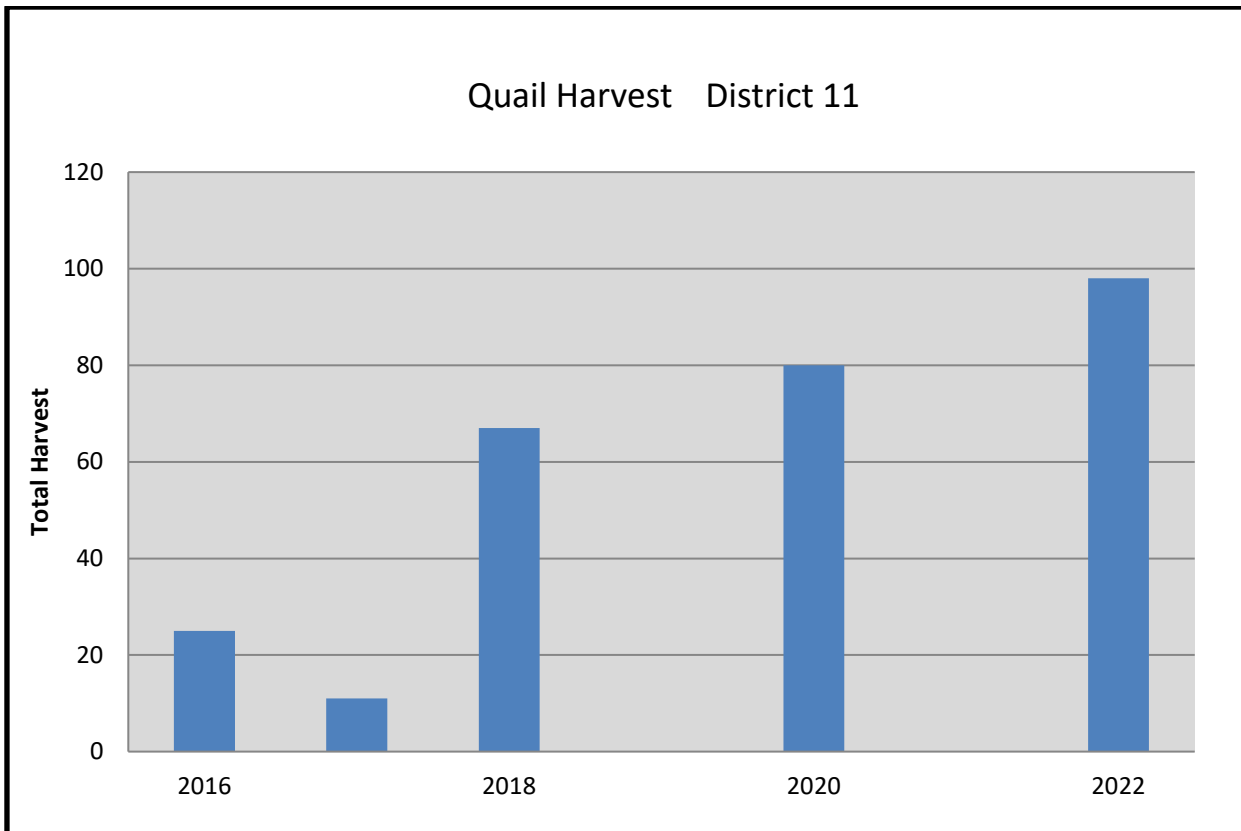
Youth pheasant hunt dates will be identified in accordance with state regulation. All youth who qualify must also register as all other hunters with iSportsman. Youth hunters may sign up for the hunt 14 days before the scheduled event. Call the Northwest Adventure Center with questions (253-967-5200). Pheasant hunters are not allowed to enter their hunting area prior to one hour before start time of a.m. or p.m. hunt. Pheasant hunters must sign in and out by the posted official time.

## QUAIL

For information on hunting quail in general, please visit WDFW's [Quail Hunting](#) web page.

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit the websites listed previously under Mourning Dove.

Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 fluctuates annually dependent on the number of hunters participating often reaching zero (as occurred in 2019 and 2021). As example, only eight hunters hunted quail in the district in 2017 and the harvest reflects that effort. Regardless, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in western Washington where hunters hunt quail. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of the Key Peninsula, Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. Where private property access is limited, seek out state (WWDNR) and county forestland. The western Washington California (valley) quail season runs end of September through end of November, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs the same season with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four.

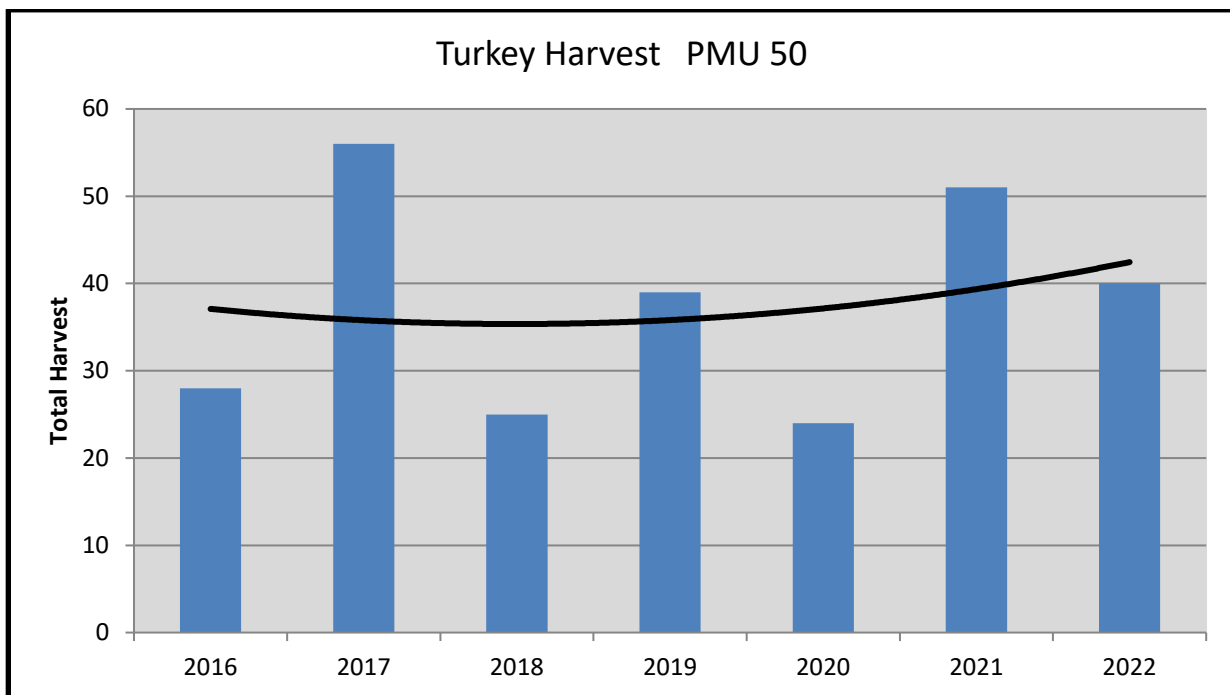


## TURKEYS

Information on hunting turkey in general can be found in the [2022-23 Washington Game Bird Hunting Regulations](#) and WDFW's [Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) booklet.

Turkey are rare, dispersed in District 11 and are not managed specifically for hunt opportunity in this district. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern sub-species of wild turkey in the district and harvest reflects hunter participation year to year. Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Unit 50, within which District 11 lies, has fluctuated since 2016 averaging 38 turkeys harvested annually over the past 7 years.

WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula, Pierce County; Rochester, Grand Mound, and Tenino, Thurston County; and along the Johnson Creek Corridor, Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. Annually, most of the turkey harvest occurs in the Skookumchuck Unit (GMU 667), followed by a few in Deschutes (GMU 666) and Puyallup (GMU 652).



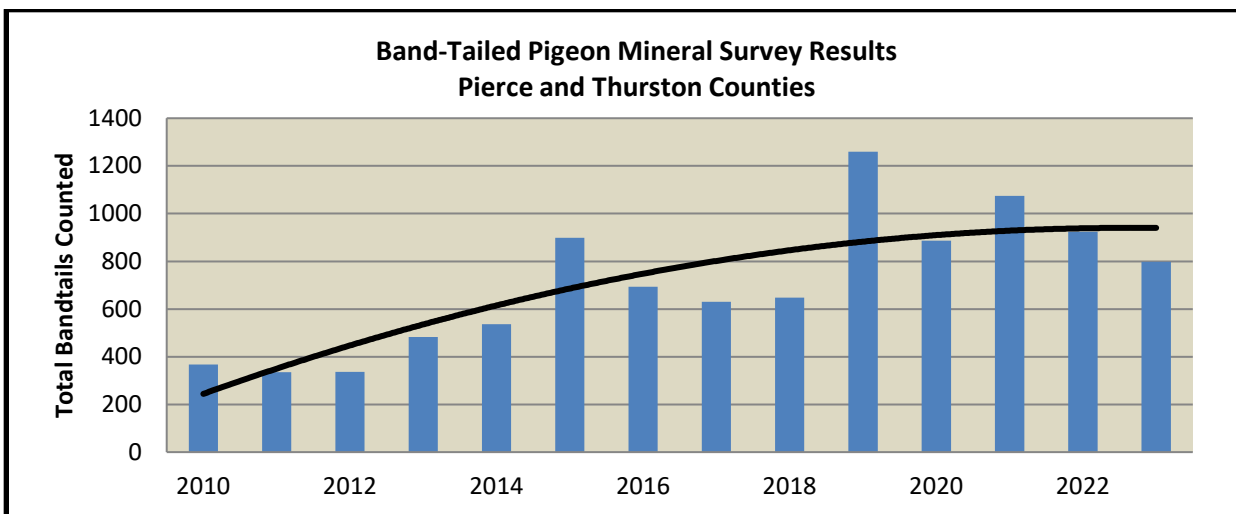
Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Management Unit 50, which includes District 11.

## BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

For additional information regarding upland bird hunting in general, please visit WDFW's [Upland bird hunting](#) page, the [Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#) booklet, and [Where to go upland bird hunting](#) page.

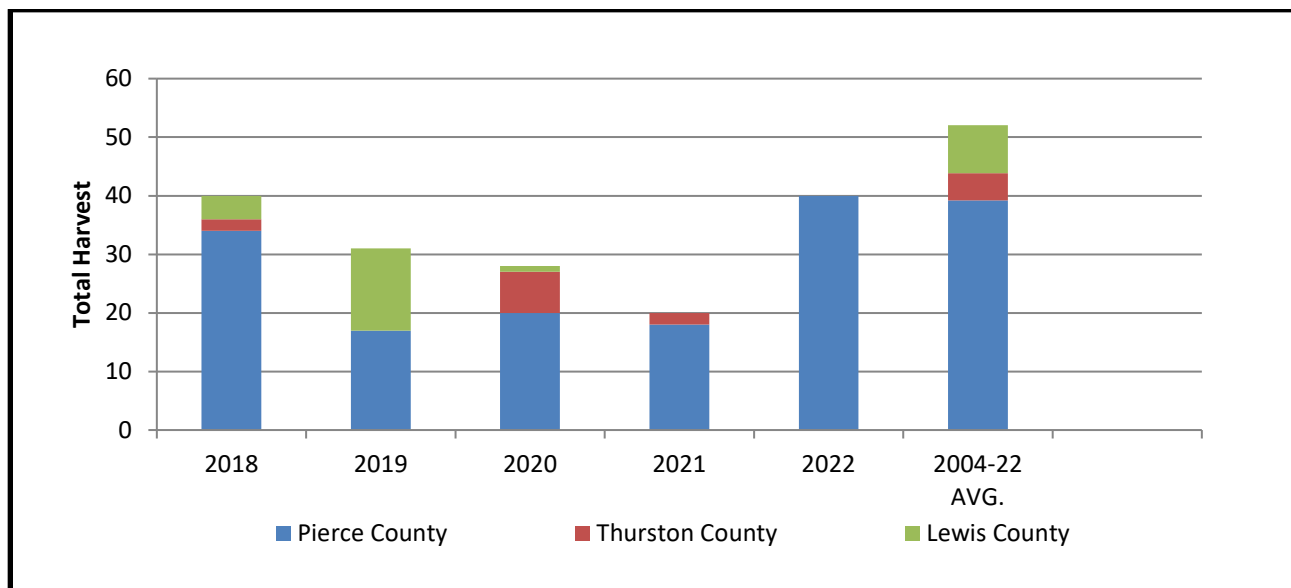
Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they feed mainly on berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits. Band-tailed pigeons frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in 5-to-10-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests used by band-tails is hard to predict. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites. Upon finding a good site, sit patiently and wait for pass shooting opportunities to occur. Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season. **Please contact WDFW if you know the location of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Pierce, Thurston, or Lewis counties.**

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at the 16 mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities. Band-tailed pigeon estimates based on mineral site surveys have been trending upwards in District 11 since 2015 and have been significantly higher since 2019. Prospect for harvesting bandtails in District 11 in 2023 remain good.

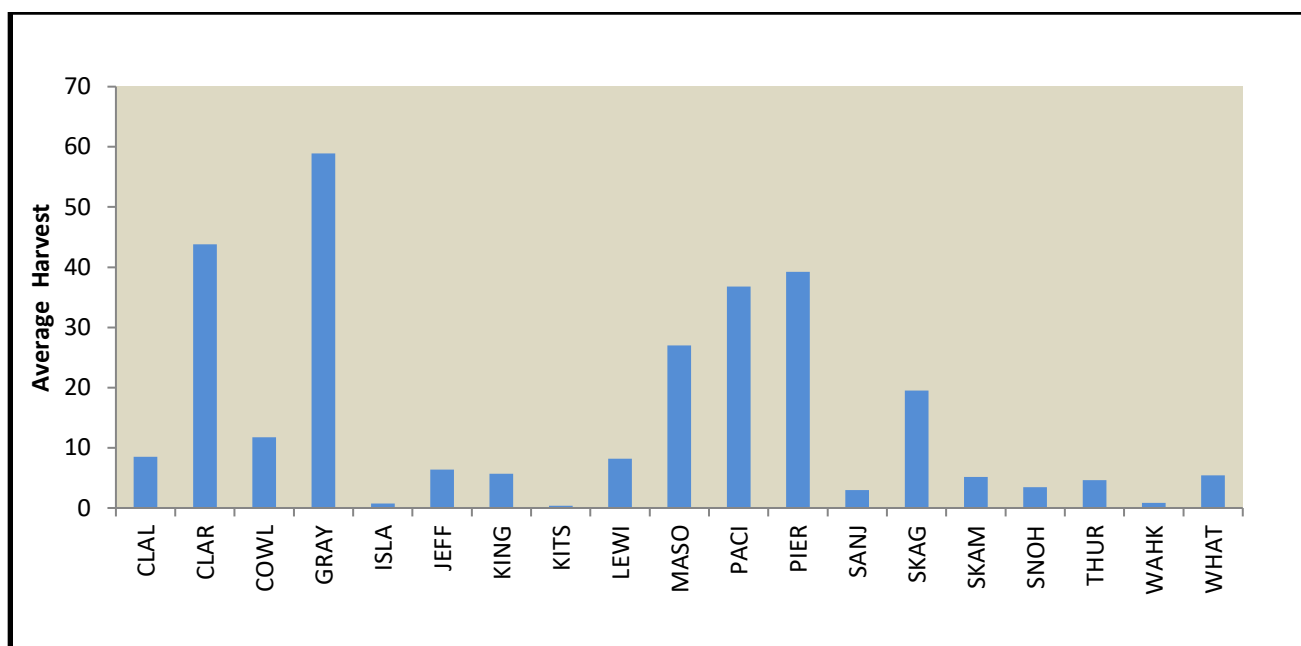


Annual band-tailed pigeon mineral site survey results, Pierce and Thurston counties only of District 11.

Pierce County is usually in the top 6 counties in the state in terms of total bandtail harvest and thus prospects for hunting band-tailed pigeons in the district are good. Pierce County harvest is traditionally much higher than Lewis or Thurston counties. The best hunting locations for band-tailed pigeons in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston county boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines of District 11.



Band-tailed pigeon harvest comparison by county for District 11.



Average annual band-tailed pigeon harvest for each Washington county over the years 2004-2022.



## **SPECIAL REGULATIONS**

Since band-tail seasons were re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization. Harvest must be submitted using harvest cards submitted to WDFW after the season has closed. Hunters should review the 2023 Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

## **RESEARCH**

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of District 16 and 17. WDFW fitted a total of 11 birds with transmitters that it programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.

The goal of this project is to conduct research on band-tailed pigeons in areas without identified mineral sites that could allow WDFW to fulfill the following objectives; 1) Identify new mineral sites to allow the agency to more accurately index our statewide population via Mineral site surveys 2) more expertly manage our band-tailed pigeons harvest seasons to potentially allow an expanded hunting opportunity, 3) provide detailed information on resource selection to inform how to manage habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research project has led to the discovery of a new mineral site location in Grays Harbor County. Hunters and members of the public are funding this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. The existing project is expected to continue through the year 2025 across various districts within Region 6.