

2023



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

CHRIS ANDERSON, District Biologist
MIKE SMITH, Assistant District Biologist



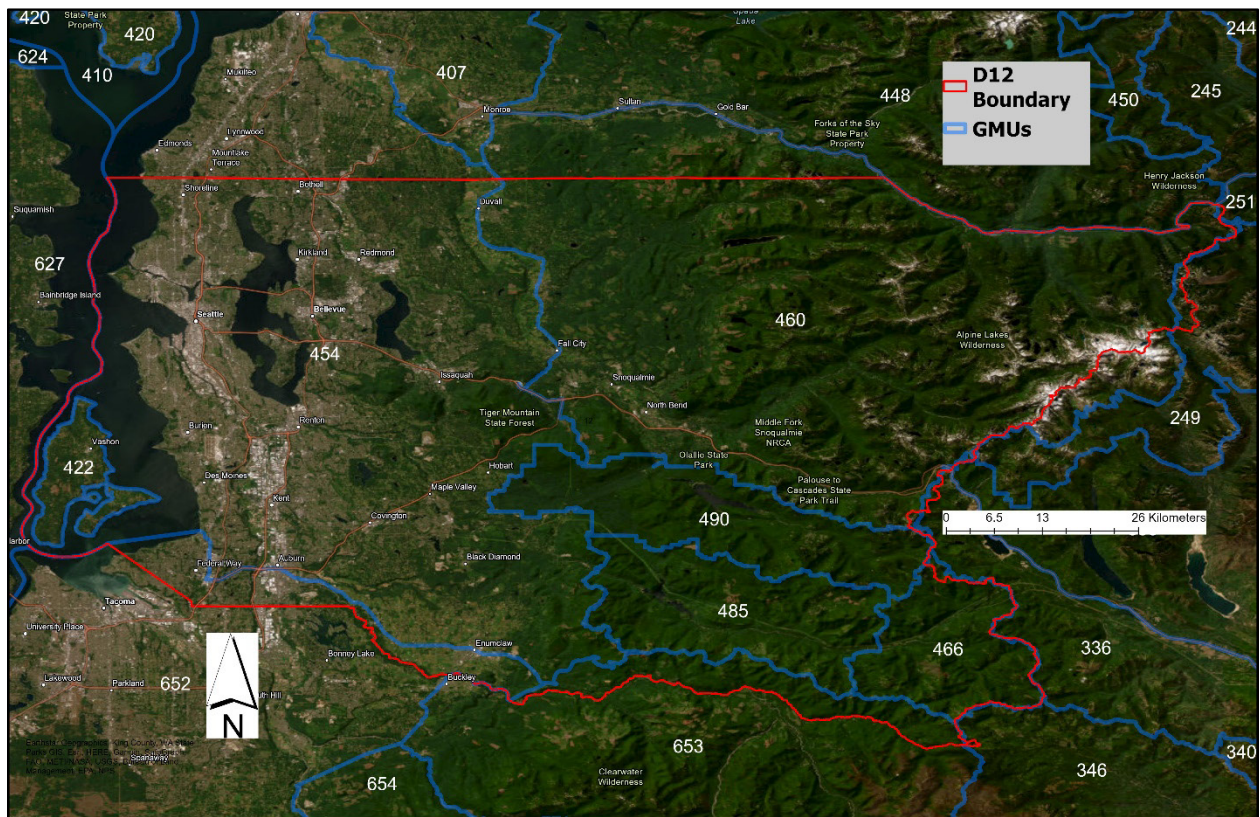
DISTRICT 12 HUNTING PROSPECTS

King County

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DISTRICT 12 GENERAL OVERVIEW



District 12 is comprised of six game management units (GMUs), including 422 (Vashon/Maury Islands), 454 (Issaquah), 460 (Snoqualmie), 466 (Stampede), 485 (Green River, open to appropriate deer and elk permit holders only), and 490 (Cedar River, currently closed to state hunters). Land ownership in the district is a checkerboard of private, state, and federal properties. The densest private (urban and suburban) developments are found in the Issaquah Unit (GMU 454), while private agricultural properties are primarily located in the northwestern part of the Snoqualmie Unit (GMU 460).

A great tool for determining property ownership and boundaries can be found using King County [iMap](#). We also suggest the [WDFW Hunt Planner webmap](#).

Tacoma and Seattle each own and operate municipal watersheds in southeast King County, totaling about 250,532 acres that supply drinking water for their cities. One is in the Green River drainage (GMU 485), one is in the Tolt River drainage (a portion of GMU 460), and the other is in the Cedar River drainage (GMU 490).

The largest huntable area is U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land, but industrial timber companies also have large properties in the area. Private, state, and federally owned lands are managed primarily to produce timber. USFS lands are managed for multiple uses, including timber, recreation, and wildlife, with a current emphasis on growing and managing old-growth forests.

Lands across District 12 are especially popular for a variety of year-round recreation activities. Always respect safety corridors and [No Shooting Areas](#). Remember to be a good hunting and outdoor steward. Be courteous and respectful of others to support quality experiences for everyone. Hunt in a manner that seeks to avoid negative interactions with other users whenever possible, such as avoiding busy trails and hunting during early morning hours. Please pick up after yourself and don't leave a gut pile out in the open – cover, bury, or hike it out and dispose of it properly. For the benefit of all fish and wildlife, strongly consider utilizing copper or non-toxic ammunition even in locations and for game species where it is not required. Similarly, shotgun shells with biodegradable wads are becoming more available and are less harmful to the environment.

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [WDFW](#) and [DNR](#) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

ELK

Hunters should place greater emphasis on riparian forest habitats and agricultural areas throughout the district, as well as public lands adjacent to such areas. Many of District 12 elk reside on private land, so make sure you have permission before you hunt.

Game Management Unit (GMU) 460 (Snoqualmie) provides good hunting opportunities in areas of the unit. Hunters are advised to scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated with restricted access. Many elk in the GMU are found (at least at times) on private property in valley bottoms (refer to Elk Area 4601 below), and elk density is much lower in the mountainous eastern portion of the unit. Hunters should network well in advance to gain access to hunt private properties. Please be mindful of residences, domestic animals (pets/livestock), and other non-target objects downrange when hunting these areas. Hunters should plan for safe shooting lanes. A map of [King County no shooting areas](#) is available online and a description of firearm restriction areas can be found on page 90 of the [hunting regulations pamphlet](#).

Elk Area 4601 is almost entirely comprised of private property and may hold half the elk in the Snoqualmie Unit. Elk Area 4601 was formed in 2009 and antlerless opportunity was added during permit seasons to help reduce the elk population in and around North Bend and Snoqualmie. Since 2014, general season archery and muzzleloader hunts in Elk Area 4601 have included opportunity for antlerless harvest as well. Antlerless opportunity was added to modern firearm in 2021 to allow property owners (and those with permission) to harvest without the need for special permits. In the interest of safety in this area, hunters are strongly encouraged to consider using muzzleloader or archery equipment during the modern firearm season.

Elk in GMU 454 (Issaquah) continue to be managed with liberal seasons designed to reduce vehicle/elk collisions and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly developed areas. Much of this unit is in private property. Pre-season planning and networking may be most important for hunters trying to gain access in this unit. Hunters should also be mindful of safety concerns and firearm restrictions in this unit. Bowhunters should have an advantage in gaining permission.

GMU 466 (Stampede) is a mix of private, state, and USFS lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). There are some old-growth stands on USFS lands, with second-growth timber dominating much of the unit. While elk are sometimes present here at higher densities than other mountainous areas in District 12, providing the chance for exceptional experiences, hunters should be prepared for up to a 2,500-foot elevation change and steep terrain in this unit. Though many forest roads exist, road conditions and access vary considerably. Early snowfall in the unit has the potential to strand hunters, but also the potential to aid in success.

GMU 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled-access portion of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Elk are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2023 season, ten (10) any bull, five (5) antlerless, and two (2) youth antlerless elk tags are available for hunters through the draw system.



Figure 1. Elk in GMU 460 – Photo by Chris Anderson



Figure 2. Group of elk in King County – Photo by Mike Smith

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online on [WDFW's harvest report webpage](#).

Elk Hoof Disease (Treponeme bacteria)

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 the North Rainier elk herd range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which 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 and Wahkiakum counties, and western Lewis County. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including the North Rainier elk herd area.

All of District 12 is within the North Rainier elk herd range. WDFW has received sporadic reports of limping elk throughout District 12 for several years. However, the presence of TAHD has only been confirmed within District 12 from elk sampled in GMUs 454 and 485.

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

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

How hunters can help:

WDFW is implementing an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest elk with hoof disease (TAHD), thereby potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The program has two complimentary but independent components:

- WDFW is offering an incentive permit opportunity to hunters that harvest a diseased elk during general or special permit seasons. Hunters can participate in the program by submitting the hooves from their elk harvest at one of many drop-off locations. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (i.e., abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit. The incentive special permits will include multiple bull permits in western Washington. The season dates will be Sep. 1-Dec. 31 and the incentive permit draw will be held prior to the special permit application deadline. All participating hunters will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.
- Additionally, WDFW is offering special permits under the Master Hunter permit category that are intended to target diseased elk. These permits are offered as a second elk opportunity for antlerless elk using any weapon type (except during overlapping general seasons where they are restricted to the general season weapon type) and are not restricted to private land. Under this permit, Master Hunters must submit all four hooves from their harvest to WDFW for inspection. Elk harvested by Master Hunters under this permit cannot be submitted through the incentive program described above because selection for this permit is itself an incentive.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit [WDFW's webpage](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet or on the [WDFW webpage](#).

DEER

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has not conducted black-tailed deer population surveys for several years throughout District 12. However, anecdotal observations and annual harvest statistics indicate hunting prospects can be quite good where hunting is allowed on private and public lands.

Game Management Unit (GMU) 422 covers all of Vashon and Maury islands. Hunting access on Vashon and Maury islands is mostly on private agricultural and hobby farm properties. King County's [Island Center Forest](#) may open to public hunting pending county decision-making; please contact the county for details. Hunters must take time to network with communities and property owners for opportunity and access. More opportunities (incorporated in recent years) will continue in the second deer special permit category for GMU 422. Please refer to the current [Big Game pamphlet](#) for updated listings of these opportunities.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife continues to manage deer in Game Management Unit (GMU) 454 (Issaquah) with liberal seasons designed to reduce vehicle/deer collisions and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly developed areas. More opportunities were recently added in the second deer special permit category for GMU 454 with the addition of Deer Area 4541 (North Issaquah). Please refer to the current [Big Game pamphlet](#) for updated listings of these opportunities. This unit (and corresponding deer area) is about 90% private land and hunters continue to have a problem with access. Success in this unit may well depend on getting to know your neighbors and raising the subject of hunting as a means of protecting their fruit trees and vegetables. Firearm restrictions are in place because landowners are concerned about safety. Bowhunters should have an advantage in getting permission.



Figure 3. A black-tailed deer buck in GMU 454, damaging landscape plantings

Game Management Unit 460 (Snoqualmie) has good hunting opportunities throughout most of the unit. However, hunters should scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated with restricted access. Forest management on these lands is favorable to deer and high-quality opportunities are available. Hunters should focus on early seral forests (less than 30 years old) next to mid (40-80 years old) or late-successional (greater than 80 years old) stands. Hunters should focus on riparian forest habitats that supply ample forage and cover. Backcountry hunting opportunities also exist in the eastern portion of the unit, including the High Buck Hunt within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Hunters here should be mindful of very high recreational presence. By reviewing maps and scouting, quality alpine experiences can still be found, especially in smaller basins not accessed by major trails.



Figure 4. Deer in King County – Photo by Chris Anderson

Game Management Unit 466 (Stampede) is a patchwork of private, state, and U.S. Forest Service lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). It consists of second-growth timber, with some old growth on U.S. Forest Service lands. This unit has a lot of steep ground, with about 2,500 feet in elevation change. Though many forest roads exist, road conditions and access vary considerably. Be prepared for early winter snowfall, which has the potential of stranding hunters, but also the potential to improve success.

Game Management Unit 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled access area of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Deer are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2023 season, five any buck tags in the Quality category, three any buck tags in the Youth category, and two any buck tags in the Hunters with Disabilities category are available for state hunters through the draw system.

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found on WDFW's [Deer Harvest Reports](#) webpage.

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020. AHD was then found on Orcas and San Juan Islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart islands. In the fall of 2021, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife confirmed AHD on Whidbey Island. However, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has NOT detected AHD in District 12 at this time.

AHD is caused by a viral infection and is transmitted by direct contact between deer, either through bodily fluids or possibly airborne routes. This makes it more likely for the virus to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people – from contact or by consuming the meat. However, the use of disposable gloves is always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should use discretion before harvesting deer in AHD-impacted areas to avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer. AHD symptoms include rapid or open mouth breathing, foaming or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation. Should hunters in District 12 encounter live or dead deer with signs of AHD, please report them through the [Department's online reporting form](#). More information on AHD is available at [WDFW's Wildlife Diseases webpage](#).

BEAR

For management purposes, the state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMU). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions. Portions of three BBMUs are within District 12. GMU 454 is in BBMU 2, GMU 460 is in BBMU 3 and GMUs 466 and 485 are in BBMU 4.

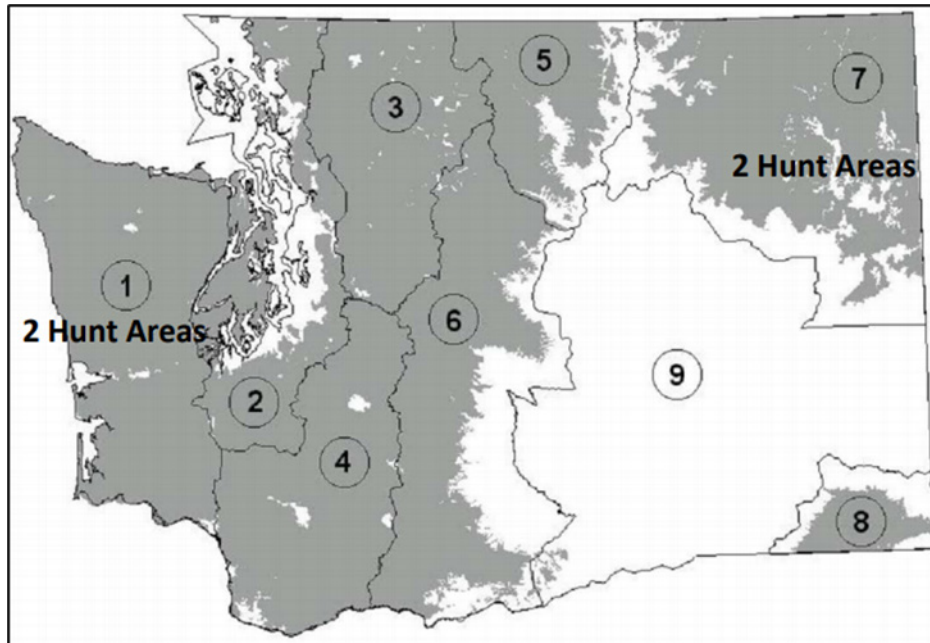


Figure 5. Black bear management units (BBMU) in Washington.

ALL successful bear hunters must submit the first premolar tooth from their harvest within five days of harvest, or by December 1, 2023. Teeth should be sent using WDFW's pre-paid and self-addressed mortality envelope which can be obtained at any [WDFW regional office](#).

Prior to shooting, hunters are encouraged to observe bears for a time sufficient to determine they are not accompanied by dependent cubs that may be following behind.

Black bears inhabit much of District 12, but like elk, many are on private lands. Hunters should ensure they have permission to hunt where they're interested. Bears are often at lower elevations early on, including riparian areas, before they move higher as the season progresses, which can offer opportunities for hunters on public lands. Berry production has been good in the district this season. Scouting to locate berry patches and recent bear signs, then returning to monitor these areas during cooler morning and evening hours when bears are more active can be effective.



Figure 6. A black bear in King County – Photo by Chris Anderson

Hunters in District 12 harvested 82 bears during the fall season in 2022. Thirteen percent (n=27) of hunters in GMU 454, 11% (n=39) in GMU 460, 11 % (n=12) in GMU 466 and 13% (n=4) in GMU 485 reported harvesting a bear. Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics can be found online at [Bear Harvest Reports](#).

COUGAR

The harvest guideline for GMU 460 is four to six cougars. For GMUs 466, 485, and 490 the guideline is two to three animals (GMU 485 is only open to deer or elk special permit holders and GMU 490 is closed to state hunting). There is no guideline for GMU 454. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Director may close the late cougar hunting season on or after Jan. 1 in either of these units if the cougar harvest meets or exceeds the guideline. Starting Jan. 1, hunters may hunt cougar until the area harvest guideline is reached, or April 30, whichever occurs first. Each cougar hunter must verify if the cougar late hunting season is open or closed in areas with a harvest guideline. Cougar hunters can verify if the season is open or closed by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline at 1-866-364-4868 or visiting [WDFW's website](#). The hotline and website will be updated weekly beginning Jan. 1, 2023. Hunters must have a 2024-25 cougar license and tag to hunt cougar in April 2024.

PHEASANT

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will release game farm pheasants this fall on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. Site maps are available in the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Pamphlet](#). Hunters must use the non-toxic shot on all pheasant release sites.

Hunting hours for pheasant in Western Washington are from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. This includes the Stillwater, Cherry Valley, and Crescent Lake units of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. For the rest of the hunting season, normal hunting hours (a half-hour before sunrise to half-hour after sunset) will apply.

QUAIL

There are few quail in District 12.

FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (blue) grouse are found throughout the public and private forests of District 12. Forest management in much of District 12 is still favorable for grouse. Hunters looking to harvest ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, early seral forests (5-30 years old) with ample berry crops in the understory, and riparian forest habitats. Sooty grouse hunters can expect the greatest success along trails and ridgelines above 2,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands with abundant huckleberries.

Adult female and juvenile grouse are especially vulnerable during early September. Beginning in 2021, grouse seasons have been adjusted to limit harvest of these individuals. More information [is available in this blog post](#). The season will be open Sep. 15, 2023, through Jan. 15, 2024.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) collects wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse (spruce, ruffed, dusky, and sooty species) during the hunting season. The goal of this collection effort is to build estimated population trend datasets for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Other factors will also be evaluated, including wildfire and weather patterns that may contribute to changes in harvest and overall populations at the species level.

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. Visit the WDFW [forest grouse collection webpage](#) for more information and collection barrel locations.



Figure 7. A male sooty grouse displaying on the Snoqualmie Tree Farm, GMU 460 – Photo by Chris Anderson

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE

Although not a managed game species, Eurasian collared doves (an exotic species) are now in District 12. People can hunt Eurasian collared doves year-round with a big or small game license. The best way to hunt them is to seek landowner permission in lowland agricultural areas that have a barnyard setting where birds roost in trees but go to the ground to feed. Hunters should be sure they are hunting in compliance with any firearm restrictions and a manner compatible with existing infrastructure (buildings, farm equipment, or power lines).

TURKEY

Wild turkeys are rare in District 12, without predictable concentrations of birds. Harvest prospects are low even with considerable effort. Hunters must use #4 shot or smaller to hunt turkey.

WATERFOWL



Figure 8. Northern pintail in GMU 454 – Photo by Mike Smith

Harvest opportunities should be good, dependent on weather conditions through the season. The best waterfowl hunting opportunities continue to be in the lower Snoqualmie Valley, with public access on WDFW's Snoqualmie Wildlife Area (Cherry Valley, Stillwater, and Crescent Lake units). Hunters can only enter and hunt units between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. during the pheasant season. More opportunities are in the Kent Valley. Hunters are encouraged to work with local private landowners to get access to one of District 12's many rivers and agricultural valleys and improve their waterfowl hunting success. Refer to the [Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Regulations](#) for season dates and hours.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, visit the webpage, [Let's Go Waterfowl hunting](#).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Firearms restriction areas in King County

Centerfire and rimfire rifles are not legal for hunting west of Highway 203 (Monroe-Fall City), the Fall City-Preston Road to I-90, I-90 to Highway 18, Highway 18 to I-5, and I-5 to Pierce-King County line. They are also not legal for hunting on Vashon and Maury islands. For more information, refer to page 90 of the [2023 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). There aren't many shooting areas in King County per county ordinances. Please contact your local sheriff for specific locations.