

# 2023



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH &  
WILDLIFE**

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## **DISTRICT 3 HUNTING PROSPECTS**

Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla counties

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## BE AWARE OF FIRE CONDITIONS AND ROAD CLOSURES

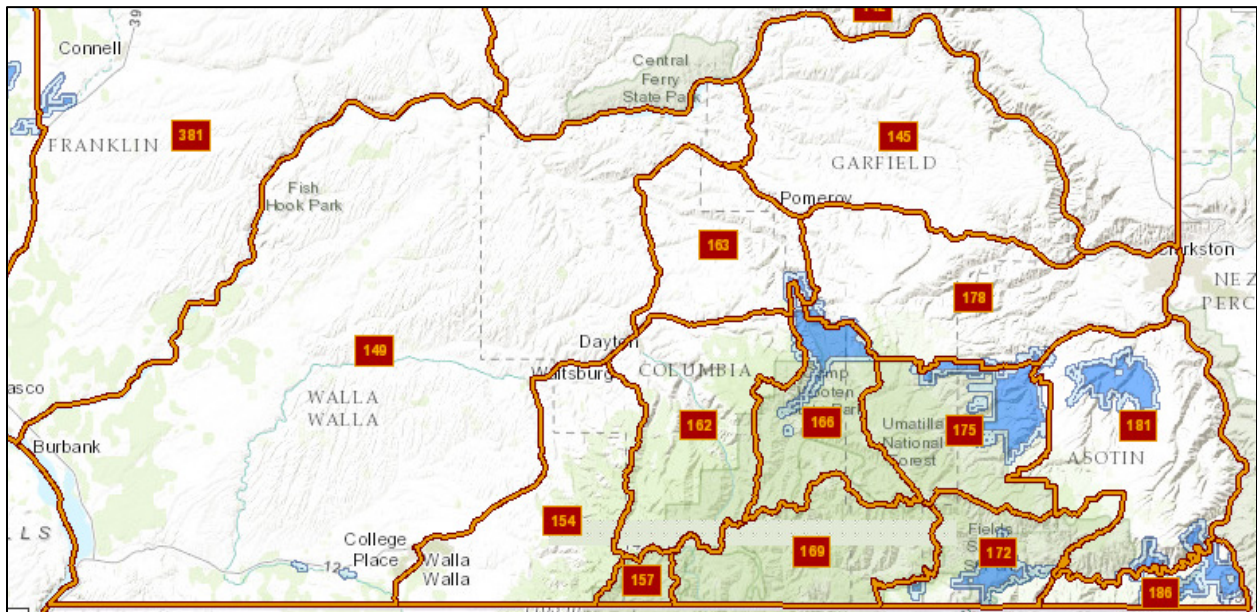
Wherever you choose to hunt, be sure to check on fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. In addition to potential wildfires, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) may be conducting prescribed burns and/or forest-thinning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

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

It is recommended that hunters [check for road closures](#) before going on their hunts.

## DISTRICT 3 GENERAL OVERVIEW

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



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

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





Blue Creek in the western foothills of the Blue Mountains.

District 3 is best known for its elk hunting opportunities in the Blue Mountains and mule deer hunting opportunities in grassland/agricultural GMUs. However, hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including white-tailed deer, black bear, cougar, chukar, turkey, and pheasant. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest and harvest-per-unit effort (HPUE) for most game species in District 3 during the 2022 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2021 season and the five-year averages. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Species	Harvest					HPUE				
	5-yr avg.	2022	2021	% change (5yr)	% change (2021)	5-yr avg.	2022	2021	% change (5yr)	% change (2021)
Elk (General)	104	98	136	-6%	-28%	118	103	68	-13%	51%
Elk (Bull Permit)	66	42	45	-37%	-7%	NA	NA	NA	(Permit success)	
Deer	2232	1567	1811	-30%	13%	15.4	19.2	17.7	24%	9%
Bear	112	187	74	67%	152%	Not estimated				
Cougar	22	21	22	-9%	-7%	Not estimated			**	**
Wild Turkey	959	979	987	2.0%	-0.8%	0.1	0.07	0.08	-18%	-17%
Canada Goose	3763	*	4635			1.09	*	1.06		
Chukar Partridge	2453	*	1587			1.11	*	0.67		
Cottontail Rabbit	436	*	144			0.62	*	0.17		
Duck	28946	*	33437			2.58	*	2.70		
Forest Grouse	1835	*	1469			0.37	*	0.28		
Gray Partridge	800	*	260			0.38	*	0.14		
Mourning Dove	3477	*	2727			3.36	*	1.60		
Pheasant	9878	*	7179			0.65	*	0.56		
Quail	3945	*	4038			0.67	*	0.70		
Snowshoe Hare	40	*	71			0.08	*	0.08		

**Table 1.** General season harvest and HPUE estimates for most game species found in District 3 during the 2021 and 2022 hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year averages and a comparison of 5-year estimates and previous year to 2022 estimates. HPUE is expressed as #hunter days/harvest for elk, deer, and bear (lower is better), and as #harvested/hunter day for all other species (higher is better).



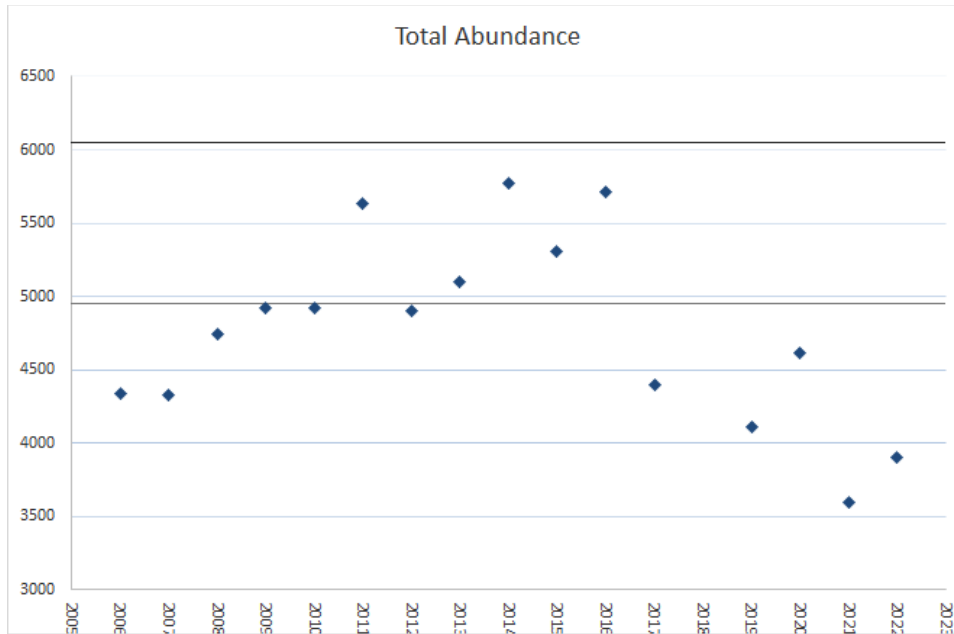
## ELK

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

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

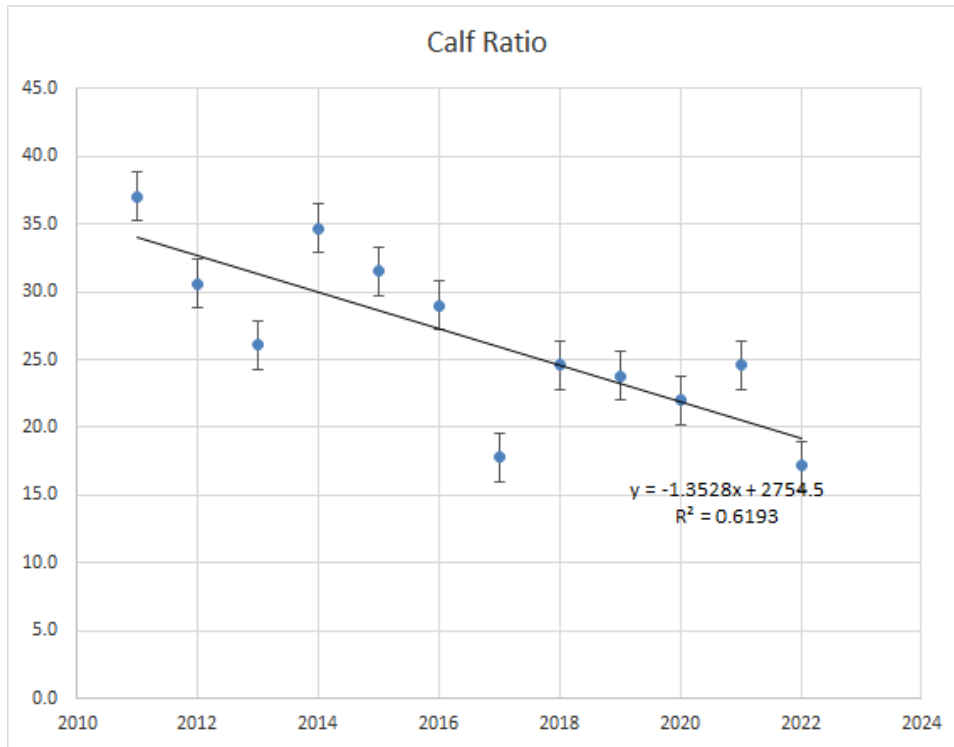
Only the GMUs within the forested portion of District 3 are managed for elk population stability or growth (GMUs 154, 157, 162, 166, 169, 172, 175, and 186). GMUs 145, 149, 163, 178, and most of 181 are managed to limit elk numbers, although some recreational opportunity is provided as determined through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

Biologists in District 3 conduct helicopter surveys within the core elk areas to estimate the post-winter population size. In the spring of 2022, survey efforts resulted in a population estimate of 3,901 (90% Confidence Interval of 3,843-4,027) elk. The southern extent of the aerial survey runs along the Grande Ronde, Wenaha, and Mill Creek watershed, which all extend into Oregon, resulting in approximately 500-600 elk being classified on shared winter range that likely remain in Oregon during during the fall. The average five-year population estimate prior to 2022 was 4,488 elk, which is 15% higher than the 2022 estimate. The 2022 surveys documented a calf ratio of 17.2 calves per 100 cows and a bull ratio of 19.7 bulls per 100 cows.



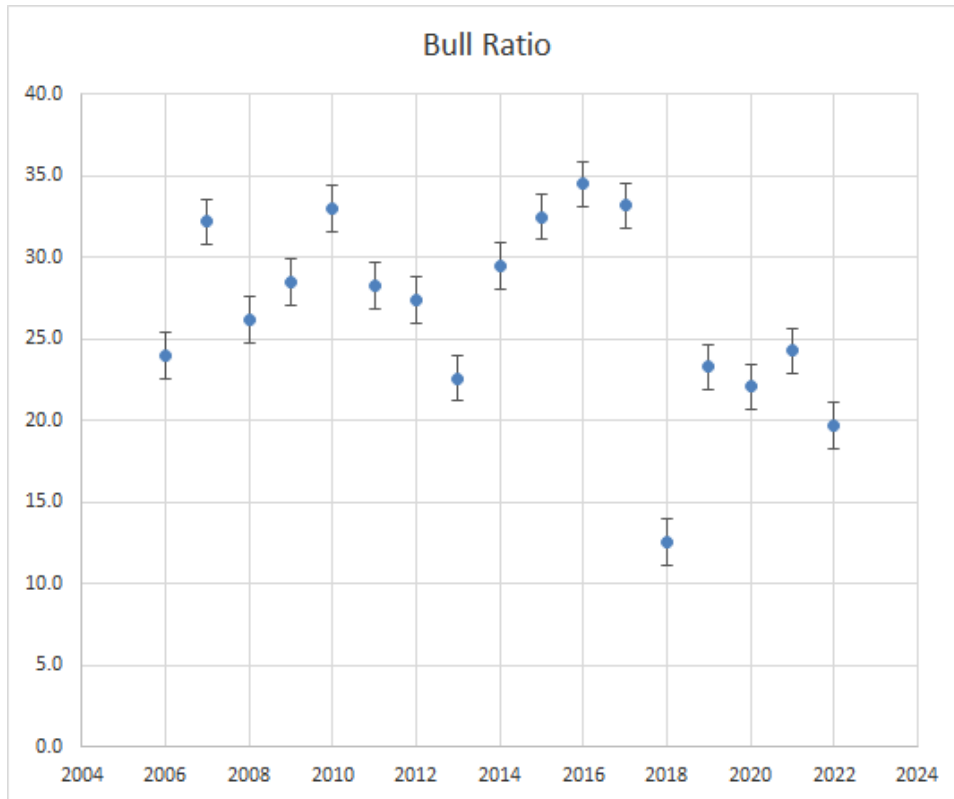
**Figure 2.** Abundance estimates for the Blue Mountains elk population.

Calf ratios in 2022 of 17.2 (90% CI +/- 0.3) dropped significantly below the 5-year average of 23.4. The low calf recruitment is attributed to high predation by cougars (WDFW 2022). Starting in May 2021, WDFW staff captured 125 neonate (newborn) elk calves and fitted them with GPS/satellite collars. The results from that work were published in April of 2022. In May and June of 2022 and 2023, WDFW captured and collared 102 (2022) and 115 (2023) neonate calves that will be monitored through 9 months of age.



**Figure 3.** Calf ratios for the Blue Mountains elk herd, generated from helicopter surveys conducted in March. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals in the estimate.

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



**Figure 4.** Estimated bull ratio (bulls per 100 cows) from helicopter-based surveys. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals. The bull ratio in 2018 is low due to the survey being ground based instead of helicopter. Finding bulls from the ground is more difficult and does not accurately represent the population.

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

### WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Most general season hunters in the Blue Mountains have been hunting here for many years. New hunters to this area will have to consider several options, such as weapon type, private land versus public land, the difficulty of hunt desired (wilderness versus landscapes with roads), and, as archery hunters, whether the availability of antlerless opportunity is important. As in most years, wildfire activity could be an important consideration on where to hunt. Wildfire activity in 2023 is off to an average start.

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

## **A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH GMU**

### **GMU 145**

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

### **GMU 149**

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

### **GMU 154**

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

### **GMU 157**

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

### **GMU 162**

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



### **GMU 163**

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

### **GMU 166**

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

### **GMU 169**

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

### **GMU 172**

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

### **GMU 175**

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

### **GMU 178**

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

### **GMU 181**

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

### **GMU 186**

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

### **SUMMARY OF GMU HARVEST ATTRIBUTES**

The information provided in Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how District 3 GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The values presented are from the 2022 harvest reports. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of elk harvested and hunters per square mile.

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

MODERN FIREARM											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	7	0.00	10	81	0.06	1	8.6%	2	3	13
154	216	2	0.01	8	166	0.77	6	1.2%	9	3	23
162	210	9	0.04	4	374	1.78	8	2.4%	10	2	22
166	131	3	0.02	6	190	1.45	7	1.6%	8	1	21
169	161	3	0.02	6	87	0.54	5	3.4%	6	1	17
172	108	20	0.19	1	199	1.84	9	10.1%	1	2	11
175	158	10	0.06	2	313	1.98	10	3.2%	4	1	16
178	275	3	0.01	8	75	0.27	2	4.0%	5	3	15
181	262	4	0.02	6	86	0.33	3	4.7%	7	3	16
186	53	3	0.06	2	23	0.43	4	13.0%	3	2	9

ARCHERY											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	8	0.01	4	56	0.04	1	14.3%	4	3	9
154	216	5	0.02	1	54	0.25	7	9.3%	5	3	13
162	210	2	0.01	4	55	0.26	8	3.6%	8	2	20
166	131	0	0.00	7	19	0.15	5	0.0%	8	1	20
169	161	0	0.00	7	29	0.18	6	0.0%	8	1	21
172	108	2	0.02	1	54	0.50	10	3.7%	3	2	14
175	158	0	0.00	7	57	0.36	9	0.0%	2	1	18
178	275	0	0.00	7	20	0.07	3	0.0%	1	3	11
181	262	0	0.00	7	23	0.09	4	0.0%	8	3	19
186	53	0	0.00	7	3	0.06	2	0.0%	8	2	17

MUZZLELOADER											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	10	0.01	1	36	0.03	1	27.8%	2	3	4
154	216	0	0.0	6	13	0.06	4	0.0%	1	3	11
162	210	2	0.0	6	27	0.13	5	7.4%	5	2	16
166	131	2	0.0	6	18	0.14	6	11.1%	3	1	15
172	108	7	0.1	2	67	0.62	8	10.4%	4	2	14
175	158	0	0.0	6	77	0.49	7	0.0%	7	1	20
178	275	0	0	6	11	0.04	2	0.0%	7	3	15
181	262	0	0	6	15	0.06	4	0.0%	7	3	17

**Table 2.** Rank sum totals that provide a quick and general comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. GMUs are generally limited to spike bull harvest, but some may have an antlerless opportunity as well (see hunting regulations for specific restrictions). Data presented are based on 2022 harvest reports.

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

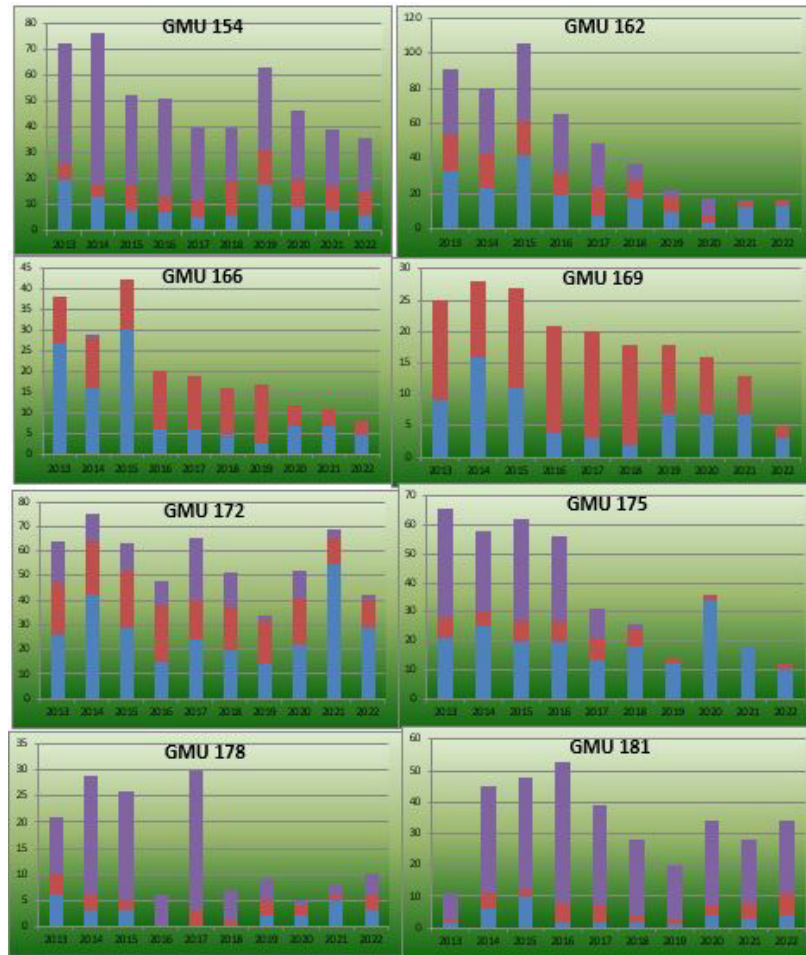
It has been uncommon for elk populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where severe winter weather conditions seldom occur. Unfortunately, the winters of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019 were uncommonly severe, with intermixed droughts in 2015 and 2021, resulting in a significant decline in elk numbers. Calf recruitment since 2016 has remained below average, consequently, elk numbers available for harvest will remain lower than years prior to the 16/17 winter. The 2023 general season is expected to be similar to the average during the past 5 years, with low numbers of yearling bulls (spikes) available for harvest. Harvest since 2016 has been the lowest in the past 20 years. Hunter numbers also typically do not change substantially from one year to the next, but a slow decline has been observed with the declining population. The weather during hunting season does change from year to year, which will influence success rates.

The spring and summer of 2021 was one of the driest and hottest since records have been kept, which resulted in greater than 130,000 acres burnt. The spring of 2022 was one of the wettest on record, resulting in great forage conditions for elk. In 2023, conditions have started out to be between these two years climatically, but drought conditions are worsening by mid-Summer. How this relates to elk hunting in the fall is unknown.

## HOW TO FIND ELK

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

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



**Figure 5.** Trends in total number of yearling bulls (blue), branched bulls (red), and antlerless (purple) elk harvested during general and permit seasons combined, 2013-2022. Harvest does not include tribal harvest.

## ELK AREAS

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

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



Elk Area 1010 was used to focus antlerless and branched-bull elk hunting on private land in the Dayton Unit. In the past, branched bull tag holders focused on public lands where access was guaranteed, but also increased pressure on that segment of the population. This elk area is also used to focus antlerless harvest on the private lands where depredation complaints have historically been high but limits antlerless harvest on public lands where higher elk densities are desired. For the 2023 hunting season, no antlerless opportunity exists in any portion of the Dayton GMU.

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

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

## **NOTABLE ISSUES AND HUNTING CHANGES**

1. Calf recruitment has been at record low numbers for the past few years. This will result in low numbers of yearling bulls available for harvest in the general season. This also results in declining branched-bull permit numbers as recruitment into the older age classes has declined.
2. Antlerless elk opportunity has been eliminated in all of the core public land GMUs. Antlerless tags remaining in the Blue Mountains area are focused on private lands that experience agricultural damage. These hunts can be difficult to gain adequate access if the elk are moving across ownerships frequently.
3. In July and August of 2021, wildfires burned 80% of GMU 175, a large portion of GMU 166 and a small portion of GMU 169. Severe drought in 2021 reduced forage and water availability throughout the district. The following year (2022) had very wet conditions with above normal vegetation growth. 2023 has started out drier than normal, with a predicted hot and dry summer.
4. During the summer of 2015, a large wildfire burned through a large portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, extending slightly into GMU 172 on Grouse Flats. A large portion of the fire that occurred in Washington burned later into September, creating desirable habitat conditions for elk with low intensity burning.
5. Severe winters occurred during 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, resulting in high mortality rates of elk. Severe droughts occurred in 2015 and 2021, influencing recruitment in the following years. Antlerless opportunity throughout the Blue Mountains has been severely reduced on public lands as a result. Calf recruitment has yet to rebound, and harvest will remain below average.

## DEER

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Both mule deer and white-tailed deer occur throughout District 3. Deer hunting opportunities in District 3 vary from marginal to quite good, depending on the GMU. The GMUs with the highest success (GMUs 145, 149, 178, and 181) also have the highest amount of private land, and access can be limited. GMUs where access to public land is highest (GMUs 166, 169, and 175) have the lowest success, probably due to a combination of high hunter numbers, a high percentage of legal bucks harvested, higher predator densities, and lower quality deer forage. While overall harvest is one indicator of GMU hunting quality, harvest/unit effort (HPUE) and harvest/unit area (HPUA) equalize GMUs based on hunter numbers, number of days hunting, and GMU size. However, both HPUE and HPUA can be misleading, as HPUE is complicated by private land access limitations and HPUA is complicated by the amount of habitat in the GMU that supports deer. In general, HPUE seems to be a better indicator of hunting success. Hunter success and HPUE of either white-tailed or mule deer in District 3 is highest in GMUs 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 178 (Peola), and 181 (Couse), with GMU 186 (Grande Ronde) seeing a recent increase in success. Total general season harvest is highest in GMUs 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), and 162 (Dayton).

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 3. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and HPUE are used to monitor population status. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and are conducting annual road surveys to determine herd composition and periodic aerial sightability surveys to monitor deer populations that are independent of harvest data, in addition to using collared mule deer does to understand survival rates.

All available harvest data indicates deer populations are variable within a relatively narrow range in District 3; however, 2021 was an abnormal year, with extensive wildfires that closed access to the National Forest for parts of the September hunting season and a severe hemorrhagic disease outbreak across the lower elevations of the district. Harvest totals were significantly lower, but the change in HPUE was not as drastic, indicating the decline in harvest was due to both fewer deer being available but also heavily influenced by lower hunter numbers. HPUE was again influenced by hunter numbers in 2022, with record low hunter numbers and effort, but only a marginal decrease in percent success and harvest/day. It is believed there will be some recovery of the herds in the 2023 season but look for a return to long-term averages in the 2024 season as yearling and 2-year-old bucks reach legal antler point numbers. For more detailed information related to the status of mule deer and white-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

### **WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?**

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

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

The information provided in Table 3 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of deer harvested per hunter and the number of hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison since GMUs vary in size. For example, the average number of deer harvested over the past five years during the modern firearm general season in GMUs 149 (Prescott) and 154 (Blue Creek) has been 457 and 212 deer, respectively. Just looking at total harvest suggests deer densities are much higher in GMU 149 than 154. However, when harvest is expressed as deer harvested/mi<sup>2</sup>, the result is an estimate of 0.33 in GMU 149 and 0.98 in GMU 154, which suggests deer densities are probably much higher in GMU 154 than they are in GMU 149.

This is further complicated by the amount of actual deer habitat in each GMU. For example, GMU 149 is the largest in total acreage but is comprised primarily of tilled croplands, and deer are concentrated in fields, rangelands, and along the breaks of the Snake River, so densities in a portion of the GMU are probably higher than the harvest/mi<sup>2</sup> indicates.

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

Differences that should be considered include:

- 1 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in WDFW Access programs, such as Feel Free to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, Hunt by Registration, or Hunt by Reservation, and may offer similar access to some GMUs with public land. See the Access section of this document for private land acreage available for public hunting in each GMU.
- 2 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in tilled croplands, and actual suitable hunting area may be much smaller, leading to higher-than-expected hunter densities (you will definitely see more hunters in GMU 149 than GMU 169 although those GMUs have similar hunter densities).

MODERN FIREARM											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	Rank Sum (Rank)
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Score	
145	355	197	0.56	6	572	1.61	4	35%	1	3	11 (1)
149	1409	457	0.33	9	1532	1.09	2	30%	4	3	15 (4)
154	216	212	0.98	2	868	4.02	11	24%	5	3	18 (5)
162	210	246	1.17	1	1392	6.63	12	18%	9	2	22 (9)
163	149	88	0.59	4	378	2.54	9	23%	6	3	19 (6)
166	131	32	0.24	10	408	3.11	10	8%	11	1	31 (12)
169	161	10	0.06	12	162	1.01	1	6%	12	1	25 (10)

172	108	37	0.34	8	187	1.73	5	20%	8	2	21 (8)
175	158	28	0.18	11	293	1.85	7	10%	10	1	28 (11)
178	275	166	0.61	3	499	1.82	6	33%	2	3	11 (1)
181	262	103	0.39	7	332	1.27	3	31%	3	3	13 (3)
186	53	30	0.57	5	133	2.50	8	23%	6	2	19 (6)



ARCHERY											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		<u>Public Access</u>	Rank Sum (Rank)
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	
<b>145</b>	355	12	0.04	7	48	0.13	9	24%	5	<b>3</b>	<b>21 (7)</b>
149	1409	46	0.03	8	171	0.12	10	27%	4	<b>3</b>	<b>22 (8)</b>
154	216	47	0.22	1	201	0.93	2	24%	5	<b>3</b>	<b>8 (1)</b>
162	210	25	0.12	3	173	0.82	3	15%	8	<b>2</b>	<b>14 (6)</b>
<b>163</b>	149	34	0.22	1	161	1.08	1	21%	7	<b>3</b>	<b>9 (2)</b>
166	131	3	0.02	9	68	0.52	4	4%	11	<b>1</b>	<b>24 (9)</b>
169	161	2	0.01	11	16	0.10	11	14%	9	<b>1</b>	<b>31 (12)</b>
172	108	10	0.09	5	28	0.26	6	36%	2	<b>2</b>	<b>13 (3)</b>
175	158	1	0.01	11	38	0.24	7	3%	12	<b>1</b>	<b>30 (10)</b>
<b>178</b>	275	23	0.09	5	79	0.29	5	30%	3	<b>3</b>	<b>13 (3)</b>
181	262	3	0.02	9	27	0.10	11	13%	10	<b>3</b>	<b>30 (10)</b>
186	53	6	0.10	4	12	0.23	8	42%	1	<b>2</b>	<b>13 (3)</b>

MUZZLELOADER											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	Rank Sum (Rank)
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	
145	355	19	0.05	4	47	0.13	2	41%	1	<b>3</b>	<b>7 (1)</b>
149	1409	58	0.04	5	175	0.12	1	33%	5	<b>3</b>	<b>11 (4)</b>
154	216	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
162	210	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
163	149	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
166	131	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
169	161	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>172</b>	108	18	0.17	1	48	0.44	5	38%	3	<b>2</b>	<b>9 (3)</b>
175	158	4	0.03	6	34	0.22	3	12%	6	<b>1</b>	<b>15 (6)</b>
178	275	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>181</b>	262	40	0.15	2	118	0.45	6	34%	4	<b>3</b>	<b>12 (5)</b>
186	53	8	0.15	2	20	0.39	4	40%	2	<b>2</b>	<b>8 (2)</b>

**Table 3.** Rank sum totals that provide a quick and general comparison of how total general harvest, hunter numbers, hunter success rates, and access to public land compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. GMUs in **bold type** are open during early and late seasons for the respective weapon type. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2018-2022).

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Wildfires are always a possibility that may affect hunter access to some hunting areas, and fires in the Lick Creek GMU two summers ago likely impacted an already declining harvest trend for deer in that GMU. This trend is most evident in success rates in the GMU, not overall harvest, and has been driven by the increase in hunters in GMU 175, which have doubled since 2001. With another wet spring promoting understory growth and projected hot and dry conditions through the summer, wildfire danger is likely to be high and hunters are **strongly encouraged**

to [check the status of wildfires](#) as well as public land access restrictions ([USFS](#)) before planning for the fall hunting season.

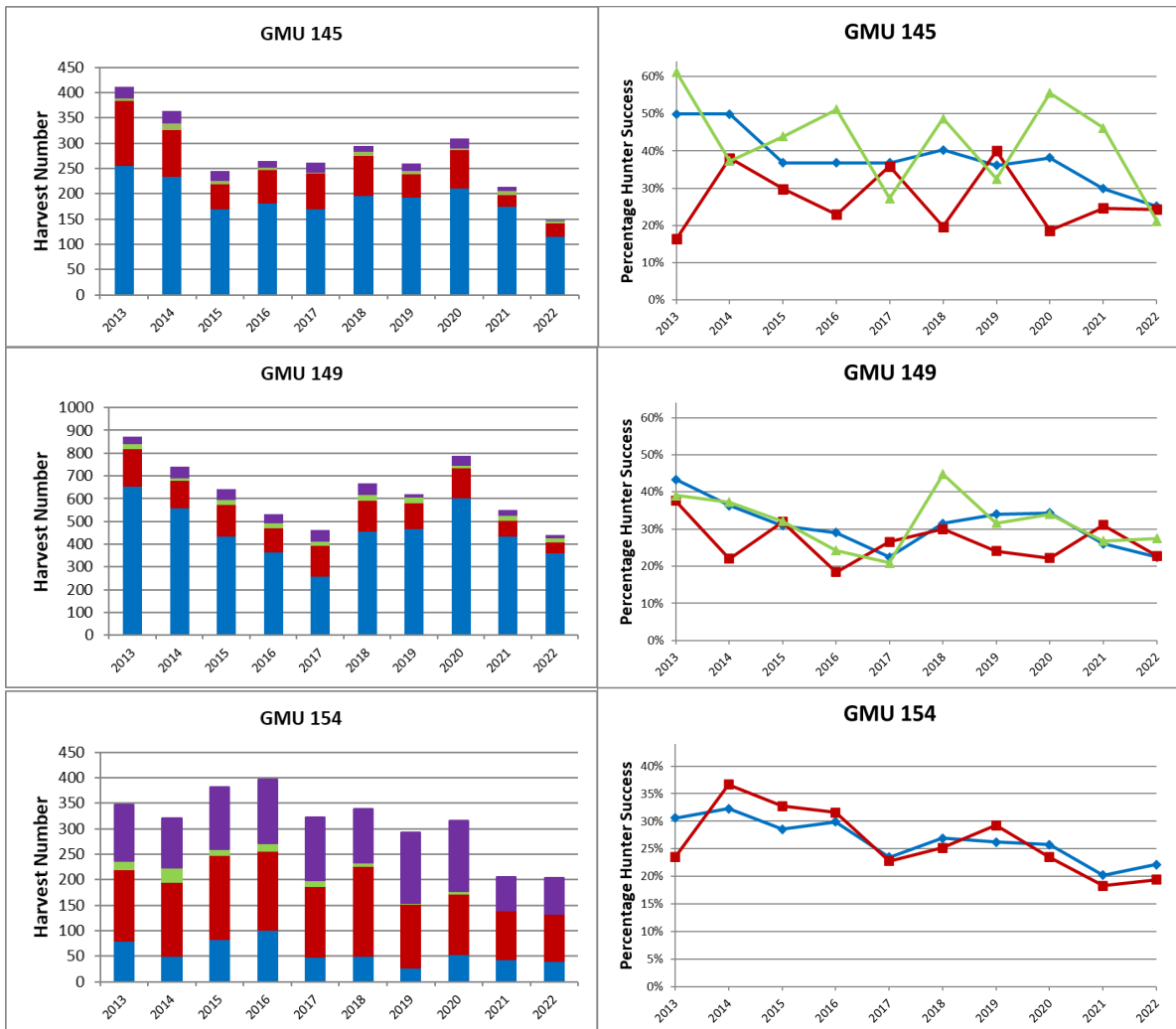
It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where winter and weather conditions are generally mild and do not result in large winter die-offs. With back-to-back average to mild winters over 2019-2022, we had been expecting to see improvements in deer populations across the district; however, drought conditions and hemorrhagic disease in 2021 took a toll on some portions of the deer herd and we did not see much evidence of recovery in 2022. The district saw increases in the number of days it took hunters to harvest a deer in almost all GMUs, with only the mountain GMUs showing stable or modest HPUE decreases, but this is likely due to lower hunter numbers. With good growing conditions last spring and an average winter, we expect overwinter survival was good, and are expecting deer harvest to marginally improve through the 2023 hunting season.

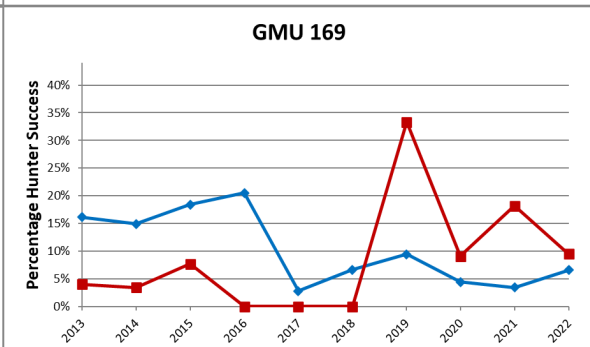
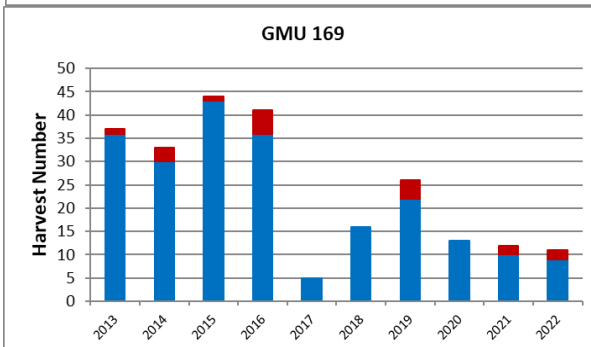
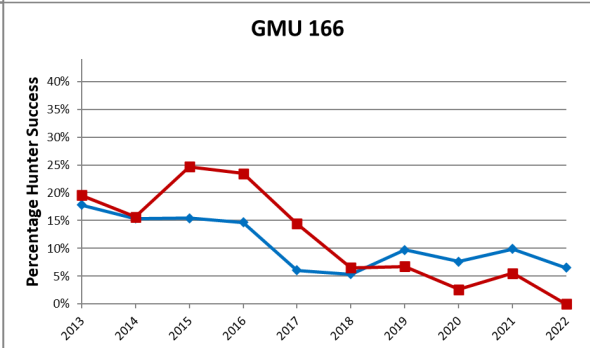
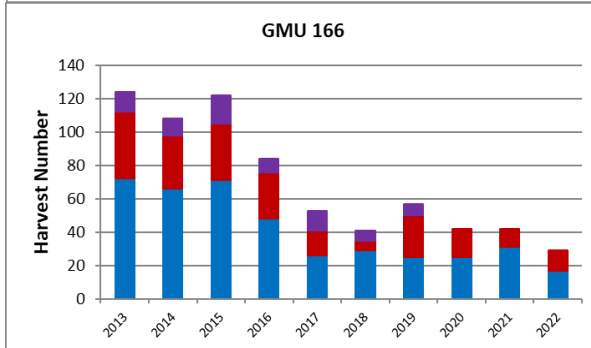
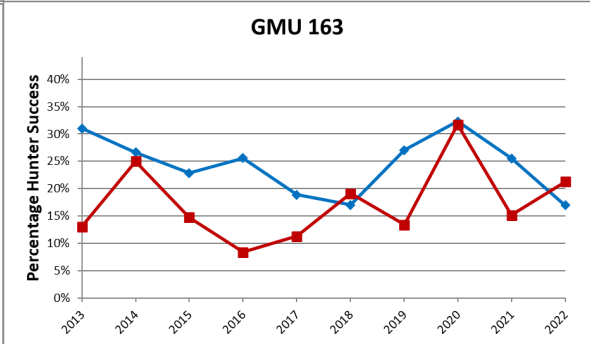
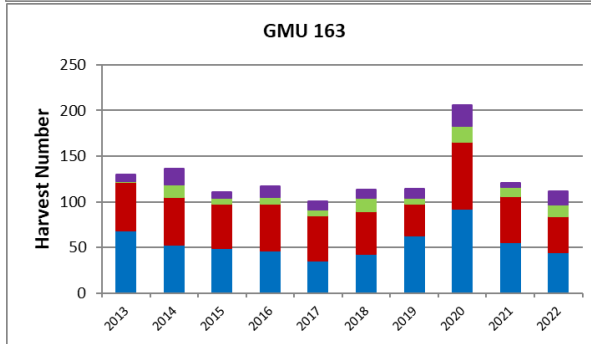
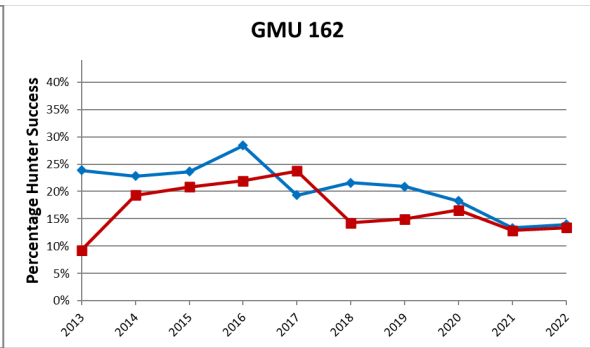
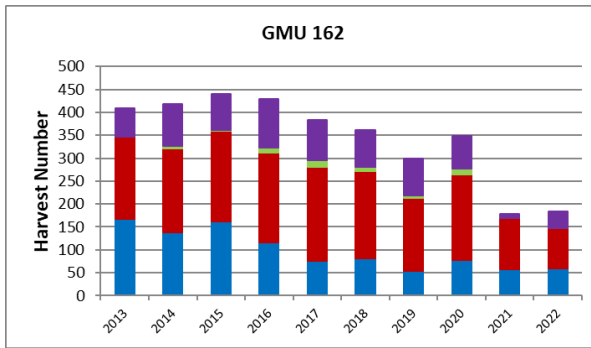
Periodic die-offs have occurred due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and bluetongue, both viral conditions transmitted by a biting midge, a small fly often found near water or marshy areas, which mainly affect white-tailed deer. The 2021 drought resulted in disease outbreaks across eastern Washington, affecting even portions of the mule deer herd, generally less susceptible than white-tails to hemorrhagic disease die-offs. While the sample size is small, approximately 15% of 40 radio-collared mule deer does were lost to either bluetongue or EHD. Although disease outbreaks are monitored annually, there is nothing feasible to be done to prevent outbreaks of hemorrhagic diseases. Research projects using relatively localized trapping of adult midges and spraying insecticides for emerging larvae have shown these methods are not effective in curtailing disease outbreaks in the wild.

Mule deer populations have experienced long-term declines across much of the west with no definitive cause identified. Habitat loss is suspected to be one possible cause, particularly the loss of winter range. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has probably helped maintain winter range in District 3, and mule deer populations outside of the mountains appear to be stable. However, decreases in available CRP contracts over the last few years have resulted in more land going into agricultural production and will likely have long-term negative impacts on mule deer populations in the district. Mountain populations of mule deer continue to show poor harvest metrics. Recent wildfires in the Tucannon-Wenaha Wilderness should have improved habitat conditions for deer, and 2021 fires in GMU 166 and 175 should provide future benefits.

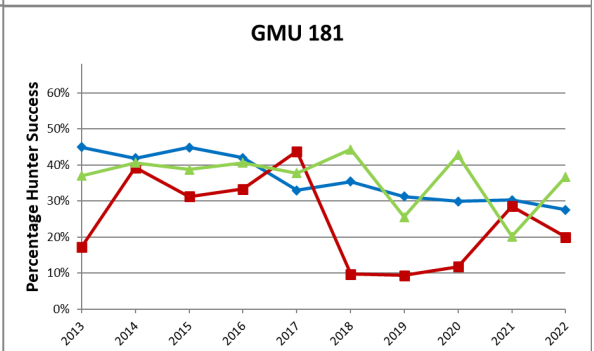
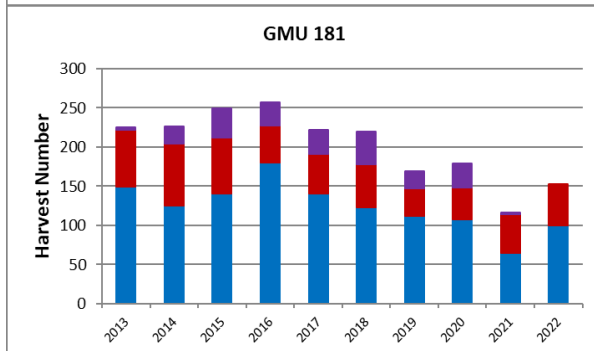
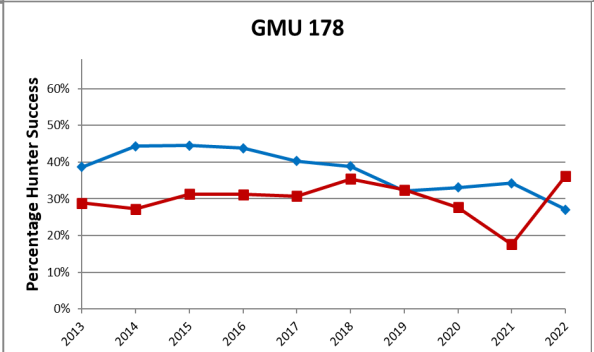
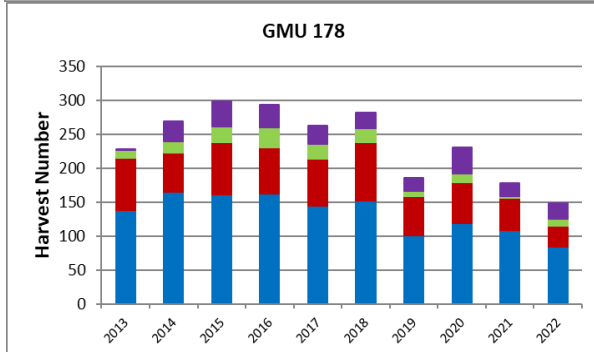
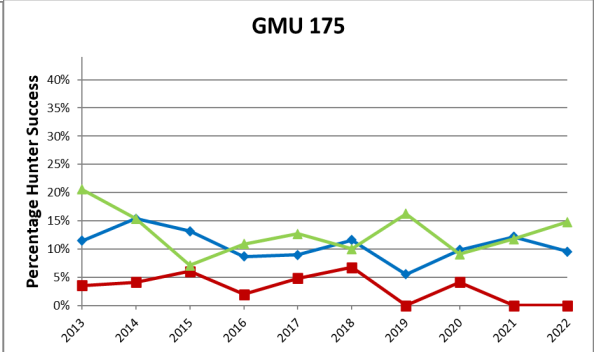
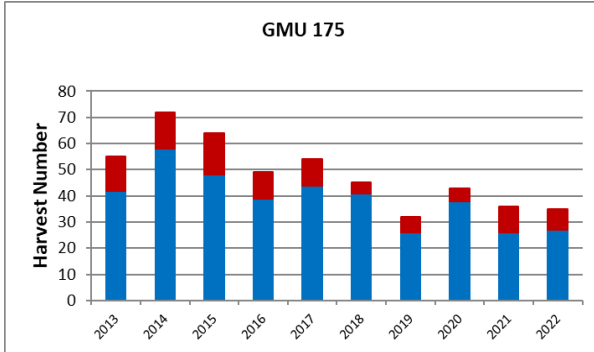
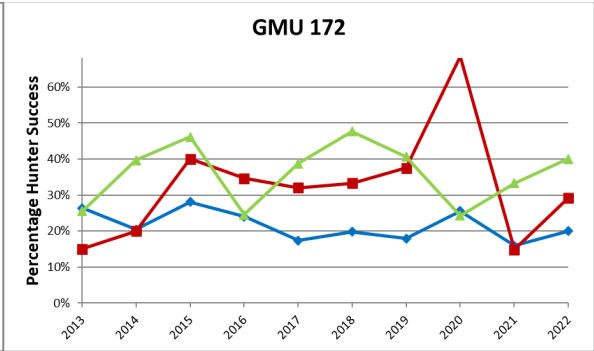
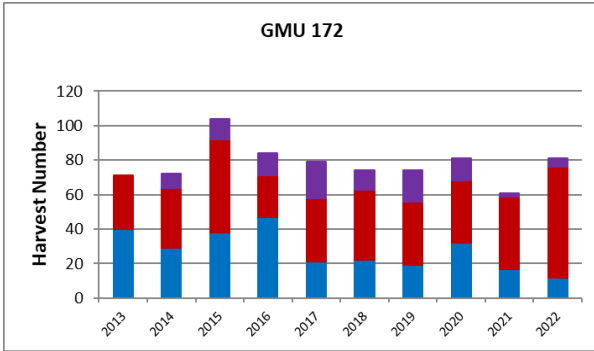
One reference WDFW currently has for future potential harvest during general seasons are recent trends in hunter harvest success and harvest/unit effort. Figure 6 provides trend data by GMU for total harvest and harvest success, which typically mirrors HPUE. The figures are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 3 and what they can expect to encounter regarding hunter success and deer numbers.

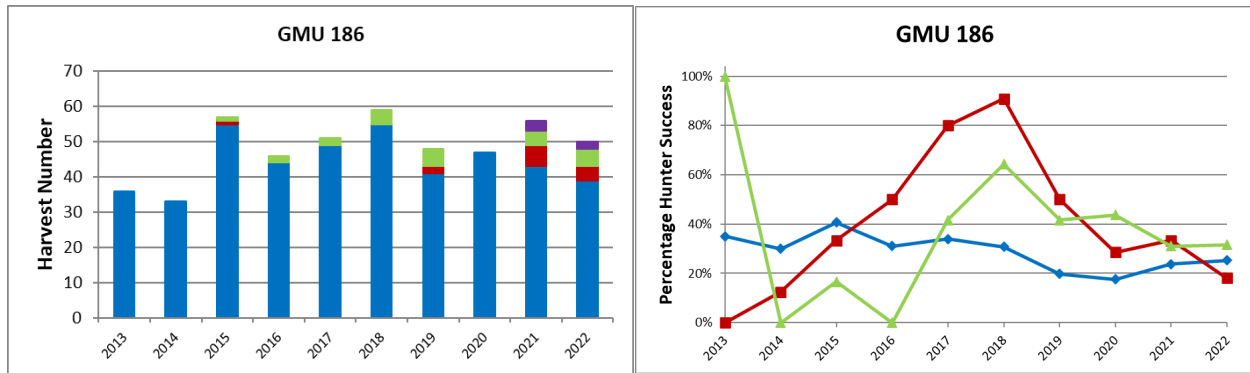
Overall, the recent trends in total harvest have been disappointing. With poor overwinter survival in 2017 and 2019, and drought conditions in 2021, environmental conditions have not been conducive to stable populations or herd recovery. Some of the decline is due to lower hunter numbers and recent restrictions on antlerless harvest, but even with that, buck harvest numbers have been declining. Harvest success has not declined by the same percentage due to the effect of declining hunter numbers, but the trend is still not positive. We have addressed the harvest declines by limiting antlerless opportunity both during the general weapon seasons and with lower permit numbers, and we anticipate seeing some recovery now that we are 2 years post-hemorrhagic disease outbreak that impacted both our white-tailed and mule deer herds.











**Figure 6. Left column:** Ten-year trends in total numbers of mule deer bucks (blue) and antlerless deer (green), and white-tailed bucks (red) and antlerless deer (purple) during all general seasons combined from 2012-2021. Totals do not include permit harvest (**note the different scales**, from maximums of 50 - 1,000). **Right column:** Ten-year trends in percentage harvest success for each GMU in District 3 for modern firearm (**blue diamonds**), archery (**red squares**), and muzzleloader (**green triangles**) general season hunters for 2012-2021.

## DEER AREAS

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

## NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. GMU 166 General Season Archery limited to 3 point minimum white-tailed and mule deer, no antlerless harvest allowed.
2. Deer Area 1040 (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area) **was eliminated three years ago** and is now open to general season deer and elk hunting under same regulations as GMU 172.
3. Deer Area 1021 was **eliminated in 2021**. This area was originally created to control resident deer in the area around Clarkston. Radio-collaring studies showed that it was likely that many of the harvested deer were only using the Deer Area for winter range and were not resident deer causing damage issues.
4. "Any Deer" permits were added for youth in selected GMUs.

## BLACK BEAR

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

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

District 3 consists of GMUs that are part of the Blue Mountains Black Bear Management Unit 8 (BBMU 8), which is one of nine BBMUs defined by WDFW. Currently, WDFW regulates for only a general fall bear season, with the elimination two years ago by the WDFW Commission of the permit-controlled spring bear hunt. With harvest metrics that fall within healthy population parameters identified by WDFW and a recent robust population index modeled through DNA sampling, both indicate a thriving bear population in the Blue Mountains. The metrics used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of female bears in the harvest (no more than 35-39% of harvest), the median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years), and the median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years).

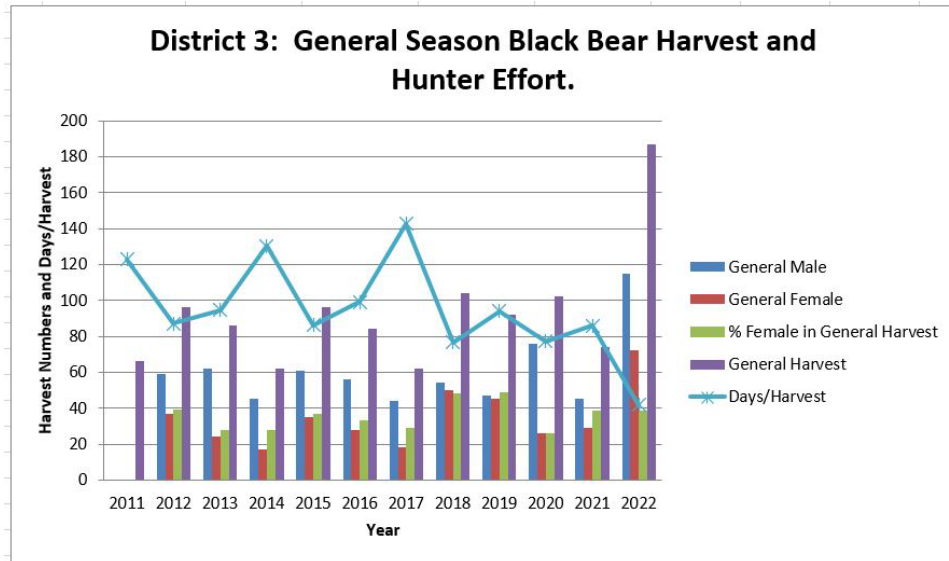
WDFW completed a DNA mark-recapture density estimate in 2021 to establish a baseline for monitoring trends in black bear population size. Results of this effort generated an estimate of 32.4 bears (95% CI 31.1-52.9) greater than 1 year old per 100km<sup>2</sup>. Black bear populations have been demonstrated to be robust and stable in District 3. Because the age of harvest is used as a management metric, hunters are reminded that **it is required that a premolar tooth be submitted** (lack of hunter compliance with this regulation is one of multiple reasons the Spring Bear hunt has been “paused”). Tooth envelopes can be obtained by calling a regional office or stopping in at one of the district offices (call ahead as these offices do not have dedicated customer service staff), which may be available to help with tooth extraction as well.

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Although there are hunters who specifically target black bears, most bears are harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest can vary quite a bit from one year to the next and overall hunter success is quite low. However, hunter success is likely higher for those who specifically target bears versus those who buy a tag in case they see a bear while deer or elk hunting. Since 2001, hunter success in District 3 has averaged just 6% and has never been higher than 9%, until 2022. Hunters averaged 16% success in 2022 and had the lowest number of days in the field per harvest in over 20 years at 41.6 days, compared to the previous 5-year average of 96 days.

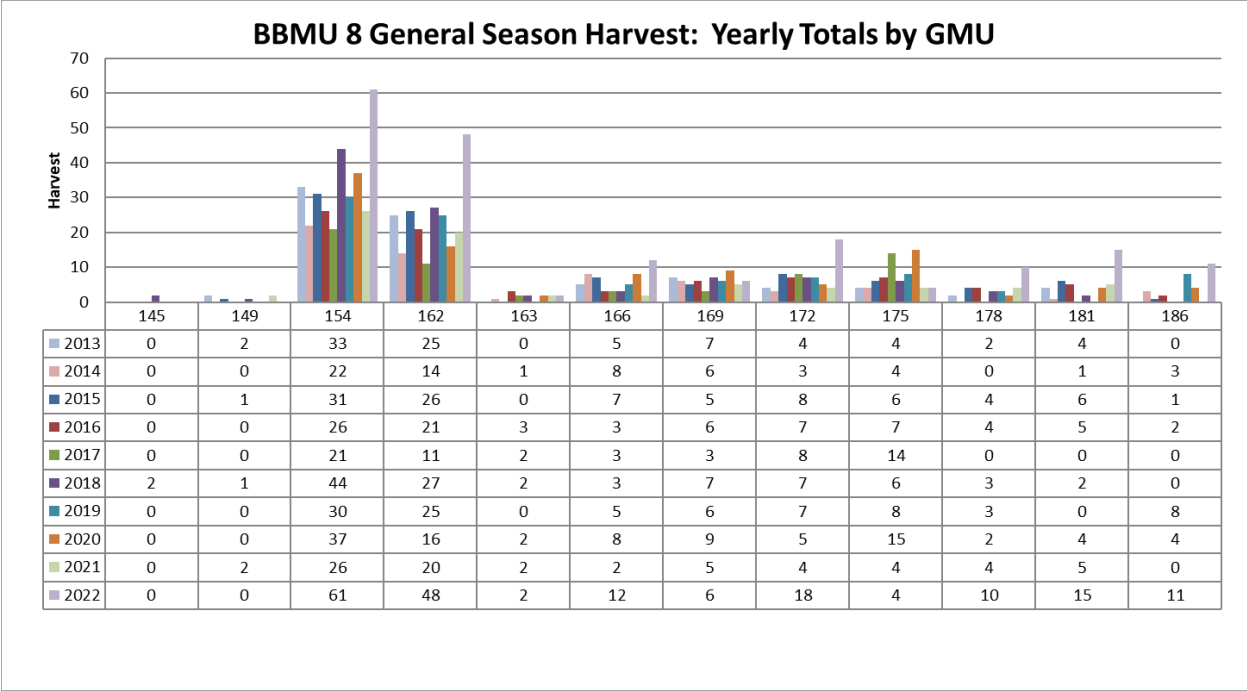
Overall, if there is any trend in bear harvest during the general bear season in District 3, it has been one of long-term stability, until 2022, where the harvest showed a substantial increase. Whether that higher harvest will repeat itself in 2023, only hunter effort and success rates will determine. Harvest has generally fluctuated between 75 and 100 bears, excluding a few outliers: 2011 was a relatively poor year, with 66 bears harvested, but harvest rebounded during the 2012 and 2013 seasons before dropping off again in 2014 to 62 bears (Figure 7).

General season harvest in 2022 was reported as 187 bears, the highest general season harvest in over 20 years. With hunter numbers trending down, other factors are responsible for the higher-than-average harvest. We know the second bear tag contributed to some of the higher harvest, but we do not know if removal of a spring hunt influenced bear populations, or if bears were more visible in 2022 due to the wet spring/early-summer resulting in higher fruit crops, or whether increased hunter interest resulted in more bears being harvested.



**Figure 7.** Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season, and an index of hunter effort (hunter days/bear harvested) in District 3, 2011–2022 (the sex of harvested bears is not available for 2011).

At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) (Figure 8). Harvest numbers during 2014, 2017, and 2021 seasons compared to long-term (10-year), and short-term (5-year) averages were lower in both GMUs 154 and 162 during those years, but the yearly District harvest does not show any identifiable trends (Figure 7) other than there have been very few low harvest years back-to-back. This was again highlighted by the rebound in both the 2015 and 2016 harvests after the low 2014 harvest, and again in 2018 after the low 2017 harvest, and last year as well with a record 2022 harvest after the low 2021 harvest. Based on general long-term stability in District 3 bear harvest, hunters should expect similar harvest and success rates during the 2023 season. We may see some change in the harvest dynamic over time with the new regulation of a two-bear limit and August 1 opener (compared to a past September opener), but in the short term this will likely be offset by the lack of any harvest during a spring season. We did experience the two highest total harvests in 2020 (140 bears) and 2022 (187) since the 2002 harvest (165 bears), with the 2002 and 2020 harvest totals being bolstered by spring bear harvest, while 2022 harvest was only from the fall general season but supported by an increase in 2<sup>nd</sup> bear tag harvest.



**Figure 8.** Number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2013-2022 general black bear seasons in District 3.

## HOW TO LOCATE AND HARVEST A BLACK BEAR

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

Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. Hunters should focus their efforts early and late in the day in areas with good food sources. In September, bears can spend a considerable amount of time in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountain foothills in search of fruit that has ripened in the riparian areas and around old homesteads.

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

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

## NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

Beginning in 2019, bear hunting season dates in District 3 were standardized to an Aug. 1 opener running until November 15 to conform to new statewide standard opening and closing dates. In addition, the two-bear harvest limit was standardized and applied statewide.

## COUGAR

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 3, but densities likely vary among GMUs, with higher densities where shrub and forest cover make up a larger portion of the unit, corresponding to good deer and elk foraging habitat. Cougar populations in District 3 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining stable adult territories and population by limiting the harvest of adult cougars to approximately 12% to 16% of the cougar population. Beginning in 2008, WDFW has made multiple adjustments to the way it manages cougar harvest in Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested, and instead using a standard liberal (no harvest restrictions) early season coupled with a restricted late season (harvest guidelines applied). The intent was to have a longer season without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific PMUs (Population Management Units) if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

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

In April 2020, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted higher harvest guidelines in the Blue Mountains and other PMUs for cougars, based on local harvest data instead of a Statewide average density estimate, to calculate available opportunity while still meeting the Game Management Plan (GMP) goals. Social stability is one goal stated in the GMP, which is maintained by adult territorial cougars. Based on this, only adult cougars (greater than 24 months of age) will count towards the harvest guideline in the coming years. It is unclear at this time if the harvest will change significantly under these new guidelines. The expectation of this change is that the winter season (Jan. 1-Apr. 30) should remain open in four out of every five years, allowing for good snow tracking conditions for hunters specifically targeting late-season cougars and potentially resulting in a higher harvest than observed in past years. Harvest guidelines would still apply, so hunters will still be required to check the WDFW website ([WDFW cougar hunting](#)) or call the hotline (1-866-364-4868) to ensure a given PMU is still open.



For the 2022 season and the upcoming 2023 season, the Commission approved the option to purchase a second permit applicable to only District 3 PMUs. This was in response to the “at risk” designation of the Blue Mountains elk herd and the demonstrated impact of cougar predation on radio-collared elk calves. The harvest guidelines remain in effect and PMUs will still close on Jan. 1 if the guidelines have been met or exceeded at that point in the season.

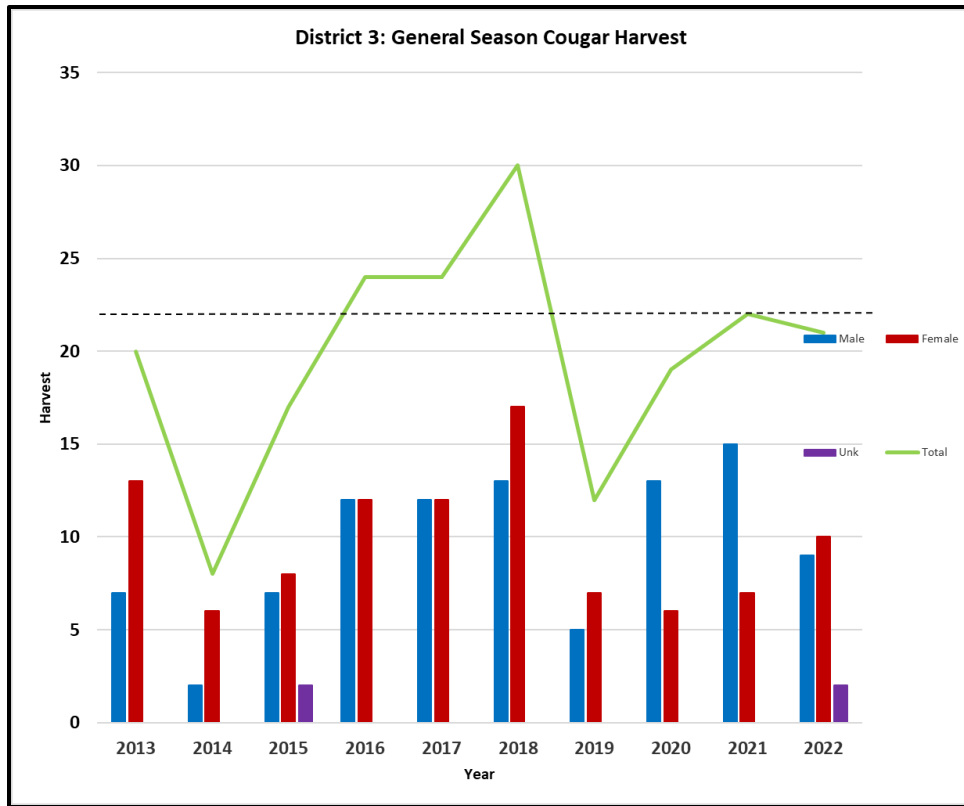
**Table 4.** Harvest guidelines and 2022-2023 harvest for the three cougar PMUs located in District 3. Harvest before the 2020 season was managed under a lower harvest guideline than first applied in 2021-2022; only cougars >24 months old are counted towards the guideline; total harvest including cougars <24 months is shown in (). Other mortalities (public safety removal, depredations) are not counted towards the harvest guideline, but are generally low in District 3.

Hunt Area (PMU)	2023-2024 Harvest Guideline	2022-2023 Adult Harvest (Total)
145, 166, 175, 178 (PMU 9)	6-7 adult	7 (10)-Closed Feb. 17
149, 154, 162, 163 (PMU 10)	7-9 adult	4 (10)- No Closure
169, 172, 181, 186 (PMU 11)	5-6 adult	0 (1)- No Closure
Bag Limit	2 per season	Only valid in Blue Mountains

For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit [WDFW’s website](#).

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Cougar harvest in District 3 has been variable over the years, with the average since 1990 of 17 cougars and a range between a low of 5 and a high of 33. However, in 14 out of the last 25 years, the range has been between 12 and 20 cougars harvested. Since 2013, the number of cougars harvested in District 3 has averaged 20 cougars, and sub-adults typically dominate the harvest. With the yearly variation, it is hard to predict future harvest, but cougar sightings in the district continue to be common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the harvest. Under the new harvest management guidelines (higher limits and only cougars >24 months counted toward the guideline), it is much less likely for all hunt areas to close by the Jan. 1 evaluation period, but hunters interested in a cougar harvest in any of these GMUs should still plan on taking advantage of good cougar tracking conditions prior to January.



**Figure 9.** The reported number of cougars harvested in District 3, 2013–2022, including subadults (which are not applied to the guideline). The dashed line represents the upper harvest guideline for the three cougar hunt areas combined.

### NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. The late season extends from January 1 to April 30, 2024. **Be aware that 2023 licenses expire at the end of March, and a 2024 hunting license and cougar tag is required to hunt cougar after Mar. 31. After Dec. 31, 2023, hunters should call 1-866-364-4686 prior to hunting to determine if their hunt area is open.**
2. The harvest guideline was increased for the 2020-2021 cougar season and continues for the 2023-2024 season, and only cougars 24 months of age and greater will be counted towards the harvest guideline.
3. In July 2022, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved a two-cougar bag limit in the Blue Mountains, with the stated goal of benefiting elk calf survival. A second cougar tag will be available for GMUs 145-154, 162-186 beginning in September 2022 and continuing through the 2023 season.

## DUCKS

### COMMON SPECIES

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

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

### MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY

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

### CONCENTRATION AREAS

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

## POPULATION STATUS

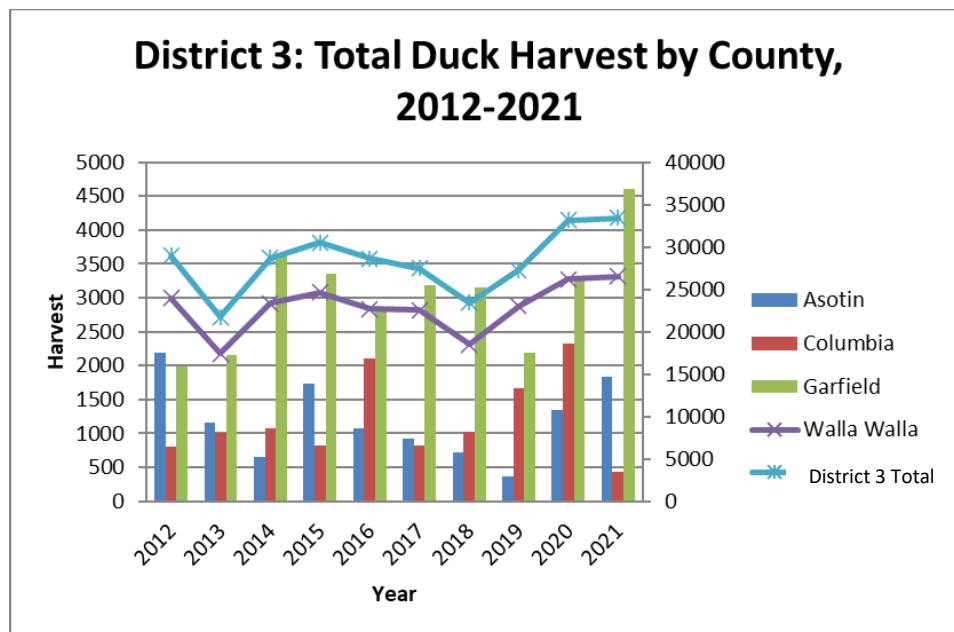
The number of ducks in District 3 during established hunting seasons is most strongly related to the status of breeding duck populations in Alaska and Canada. The following are the trends from USFW/Canadian Wildlife Service monitoring data over the ten-year period from 2013-2022: the 2014 breeding survey estimated the breeding population in Alaska at 3.5 million ducks, a 6% increase over 2013 values, but still well below the 2012 estimate of 4.4 million. The mallard estimate recovered from 2013 lows of 338,000 to an estimate of 501,000 for 2014, a 48% increase, and similar to the 2012 estimate (USFWS, Trends in Duck Breeding Populations, 1955-2015).

In 2015, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats traditional survey area was 3.4 million, a 3% decrease from 2014 estimates, and 8% below the long-term average. The mallard breeding population estimate was 471,000, a decrease of 6% from 2014 levels, but still 24% above the long-term average. In 2016, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats area was 4.3 million, a 28% increase over 2015 estimates, and 17% above the long-term trends. The mallard breeding population estimate was 584,000, 24% above the 2015 estimates, and 54% above the long-term trend. In 2017, the total estimate for the Alaskas-Yukon area was 3.99 million, an 8% decline from the previous year, but 8% higher than the long-term average. The 2017 estimate for mallards was 538,000, an 8% decline from the 2016 estimate but 40% above the long-term average. In 2018, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 3.38 million, 15% below 2017 estimates, and 9% below the long-term average.

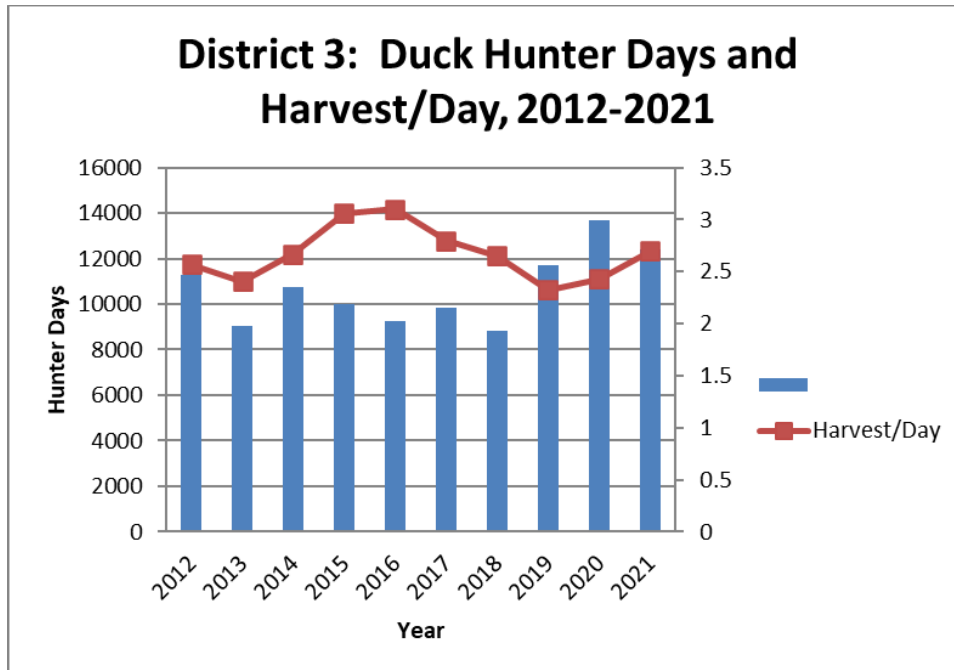
The 2018 harvest in District 3 mirrored the population estimates, with a 15% decline in harvest over the 2017 duck harvest. In 2018, the mallard population estimate was 451,000, a 16% decline over 2017 estimates but still 17% above the long-term average. In 2019, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 2.61 million, a 23% decline over 2018 estimates, and the third year in a row of population declines. 2019 also saw a continued decline in mallard breeding population numbers, with an estimate of 361,000, 20% below 2018 and 7% below the long-term average. There are no reports for the 2020 and 2021 years due to Covid restrictions, but surveys resumed for 2022. The total duck breeding estimate for 2022 was 3.8 million, a 47% increase over 2019 values and 4% above the long-term average. This reverses a 5-year declining trend. The mallard portion of the breeding duck estimate was particularly robust, with an estimate of 614,000 being 70% above the 2019 estimate and 59% above the long-term average.

## HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Although we do not have the 2022 harvest data, recent harvests have mirrored the breeding estimates, as evidenced by the 2018 duck harvest being down 15% overall from 2017, marking the third year in a row of decreased harvest, mirroring decreased breeding estimates for two out of the last three years from the breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada. Harvests in 2019 broke this trend and were well above expected levels, being 16% greater than 2018 and only 2% below the 5-year mean despite declines in the breeding duck numbers. With widespread drought, hot and dry conditions, and early fires, the 2021 harvest was expected to be well below average but was essentially unchanged from the 2020 levels, which were 22% above the 2019 harvest. Breeding conditions in 2022 were generally favorable for waterfowl but drought conditions in Canada this summer may hinder brood production for the 2023 season. However, with robust breeding duck populations, we should still see an average to above average harvest this fall. Although hunter numbers have remained relatively stable, the number of hunter days were much higher in 2019 and 2020, resulting in the below average harvest/day rates, with 2019 being the lowest in the last 5 years and were well below both the five- and 10-year averages (Figure 8). The 2021 hunter days dropped back to the average, and with good harvest numbers, harvest rates are on the upswing. Traditional breeding surveys were not conducted in 2020 and 2021, and only local spring estimates are available in those U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports. The 2023 Waterfowl Population Status Report was not available at the time of this writing, but hunters should check the report at [USFWS](https://www.usfws.gov/) for insight into the 2023 population estimates for waterfowl hunting prospects.



**Figure 10.** Trends in the total number of ducks harvested (blue line, right axis), and totals by county in Walla Walla (purple line, right axis), Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties (bars, left axis), 2012–2021.



**Figure 11.** Trends in the total duck hunter days (left axis), and ducks harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2012-2021.

### HUNTING TECHNIQUES

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

### PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

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

## GEESE

### COMMON SPECIES

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

### MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

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

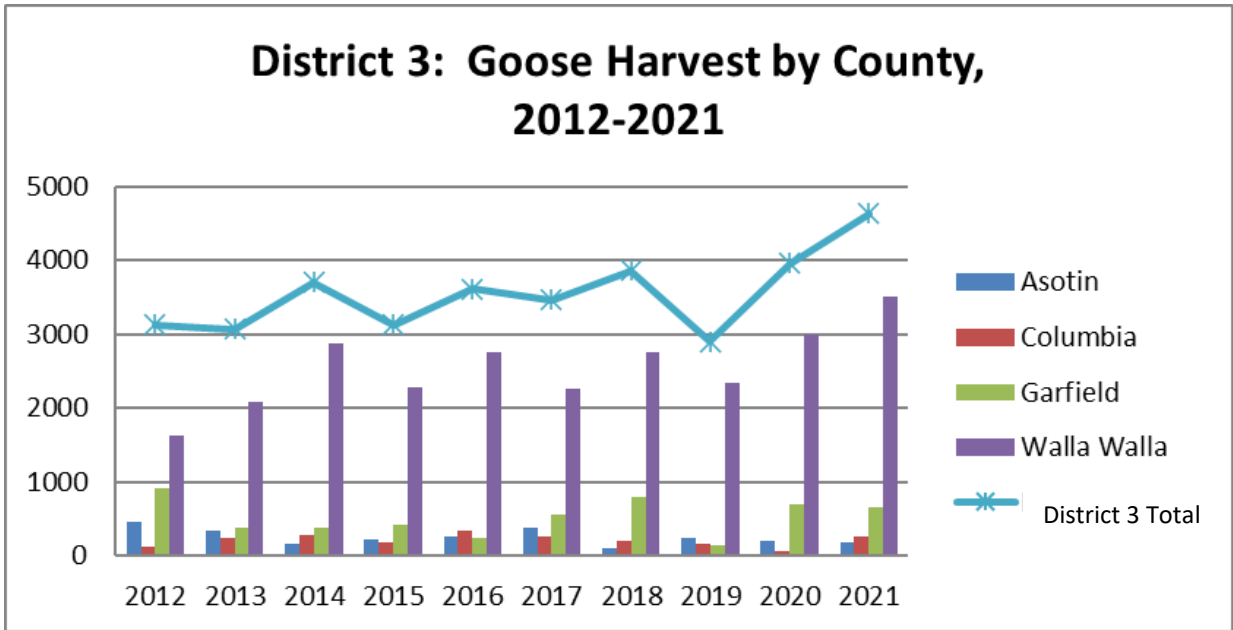
### POPULATION STATUS

Breeding Canada geese appear to be increasing in District 3, with many local lakes, ponds, and rivers hosting multiple breeding pairs. WDFW does not currently conduct breeding goose surveys in this part of the state. Locally breeding geese may help supplement migratory numbers and add localized hunting opportunity to the main goose concentrations in western Walla Walla County. Urban goose populations can be problematic at times but offer limited hunting opportunities.

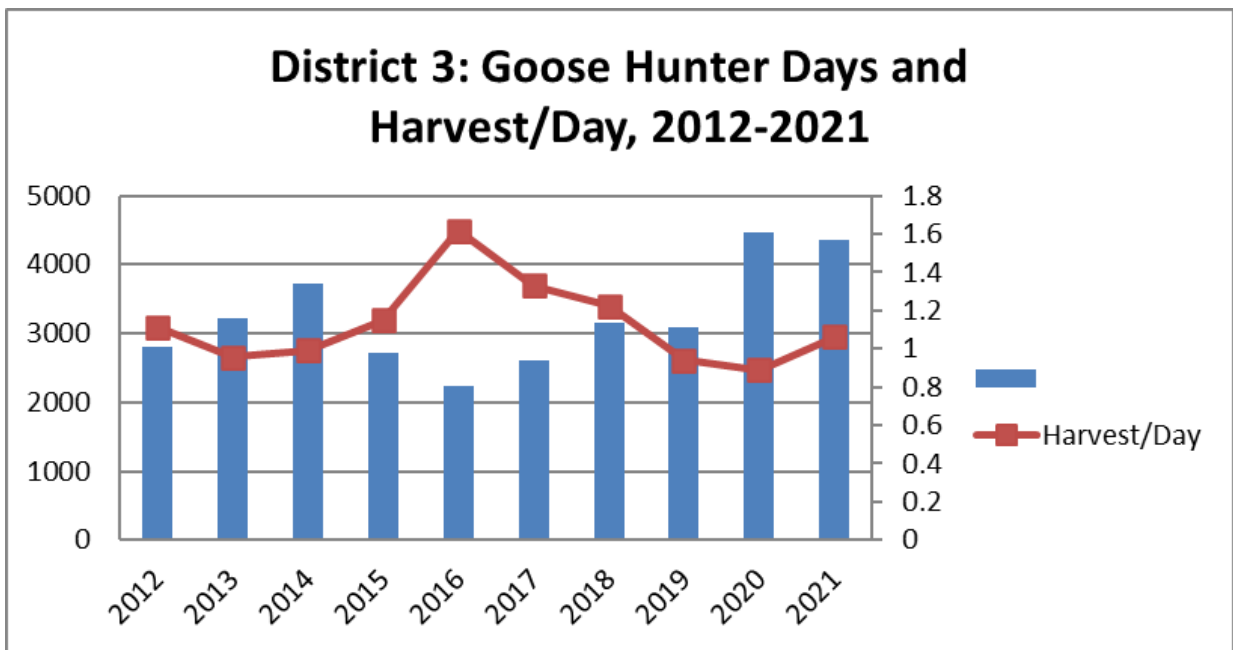
### HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 3 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most goose harvest will occur in Walla Walla County during the late season, where twice as many geese are harvested each year compared to Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties combined. Although harvest is low in the three eastern counties of the district, creative hunters can find opportunities along the Touchet, Tucannon, and Snake rivers by requesting access from farmers who have geese feeding daily in their crop fields, particularly alfalfa and volunteer wheat.





**Figure 12.** Trends in the total number of geese harvested (pale blue line), and totals by county in Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Walla Walla counties, 2012–2021.



**Figure 13.** Trends in the total goose hunter days (left axis), and geese harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2012–2021.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES

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

## SPECIAL REGULATIONS

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

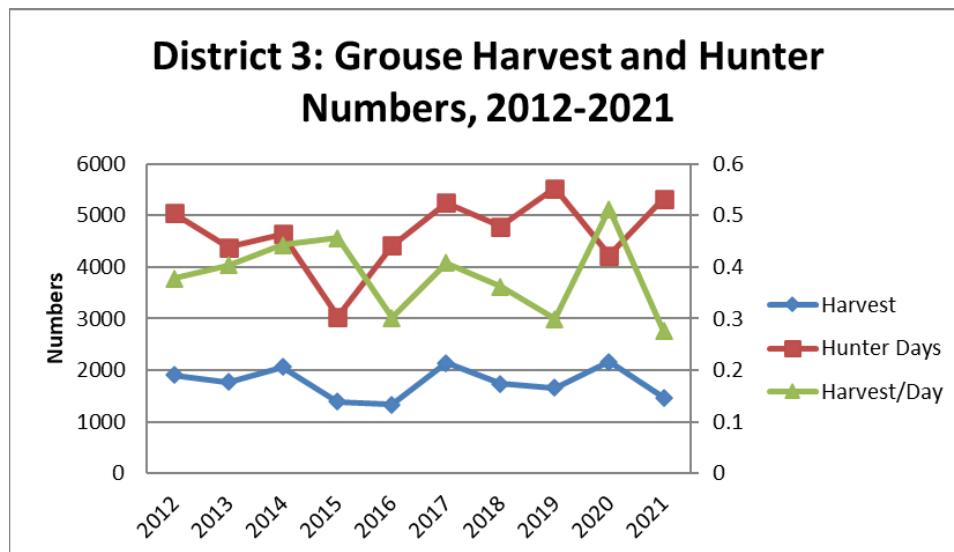
## FOREST GROUSE

### SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

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

### POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not conduct any standardized surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 3 (expanded wing and tail collection using “wing barrels” at major public land entry points is underway in an effort to identify age and sex of harvested birds, see information here: [Forest Grouse](#)). Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor the general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, grouse populations appeared to be at least stable if not increasing until the 2016 season, as HPUE has slowly increased from a low in 2011 until a drop in 2016. While both harvest numbers and hunter days have been decreasing, the increase in HPUE suggests grouse populations have been stable (Figure 11) but were likely impacted by difficult winters in 2016/17 and 2018/19. Harvest is also highly dependent on weather during brood rearing. Harvest is dominated by young-of-the-year birds, so poor hatching or brood rearing conditions greatly influence the harvest.



**Figure 14.** Number of grouse harvested, number of hunter days (right axis), and grouse harvested per hunter day (left axis), 2012-2021.

## HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of grouse harvested in District 3 has declined significantly since 2009 when 5,147 grouse were estimated to be harvested. This is compared to 2,143 in 2017 and around 1,700 in both 2018 and 2019. Harvest in 2020 rebounded to 2,200 birds but was still well below the 2009 levels. The 2021 harvest was the lowest in over 20 years at 1,469 birds despite a large increase in hunter days afield. The trend in declining hunter days has somewhat stabilized within the range of 4-5 thousand hunter days. Typically, a hunter may go a few days without seeing birds or getting a shot at any but will harvest multiple birds on a given day, once they find good habitat and encounter birds still in family groups. Since harvest is so closely tied to brood production, weather conditions in the spring are a good predictor of hunting season success. This year's wet but warm spring should have minimal impact to early brood production and survival. Birds that fail early will often attempt a second clutch, and later nesting birds have had very good brood-rearing conditions, with abundant vegetation promoting superior foraging conditions for chicks. Overall, we expect average nesting success this year, resulting in some rebound in abundance during the coming hunting season.

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

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

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

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## PHEASANTS

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

### SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

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

### POPULATION STATUS

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

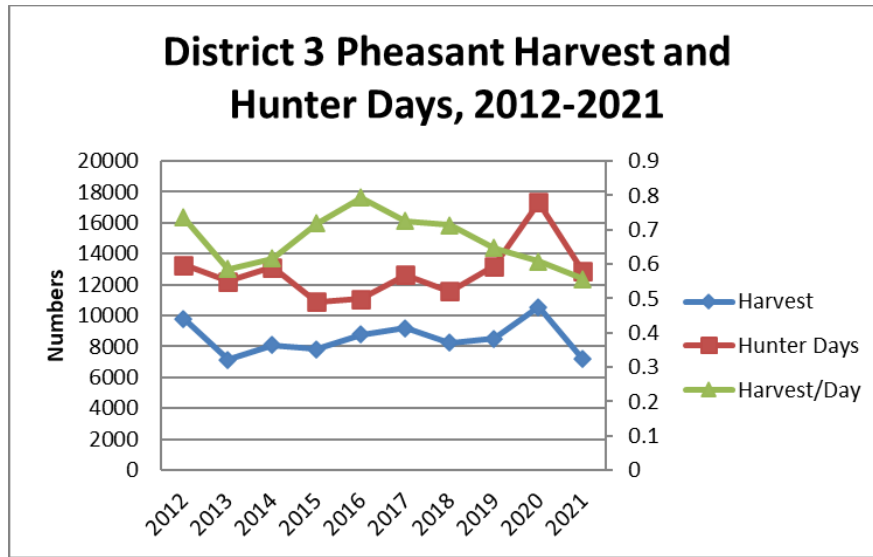


Figure 15. Total pheasant harvest, hunter days, and harvest per day in District 3, 2012-2021.

### HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

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

### HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

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

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

# QUAIL

## SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

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

## POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for quail. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, recent quail HPUE has improved significantly from low levels in 2013, likely due to weather during the nesting period. HPUE in 2014 was 1.23 birds harvested per hunter day and remained stable through the 2016 season at 1.38 birds harvested per hunter day but dropped drastically in 2017 to 0.64 birds/hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 1.14 birds/day. An expected improvement in quail harvest did not materialize in 2018, with another low harvest of only 0.62 birds/hunter day. Harvest in 2019 and 2020 did see improvement to ~0.7 birds/day, but still well below the 5-year average. Conditions in 2021 were not as favorable as 2019 or 2020, with drought conditions not conducive to successful brood rearing, but we saw stable HPUE at 0.7 birds/day. We don't have the 2023 harvest results, but with the opposite case of a cool wet spring likely inhibiting nest success, we expected a lower harvest in 2022. To date, 2023 conditions have been generally favorable for brood production, and we expect some increase in harvest for the coming fall season.

## HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of quail harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. The breeding conditions during spring and early summer of 2023 have been good for nesting success and should also support good survival of any late nesting birds. Biologists predict that 2023 quail harvest numbers will recover from their recent slide.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

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



## TURKEYS

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

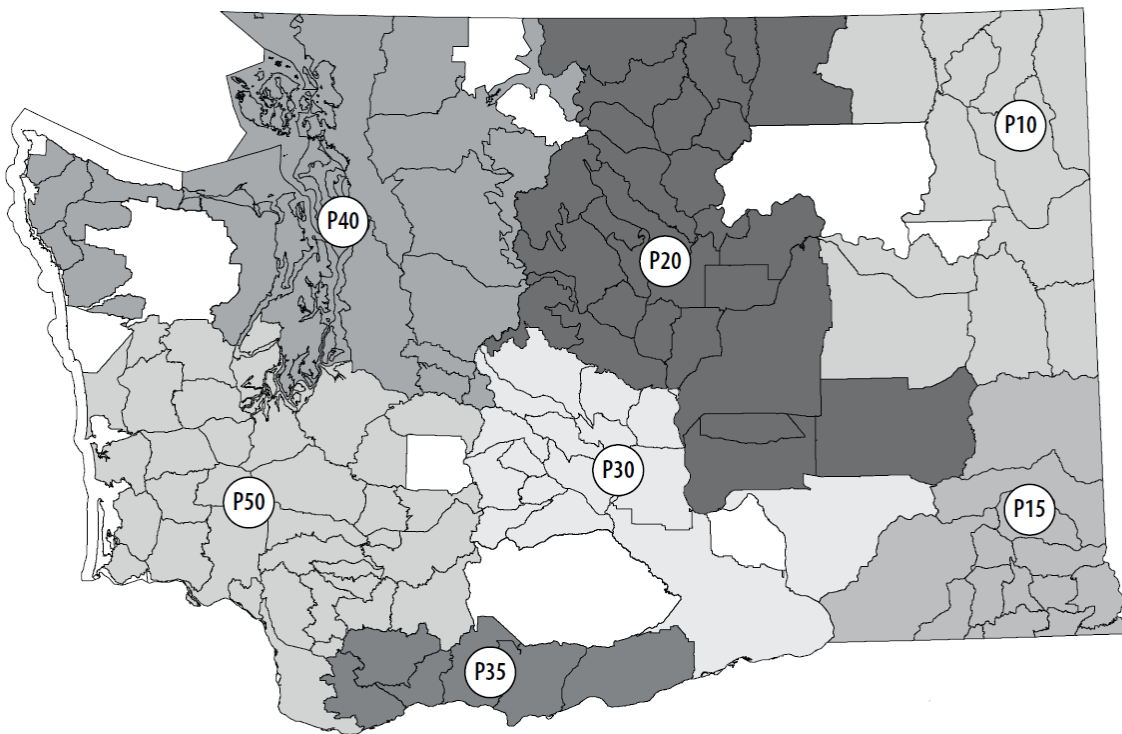


Figure 16. Map depicting WDFW's seven wild turkey population management units.

### POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for turkeys. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. The 2019 harvest continued the improving trend from 2018, with a HPUE of 0.11 during the spring season, dropping a bit at 0.09 for the fall. However, the last 3 years of HPUE have seen a steady decline during the spring season, which may be an indication that recent increases in harvest limits are affecting the population. That said, the 2020 fall harvest was the second highest in the last 10 years, both in total harvest and HPUE.

The 2021 season saw a spike in hunter numbers and harvest, but HPUE was slightly down as the increase in hunter numbers was not quite matched by the harvest, and the 2022 metrics dropped off slightly in both categories. For the past five years, total harvest has been relatively stable at ~1,000 birds harvested, regardless of hunter numbers and effort. This may be a case where trend in HPUE is no longer tracking the population.

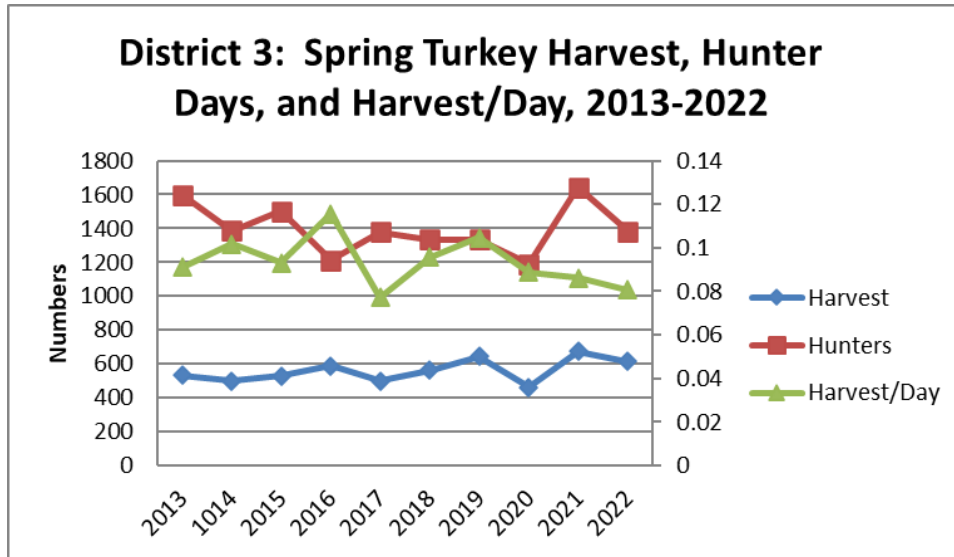


Figure 17. Spring turkey harvest numbers and numbers of hunter days (left axis), and harvest/day (right axis), 2013-2022.

### HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

The total number of turkeys harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season and overwinter survival. The total harvest of 742 in 2014 was nearly average, followed by harvests of 770 in 2015, 773 in 2016, and 769 in 2017. With more liberal bag limits, 2018 saw a jump in harvest to 1,053 birds combined for spring and fall seasons, with a similar harvest of 1,048 in 2019, both years being well above the five-year average of 821 birds. Although harvest dropped during the 2020 through 2022 seasons, we still saw total harvest in the 940-990 bird range, continuing to be above the 5-year average which has climbed to about 960 birds. Both the 2021 and 2022 harvests were bolstered by healthy spring harvests of over 600 birds. The spring season limit remains at two bearded turkeys in Eastern Washington. Based on long-term harvest trends, turkey populations in southeast Washington appear to have stabilized after years of increasing harvest, and future harvest is likely to be most impacted by spring weather conditions on brood survival and the occasional hard winter impacting all age classes. Prospects for this season are very promising; the average winter should support good survival and possibility for higher nesting success, especially for yearling hens most impacted by winter severity, and the wet but warm spring should not have hampered poult production. Successfully nesting hens will find good poult rearing conditions with ample seed and insect food resources. All told, biologists are optimistic that we will see support of the new higher average harvest for the coming fall season.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

Most turkey hunters target gobblers in the spring when males are displaying and readily come to box, slate, and mouth calls that mimic hen groups. Setting a blind or using camouflage clothing near meadows or small forest openings used as strutting grounds can be very effective. Often only minimal calling is needed to bring turkeys within range. Identifying roost areas and setting up nearby can also be effective, but efficient calling will be needed to attract birds. Gobble calls should only be used infrequently, and hunters generally should not stalk or approach gobble calls, as it may be another hunter.

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

## OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

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

### NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

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

## MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

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

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

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

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

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

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

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

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

### GMU 145 - MAYVIEW

Access rating – Poor

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

### GMU 149 – PRESCOTT

Access rating – Poor

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

## **GMU 154 – BLUE CREEK**

Access Rating – Poor/good

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

## **GMU 157 – MILL CREEK WATERSHED**

Access rating – No entry without permit

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

## **GMU 162 - DAYTON**

Access rating – Good/poor

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

## **GMU 163 - MARENGO**

Access rating – Poor/fair

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



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

The General Store  
426 Main Street  
Dayton, Washington, 99328  
509-382-1042  
[tgsdayton@gmail.com](mailto:tgsdayton@gmail.com)

The Last Resort Kampstore  
2005 Tucannon Rd.  
Pomeroy, WA 99347  
[www.thelastresortrv.com](http://www.thelastresortrv.com)

Four Star Supply  
2255 Villard St  
Pomeroy, WA 99347  
509-843-3693  
[pomeroyfourstarsupply@hotmail.com](mailto:pomeroyfourstarsupply@hotmail.com)

### **GMU 166 - TUCANNON**

Access rating – Excellent

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

### **GMU 169 - WENAHA**

Access rating - Excellent

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

### **GMU 172 – MOUNTAIN VIEW**

Access rating – Good/fair

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

### **GMU 175 – LICK CREEK**

Access rating – Excellent

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

### **GMU 178 - PEOLA**

Access rating – Poor/fair

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

### **GMU 181 - COUSE**

Access rating – Good/poor

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

### **GMU 186 – GRANDE RONDE**

Access rating – Good/poor

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

## PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

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

The following is a summary of anticipated private land acres available through the department’s Private Lands Access program in **2020**. There have been a number of land ownership changes and withdrawals from the Access Program, so hunters should be sure to check current conditions before heading out to their usual hunting spots. There are some **Feel Free to Hunt** properties that may **not** appear on under Private Lands Hunting Opportunities due to contracts that haven’t been signed. Be sure to ask your local Private Lands Biologist about other opportunities that may be available.

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

## ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

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

### DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS

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

### ONLINE PARCEL DATABASES

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

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

[Asotin County GIS](#)

[Columbia County GIS](#)

[Garfield County GIS](#)

[Walla Walla GIS](#)

### WDFW'S MAPPING TOOL

WDFW's mapping tools have been updated as the new [WDFW Hunt Planner map](#) and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU. The web map can be accessed by clicking the above link or going to WDFW's hunting website.