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Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

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DISTRICT 8 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Yakima and Kittitas counties

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DISTRICT 8 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 8 is in south central Washington and includes Yakima and Kittitas counties and game management units (GMUs) 328 (Naneum), 329 (Quilomene), 330 (West Bar), 334 (Ellensburg), 335 (Teanaway), 336 (Taneum), 340 (Manastash), 342 (Umtanum), 346 (Little Naches), 352 (Nile), 356 (Bumping), 360 (Bethel), 364 (Rimrock), 368 (Cowiche), 371 (Alkali), and part of 372 (Rattlesnake Hills). Hunters can choose a variety of habitats, ranging from lowland shrubsteppe and farmland, to high elevation alpine wilderness.

Large blocks of public land dominate District 8 and provide abundant hunting opportunities. The district is best known for excellent elk hunting. The Yakima elk herd is one of the largest in the state, with more than 11,000 animals roaming over 900,000 acres of public land. There are about 4,000 elk in the Colockum herd, which primarily inhabits public land north of Ellensburg.



Figure 1: Rainbow over the Yakima River from the Wenas Wildlife Area on a cloudy day.

The public land provides plenty of upland bird hunting opportunities in District 8, but populations have fallen on hard times and aren't likely to rebound. Wild pheasants are almost extinct, and nearly all species have declined to near historic lows. Bird hunters wanting to wander over large areas have many options in District 8. Along the breaks of the Columbia, the Yakima Training Center consists of 327,000 acres south of I-90, while WDFW manages another 154,000 acres north of the I-90. There are 9,000 acres on the [Wild Horse Wind Farm](#), which utilizes the [Hunt by Reservation](#) system. A motivated upland bird hunter with a good dog could pursue grouse, chukar, partridge, quail, and pheasant on the same day.

Turkeys were introduced more than 40 years ago, but populations remained low. In the late 1990s, a more extensive effort was made to augment existing pockets of birds. Populations in GMU 335 (Teaway) have become large enough to allow for a fall permit season. Turkey densities may never reach those found in northeast Washington, but many hunters find decent turkey hunting closer to home.

District 8 is also home to more than 70 percent of the bighorn sheep in Washington. While drawing a permit to hunt sheep is still challenging, bighorns can add enjoyment to a hunting trip in District 8. Rams are in rut from mid-October through November when many hunters travel through the area. There are robust populations of bighorns that can often be easily viewed along Highways 821 (Yakima River Canyon) and 410 (Clemans Mountain, north of the junction with Highway 12).

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each public or private landowner to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [Electric-assisted bicycles on WDFW-managed lands](#) for the most recent information.

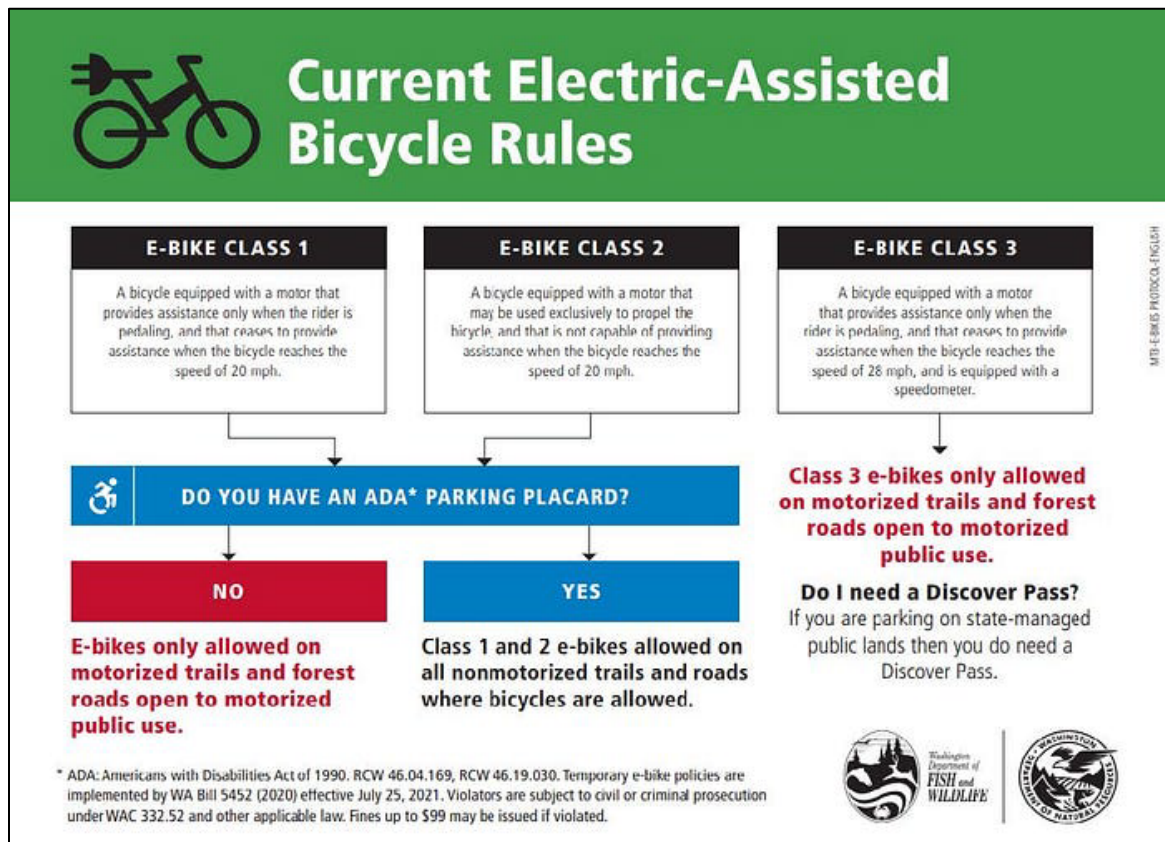


Figure 2: Current e-bike rules

ELK

District 8 was once considered some of the best elk hunting areas in the state. This reputation results in relatively high hunter densities throughout the hunting season. Opening weekend is crowded, with hunters setting up camp early and heading home before the season ends. For those looking for a higher quality experience, consider hunting the last two or three days of the modern firearm season or opt to hunt during the quieter archery or muzzleloader seasons.



Bull elk

The only antlerless archery general season is now in GMUs [334](#), [335](#), and [371](#). These GMUs are managed for minimal numbers of elk due to human-wildlife conflict issues in adjacent agricultural lands. This year's archery season runs from Sept. 9–21. Elk Area 3911 covers all GMU 334 and the lower portions of GMU 335, where most elk in these units reside.

Master Hunters can harvest antlerless elk using modern firearms from Aug. 1, 2023–Jan. 20, 2024, in 3911, so archery hunters in Elk Area 3911 **must** wear hunter orange or pink. In 2022, archers harvested 10 antlerless and four antlered elk from GMU 335, and four antlerless elk from GMU 334. Overall, archery hunters find more success (7.2%) in these GMUs than those opting to use modern firearms (3%). Success rates last season averaged around 4% (Table 1).

The open terrain of GMU 371 on the [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC) has good numbers of elk and boasts a hunter success rate of more than 50%, with 45 antlerless elk harvested last season. YTC is open to the public for various recreational activities, including hunting, bird watching, mountain biking, horseback riding, hiking, falconry, and archery target practice. All patrons wishing to access YTC lands for recreational purposes must have a [YTC Recreation Access Card](#). Access to these lands can change based on military training schedules. Please call the Blanchard Physical Fitness Center (509-577-3208) for current information and rules.

Once seasons begin, hunters will find more elk at higher elevations and away from roads. The wilderness areas in the Yakima herd range can provide some of the better opportunities in the district for those willing to invest the effort to chase elk in the high country away from roads.

Table 1: 2022-23 District 8 general season elk harvest by sex.

| GMU | Antlerless | Antlered | Total | Hunters | Success |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| 328 | 24 | 83 | 107 | 2347 | 4.6% |
| 329 | 18 | 35 | 53 | 1165 | 4.5% |
| 334 | 10 | 0 | 10 | 283 | 3.5% |
| 335 | 20 | 8 | 28 | 800 | 3.5% |
| 336 | 6 | 23 | 29 | 949 | 3.1% |
| 340 | 0 | 33 | 33 | 1811 | 1.8% |
| 342 | 0 | 43 | 43 | 1252 | 3.4% |
| 346 | 0 | 67 | 67 | 1280 | 5.2% |
| 352 | 0 | 16 | 16 | 731 | 2.2% |
| 356 | 0 | 18 | 18 | 666 | 2.7% |
| 360 | 0 | 27 | 27 | 1061 | 2.5% |
| 364 | 0 | 36 | 36 | 990 | 3.6% |
| 368 | 15 | 79 | 94 | 1615 | 5.8% |
| 371 | 45 | 0 | 45 | 86 | 52.3% |
| Total | 138 | 468 | 606 | 15036 | 4.0% |

District 8 contains elk from the designated Yakima and Colockum elk herds. The Yakima herd has met the population management objective of 9,500 individuals for the last three years. In contrast, the post-hunt aerial survey estimate of 3,835 individuals for the Colockum herd remains below the objective of 4,500 individuals. Harvest trends (Figure 3) are consistent with population trends, whereas opportunity and harvest decrease with lower populations. The severe winters of 2015-2017 caused significant population declines and reduced opportunity/harvest.

Interested parties can find annual harvest reports and harvest statistics online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). Hunters in District 8 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on [Washington 2023 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

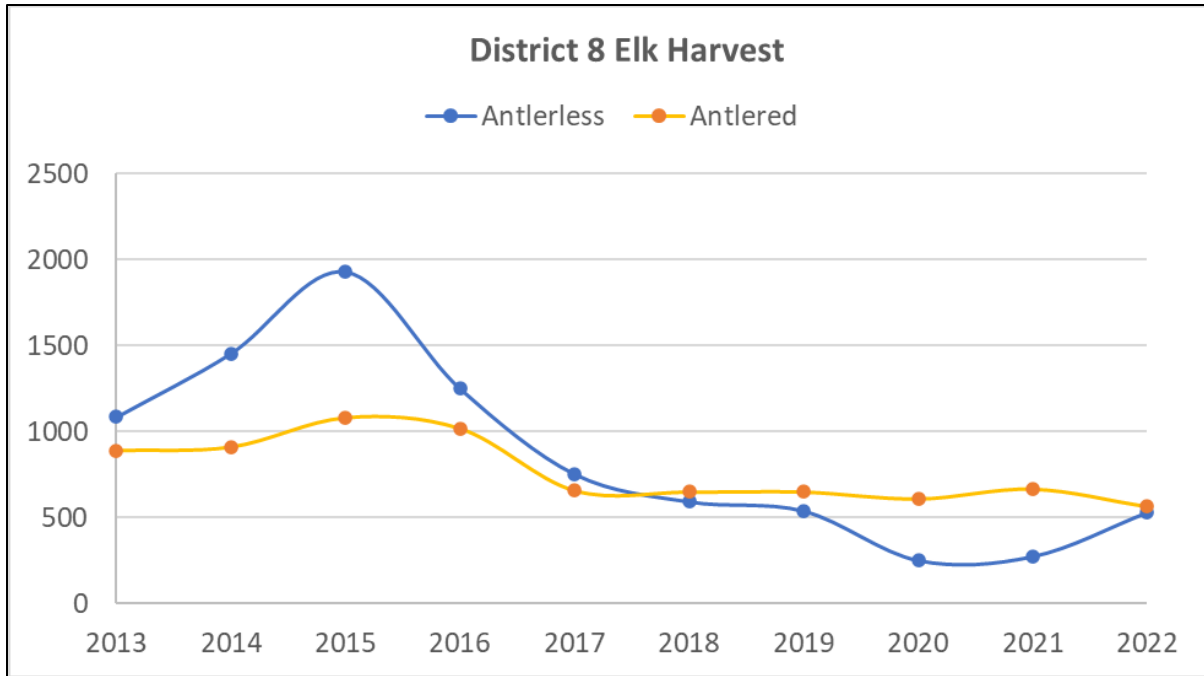


Figure 3. Combined general season and special permit harvest trend of antlerless (cow) and antlered (bull) elk within District 8.

DEER

All District 8 GMUs are managed using mule deer hunting regulations. However, the area boasts a combination of mule deer, mule-black-tailed hybrids, and black-tailed deer. This species diversity makes hunting especially interesting since these species all use slightly different elevations and habitat types. Deer harvest in District 8 hit its lowest levels in 2017-2018 and has since rebounded slightly (Figure 5). The average general season hunter's success is about 7% compared to a statewide average of 23%. The 2023 harvest is hard to predict, but in the past a decreased deer harvest was linked to widespread drought across eastern Washington. In contrast it appears that the two consecutive harsh winters in the area did not appear to increase the mortality of radio collared individuals. Harvest stats and hunter numbers by GMU over the last three years are shown in Table 2.



Figure 4. A doe with her two fawns during fall in Region 3.

Hunter numbers have declined with the reduced deer population. Many of the remaining modern firearm hunters now set up camp and claim their favorite spot for elk season. If you are looking for relatively low hunter densities, consider the higher elevations of District 8. Harvest and hunter numbers are typically highest in GMUs: 335 (Teaway), 328 (Naneum), 340 (Manastash), and 342 (Umtanum).

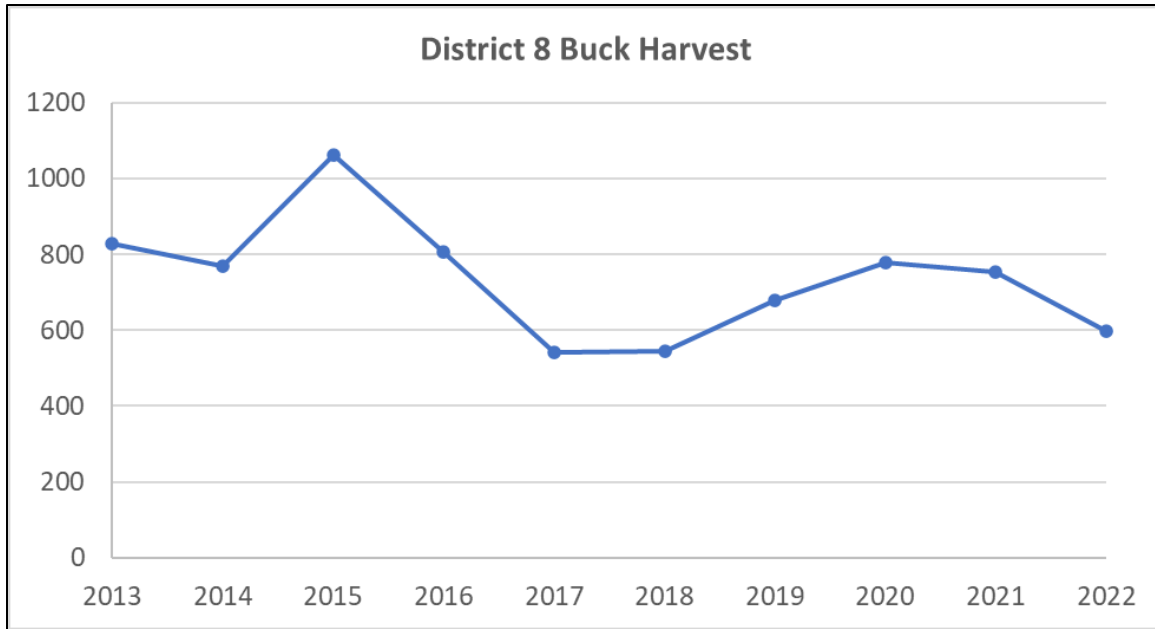


Figure 5. General seasons buck harvest in District 8 from 2013-2022.

Table 2: Total buck harvest, number of hunters, and overall success rate for the 2022-23 season by GMU.

| GMU | Buck Harvest | Hunters | Success |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 328 | 122 | 1297 | 9% |
| 330 | 4 | 18 | 24% |
| 334 | 33 | 292 | 11% |
| 335 | 198 | 1588 | 12% |
| 336 | 47 | 741 | 6% |
| 340 | 66 | 868 | 8% |
| 342 | 84 | 998 | 8% |
| 346 | 23 | 708 | 3% |
| 352 | 15 | 443 | 3% |
| 356 | 5 | 206 | 2% |
| 360 | 10 | 355 | 3% |
| 364 | 8 | 375 | 2% |
| 368 | 55 | 1033 | 5% |
| Total | 669 | 8922 | 7% |

BEAR

Black bears live in diverse forested habitats throughout the state, from coastal rainforests to the dry woodlands of the Cascades' eastern slopes. They are found in hardwood and coniferous forests, meadows, alder thickets, burns, clear cuts, and sub-alpine parkland. Core bear habitat can occur in all of Washington's vegetative zone except the shrub steppe, which is considered fringe habitat. Good habitat typically includes water or wetlands. In District 8, they primarily occur in the forested areas in western and northern District 8. The Teanaway GMU 335 has the most bear habitat in the district, the most bear hunters, and averages the highest harvest and hunter success rate in the area. Black bears tend to move to higher elevations in the fall, following the progression of seasonally available foods, so when scouting, look for food items such as huckleberries and other berry-producing plants or acorns which occur in some areas of Yakima County. Recent wildfires have impacted bear habitat in several places throughout the District, so while these areas cannot currently support a large bear population, as the habitat recovers, it will be better suited for bears and other wildlife.

In 2023, WDFW biologists conducted a population monitoring effort in GMU 352, 356, and 360 to obtain a more accurate population density estimate for this area. Using hair snare corrals

(Figure 6), biologists collected more than 600 hair samples.

These samples are being processed and will be sent to a lab for genetic testing. With this information, an estimate of the number of bears per 100 km² (i.e., # of bears per 39 mi²) for the GMUs will be calculated. This, coupled with the harvest reports and age data obtained from premolar teeth, will improve local estimates of age and sex ratios and population size and trends that guide bear harvest



Figure 6: Example of the hair snare corral system used during the bear density estimation study.

guidelines. Most recent monitoring efforts produced a median age of harvested bears in D8 as 3.5 for males and five for females, consistent with the statewide numbers.

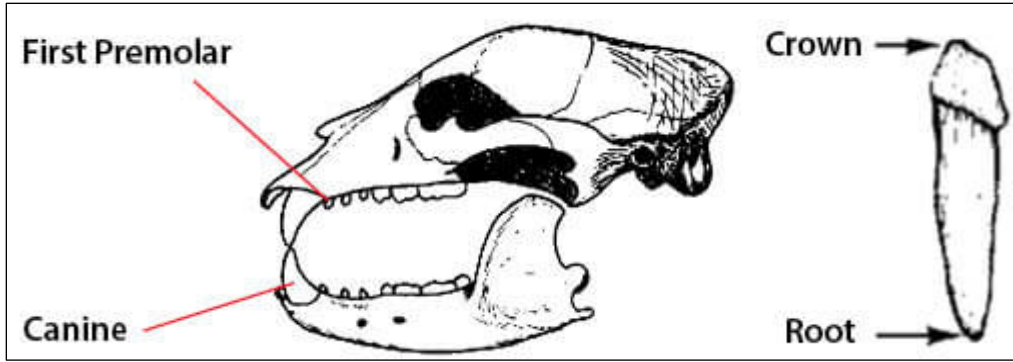


Figure 7. The location of a black bear's first premolar required tooth submission to WDFW.

Fall black bear season begins Aug. 1 and runs through Nov. 15. Hunters are strongly urged not to shoot a female black bear with cubs. During the fall females may be accompanied by cubs (weighing 30-50 lbs.) which tend to lag when traveling, so please observe and be patient before shooting. All successful fall black bear hunters statewide **must** submit a black bear premolar tooth per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department within five (5) days of harvest or by Dec. 1, 2023. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw. Tooth envelopes are available at all WDFW offices.

Bear hunters are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2023–2024 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

Table 3. Bear harvest in District 8 by GMU for 2022-23 season.

| GMU | HARVEST |
|-----|---------|
| 328 | 13 |
| 329 | 4 |
| 334 | 0 |
| 335 | 54 |
| 336 | 15 |
| 340 | 10 |
| 342 | 3 |
| 346 | 7 |
| 352 | 5 |
| 356 | 7 |
| 360 | 6 |
| 364 | 7 |
| 368 | 20 |
| 371 | 0 |
| 372 | 0 |

COUGAR

Most cougars in the district are harvested by deer and elk hunters who opportunistically cross paths with a cougar during general deer/elk seasons and have a cougar tag. A hunter who wishes to harvest a cougar must possess a valid big game license, including the cougar species option, before harvesting a cat. The primary prey for cougars in the district is mule deer, so hunters who spend time in areas with more deer will increase their chances of seeing and harvesting a cougar. Independently, cougar hunting is a fun and challenging experience. The



Figure 8: An adult cougar peers from behind a snow-covered tree.

early season is open from Sept. 1 – Dec. 31. The late season starts on Jan. 1 and continues until harvest guidelines (Table 4) are reached. All GMUs close on April 1 if their harvest guideline has not been met that season. The hunter is responsible for verifying if the late hunting season for the GMU they are hunting is open or closed by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline (1-866-364-4868) or visiting the WDFW webpage for [Cougar Hunting Area Openings and Closures](#). The hotline and webpage will be updated weekly beginning Jan. 1, 2024. The use of dogs to recreationally pursue and harvest cougars is illegal statewide.

Table 4. District 8 GMU cougar harvest guidelines

| HUNT AREA | HARVEST GUIDELINE |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 328, 329, 335 | 8-10 |
| 330, 334, 371, 372 | N/A* |
| 336, 340, 342, 346 | 9-11 |
| 352, 356, 360, 364, 368 | 7-9 |

Male cougars are territorial and use a broader range when deer and elk are dispersed in summer and early fall. Deer and elk typically migrate back to the winter range by mid-November. Cougars will follow, and the highest densities can be found in lower elevations in late fall and winter. One popular cougar hunting technique is to use calls. This is most successful when snow is on the ground and tracks can be found. Rather than following the cougar hoping to find it, hunters call, trying to get the animal to come to them. Several calls work. During deer and elk seasons, hunters might consider a fawn bleat call, which typically won't spook deer or elk. Without snow, it can be challenging to know where to start. Rather than working large

blocks of timber, consider timbered stringers. Cougars inhabit open terrain but prefer cover. Cougars hunting open shrubsteppe will likely hide in timber stringers during the day. Cougars inhabit nearly every portion of the district, but some online hunting groups post where cats have been seen recently. Checking those sites may improve your success.

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually <80 lbs.) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. Hunters should be aware of how to identify young from adults by consulting the [Cougar](#) Brochure prior to hunting. Females can have dependent young throughout the year. Since cougars are solitary, observing multiple tracks suggests a female with offspring. However, smaller kittens may not be visible to hunters so please observe and be patient before shooting.

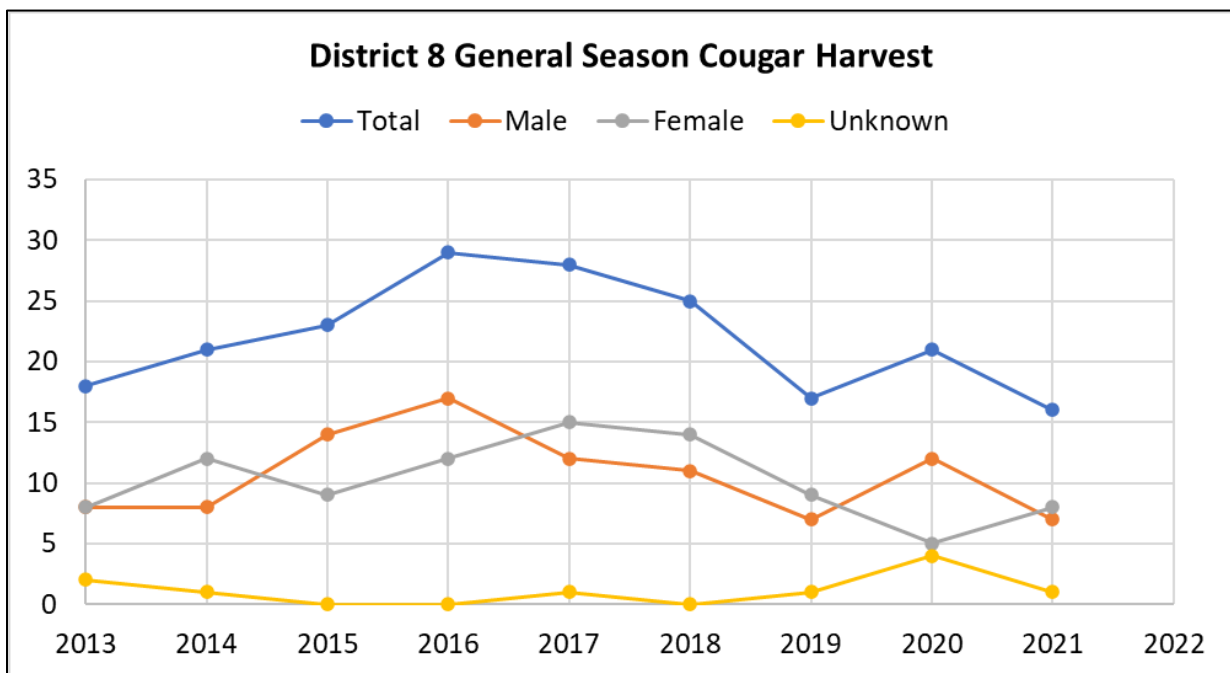


Figure 9. General season cougar harvest in District 8 from 2013-2022.

WATERFOWL

The Washington Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey is conducted yearly and is an index of breeding abundance since all areas of the state cannot be sampled. This year's survey was conducted May 1 – May 5 in eastern Washington. Parts of the district are within the Yakima and Columbia Irrigated survey stratum (Figure 10).

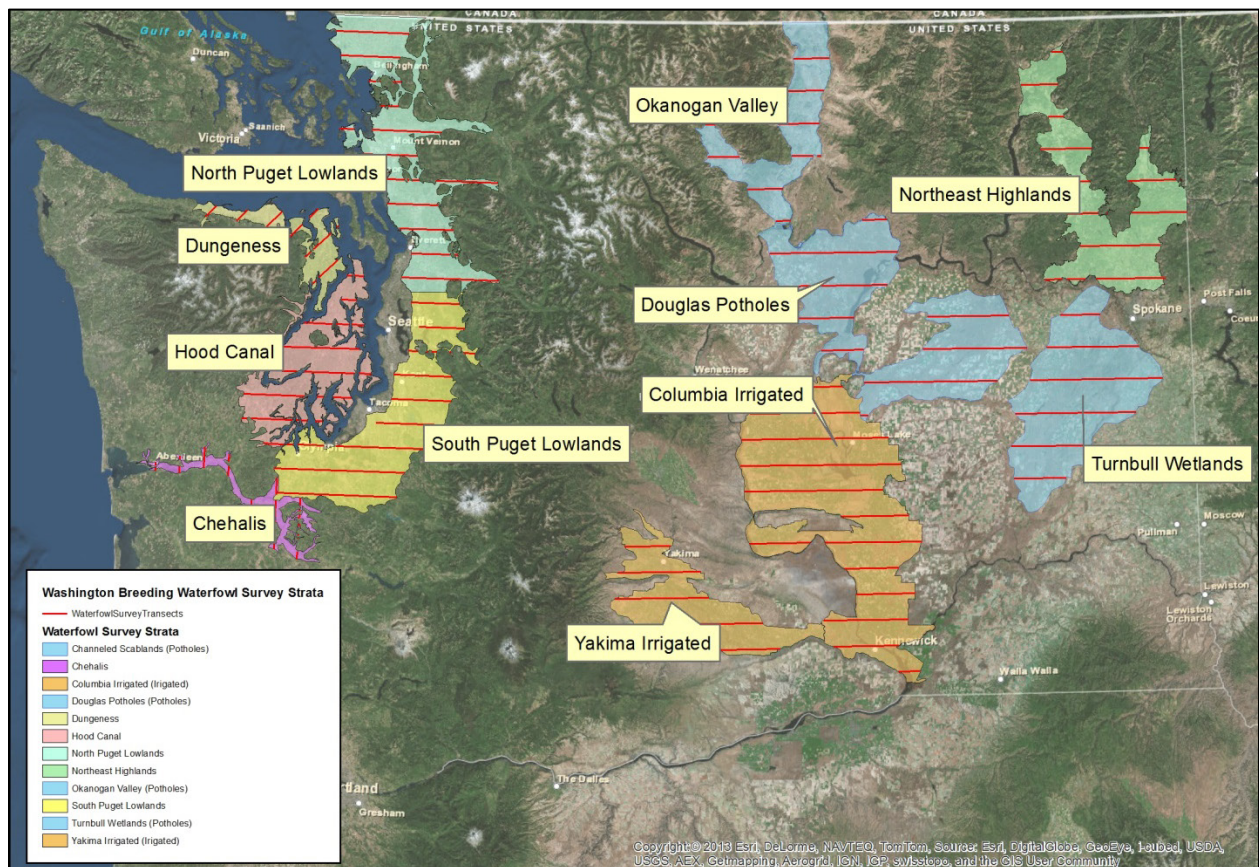


Figure 10. Washington State breeding waterfowl strata and long-term Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey transects and survey strata.

Statewide spring precipitation values in 2023 were generally drier than average but were not as dry as last year. However, only 6% of the area of the two survey strata were classified as being abnormally dry. April brought enough rainfall to form widespread areas of standing water during the survey period but may have occurred too late to increase nesting success. The statewide population estimate of all ducks was 7% less than the 2022 survey but 4% higher than the long-term average. The 2023 eastern Washington estimate of 107,090 was 20% lower than the previous year and the long-term average.

Mallards are the most abundant breeding and wintering waterfowl species in Washington. Unsurprisingly the estimate of breeding mallards in 2023 in eastern Washington was 42,999,

which is 5% lower than 2022 and 26% lower than the long-term average. This was the first year that western Washington had a higher mallard estimate than eastern Washington. One factor contributing to the high mallard estimate in western Washington, was the high number of grouped mallards. In 2023, grouped mallards comprised 27% of the statewide BPI compared to 8% in 2022, a more typical year. Ultimately, ducks need water, and the extreme drought throughout the west and prairie potholes negatively impacted populations in 2020, 2021, and 2022.



Figure 11: Waterfowl hunter adjusting decoys.

In District 8, fall and winter populations have been declining. Harvest peaked at around 50,000 birds in 2012 and has declined to roughly 20,000 in recent years (Figure 12). During the 2022-23 season harvest exceeded the 10-year average (29,693 birds) but did not exceed the 20-year average (33,038 birds). It is somewhat surprising harvest held above 20,000 during the 2022-23 season. There appeared to be few ducks, especially mallards, in the district. Harvest estimates were either inflated, or hunters took many more teal and ring-necked ducks. As row crops like corn are converted for hop cultivation, orchards, and vineyards, there is little reason for large ducks to stay in the district.

The best waterfowl hunting is in the lower Yakima Valley, especially on Yakama Nation (YN) lands, which tries to increase waterfowl hunting opportunities along the Yakima River every year. Review their [Feel Free to Hunt map](#) annually, use Google Earth to pre-scout, and don't be afraid to explore. YN's Satus Wildlife Area is the most popular and is open to hunting Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays. The Satus Wildlife Area is very popular due to relatively easy access. Hunting can be just as good on Mosebar ponds and north Satus.

Public hunting can be found on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) (SSWA) and [Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge](#). The Sunnyside Unit of the SSWA has several managed wetlands which include the Rice Paddy Wetlands, Johnson Wetland, and the North and South Haystack Ponds. There are three blinds on the SSWA, all of which require the use of waders while putting out decoys. The blinds offer mostly duck hunting with a rare flock of geese passing by. These are

first-come first-serve, with ADA hunters having priority if the blind is occupied 1 1/2 hours prior to daylight. Infrastructure problems in recent years have left one or more blinds dry. For information on which blinds have water and to obtain the combination to the lock, call the SSWA at 509-545-2028. The wildlife area also has several agriculture fields with small grains that can also provide some field hunting opportunities. Harvest and hunter days on Sunnyside have been low and are likely influenced by the challenging nature of managing dense vegetation and low water levels during drought years.

Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge has also had difficulty filling wetlands, especially in October. Water can only be pumped from Toppenish to fill wetlands in the Robins Unit if flows exceed 30 cubic feet per second. The Pumphouse wetlands depend on Toppenish Creek side channels to fill at higher creek levels. Flows in those side channels have been unpredictable in recent years. At a gauge height of three feet, the channels should fill. Hunters can check flow/levels at the [USGS website](#). Summer flows in Toppenish Creek are always low. Significant fall rain is needed, which usually doesn't come until November. A private hunt club due east of the refuge that attracted large numbers of ducks to the area was abandoned a few years ago. Few ducks were seen leaving the reserve and flying over the Toppenish Refuge last year. Before making a trip to Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge, calling the refuge at 509-865-2405 for conditions would be best.

Band returns suggest many locally produced ducks are staying in the Yakima Valley. Early season success is likely tied to regional production. The May mallard breeding population was down >40% in eastern Washington. There is no information on 2022 production. Banding takes place in August after this report is written.

Late season success is probably more dependent on naive northern migrants. The USFWS surveyed northern areas this year, but population estimates aren't published until August. The first cold wave is typically around Thanksgiving. Once ponds and sloughs freeze over, the Yakima River can be productive. For the best late-season hunting, watch for significant weather changes. If there is a quick thaw and rain, new ducks enter the valley, and a week or so of good hunting can be had before the birds find the safety of private land and the reserves. A freeze and thaw may also fill wetlands that had been dry earlier in the year.

Check out the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information about migratory waterfowl and upland game hunting. There are some bird hunting opportunities that get underway in September so hunters can start making plans now by checking out the upcoming seasons. Additionally, an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting in Washington can be found on the WDFW [Let's Go waterfowl hunting webpage](#).

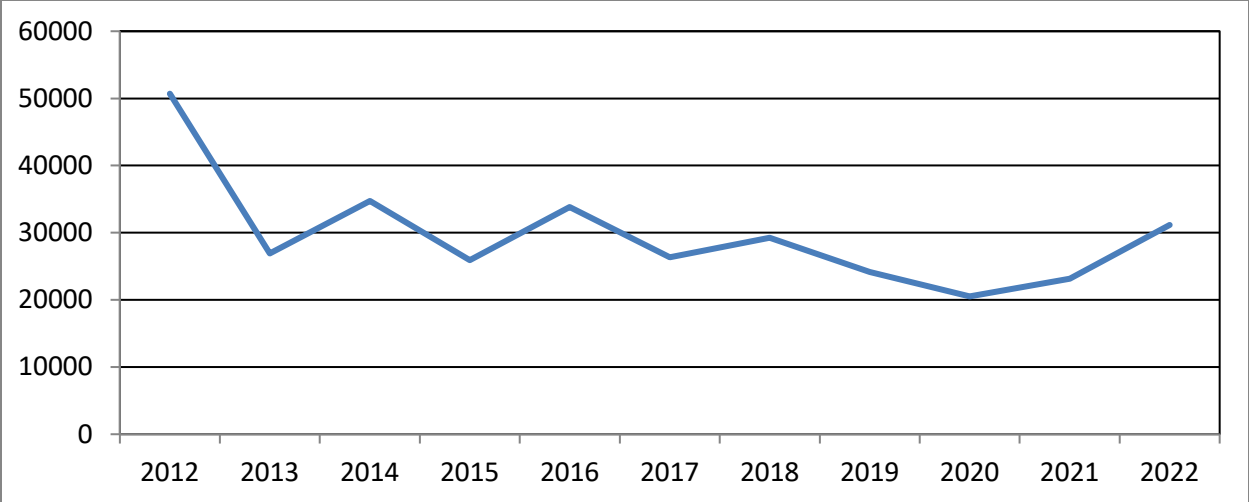


Figure 12. Duck harvest estimates in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

DOVE

Yakima County typically ranks second in the state for dove harvest. Harvest had declined until recruitment increased in 2020-2021 (Figure 13). The recruitment was obvious at banding stations in 2022, however no dove banding occurred in District 8 in 2023 because of staffing capacity issues.

To hunt mourning doves, hunters must possess a small game license and a state migratory bird permit. The season runs from Sep. 1 – Oct. 30, with a daily bag limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45. The best hunting success in the lower Yakima Valley occurs on private land. Better public hunting can be found on the Yakama Nation Reservation. Yakama Nation grows wheat on portions of the Yakama Nation's Satus Wildlife Area. Information on hunting on Yakama Nation land is available on their [website](#). The [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) has public dove hunting, but registration boxes suggest a relatively poor harvest. Hunters typically average <1 bird per day. The plentiful agricultural fields on the wildlife area provide abundant opportunities for dove hunting.

Dove numbers in the area often depend on the weather pattern. Warm weather is needed to keep most birds from migrating out of the valley. Cooler weather often hits the area by late August or early September. Despite a 30-day season, the average dove hunter only spends three days, usually opening weekend, pursuing doves. It is best to scout a few days before the season to find birds.



Figure 13. Comparison between a mourning and Eurasian collared dove

Many hunters ask about Eurasian collared dove hunting opportunities, as the season extends year-round without bag limits. Eurasian collared dove numbers have increased dramatically, but there was a die-off in 2018-2019, probably due to Avian Paramyxovirus-1. The virus was widespread nationwide in Eurasian collared doves, and populations have not rebounded. No information is collected on collared dove harvest, nor are there surveys. The difficulty for hunters is that most collared doves are in urban areas. Collared doves behave more like rock

doves (pigeons) than mourning doves. Some hunters occasionally find opportunities at roost sites and in a few fields, but good hunting is rare. Eurasian collared dove harvest is more of a bonus while hunting other birds rather than a target for most hunters. Making a trip to target Eurasian collared doves may be frustrating.

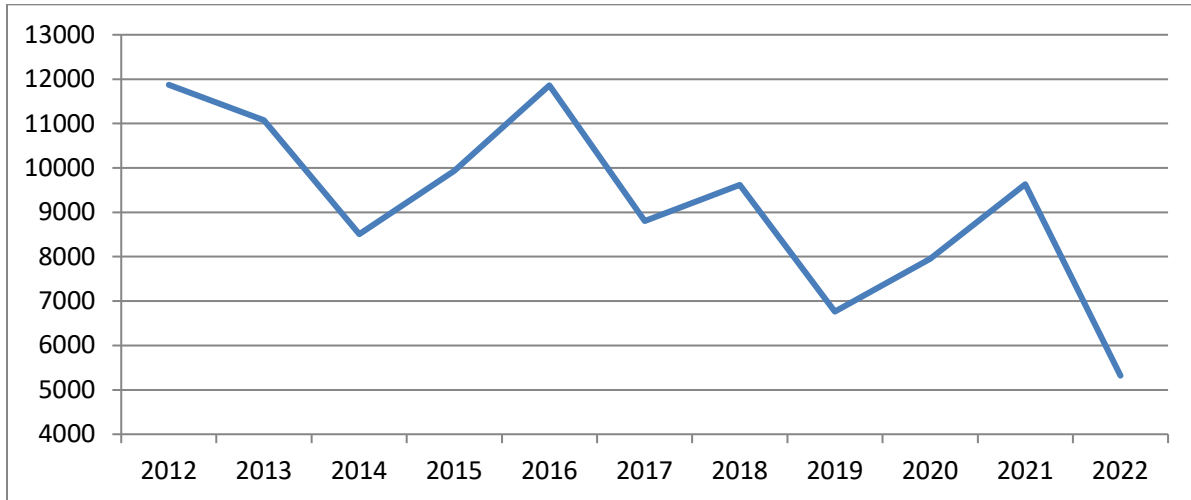


Figure 14. Dove harvest estimates in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

FOREST GROUSE

Traditionally, the harvest in District 8 was made up of primarily blue grouse. However, 45% of last season's harvest was made up of ruffed grouse. While around 30% of harvest was of blue grouse (sooty or dusky), and 5% spruce grouse. The remaining 20% of harvest was reported as unknown species. Grouse harvest in District 8 hit an all-time low in 2021 (Figure 16) but rebounded slightly during the 2022 season



Figure 15: A lone grouse hiding in the understory.

but was still significantly lower than long-term average. Some of the decline over the last two seasons was likely a result of fires and the associated closures. Hunters that reported hunting only took 0.17 birds per day (~6 days per grouse harvested) which is slightly higher than the year prior. There is no information on the 2023 hatch, but it would be hard for novices to find some grouse in the district.

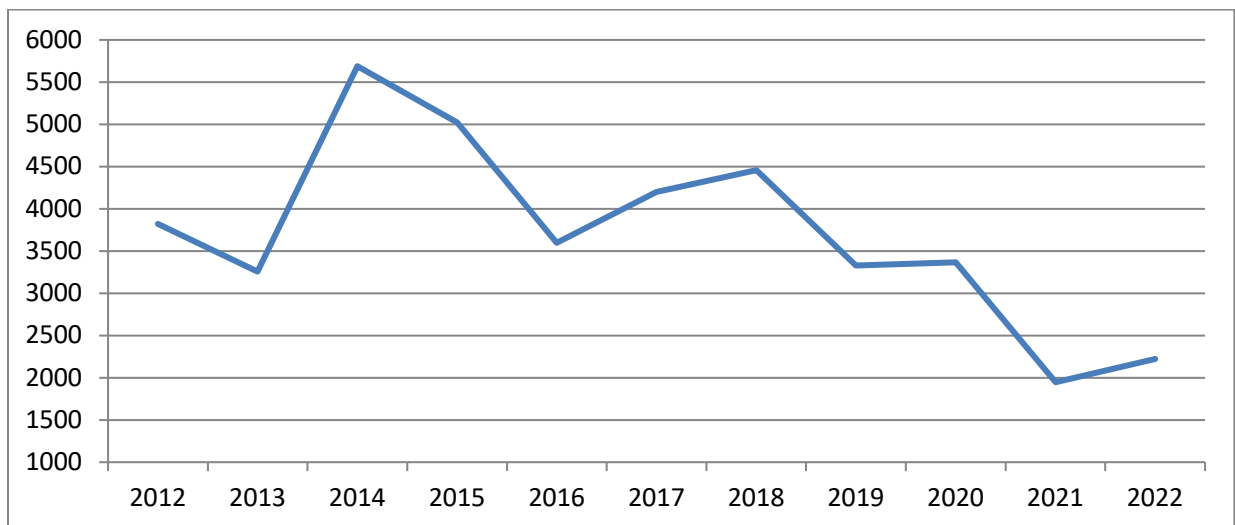


Figure 16. Harvest estimates for forest grouse in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

A common tactic used by many grouse hunters is driving roads in the morning and evening, especially when the season first opens. Research suggests brood hens and young are most vulnerable in early September. During the 2021-2023 season setting rulemaking process, the WDFW Commission adopted a decision to delay the forest grouse season two weeks from the

original opening date of Sept.1 to the new season dates of **Sept. 15 – Jan. 15**. WDFW biologists recommended the rule based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. Setting the season back to Sept. 15 helps protect brood hens that are more vulnerable to harvest during early September. More information is [available in this 2021 blog post](#). Hunters serious about finding grouse should look for areas with low densities of open roads and hike morning or evening.

WDFW FOREST GROUSE WING & TAIL COLLECTION

Biologists collect wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse throughout the season using designated collection sites. This collection effort contributes to a long-term statewide dataset that allows for a better evaluation of population trends and age-ratio data necessary for the local management of forest grouse species. Grouse hunters in District 8 can help with this effort by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse they harvest into one of our collection barrels located statewide ([WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection sites](#)). In District 8, collection sites are at the following locations:

- **Coleman Creek** - Coleman Creek Road at the entrance to Naneum State Forest.
GPS: 47.10453, -120.39865
- **Taneum Creek** - W Taneum Road, Entrance to L.T. Murray Wildlife Area.
GPS: 47.08702, -120.79056
- **Nasty Creek** - Junction of North Fork and Nasty Creek Roads.
GPS: 46.56476, -120.91966
- **Oak Creek Rd** - Junction of Oak Creek Road (1400) and Hwy 12
GPS: 46.72399, -120.81432

Please be sure to use the provided bags at the site and to fill out all necessary information. If these locations are inconvenient for hunters, we suggest looking through the statewide wing barrel site list on our website's [Forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) webpage or calling your local, [regional office](#) for information.

PHEASANT

Pheasant harvest in District 8 has declined about 50% over the last ten years and recently leveled out at very low levels (Figure 8). Habitat loss due to conversion from fallow land to crops has been identified as the reason for the decline as well as the decline of hunter participation. The best pheasant hunting in the district is around the irrigated farmland along the Yakima River in Yakima County. A large part of the irrigated farmland in Yakima County is located on the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation. Hunters interested in hunting on tribal lands should contact the office of the Yakama Nation (YN) at (509) 865-5121. For maps of WDFW-owned and managed land along the Yakima River, contact the Yakima Regional office at (509) 575-2740. There has been no change in this trend.

Wild pheasant populations in District 8 successfully hatch young when moisture is high. This year saw below-average moisture levels during the spring nesting period, which may decrease the overall wild pheasant recruitment. Additionally, several consecutive years of poor moisture levels and the effects on wild pheasant reproduction are a small cause for concern. The reality is that wild pheasants contribute little to the total harvest in the district. In Kittitas County (no wild birds), 490 pheasants were released, and harvest was estimated at 1100. However, For county level harvest especially, it's important to look at the confidence intervals, not just the point estimate. With small sample sizes per county, the estimate can be driven by a small number of hunters. This should be less of a problem with the new harvest survey, but still will occur where sample sizes are small. The harvest estimates are most valuable for looking at trends, not precise numbers.



Figure 17. A successful youth hunt in District 8

No pheasant surveys are conducted in District 8; thus, there is no information on the 2023 wild pheasant nesting season. Released pen-raised pheasants are the district's main source of opportunity for hunters.

About 1200 birds will be released at the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) and 500 birds at the Green Gate Entrance on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#) (also referred to as Whiskey

Dick). To hunt pheasants in Eastern Washington a small game license is required. The small game license is \$40.50, it is \$22.00 if purchased with any big game license. Youths under 16 can purchase the small game license for \$18.50, or \$8.80 with a big game license. Birds are released for youth and general season openers. To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, non-toxic shot is required for all upland bird, dove and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. More detailed information can be found in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) pamphlet. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). The use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

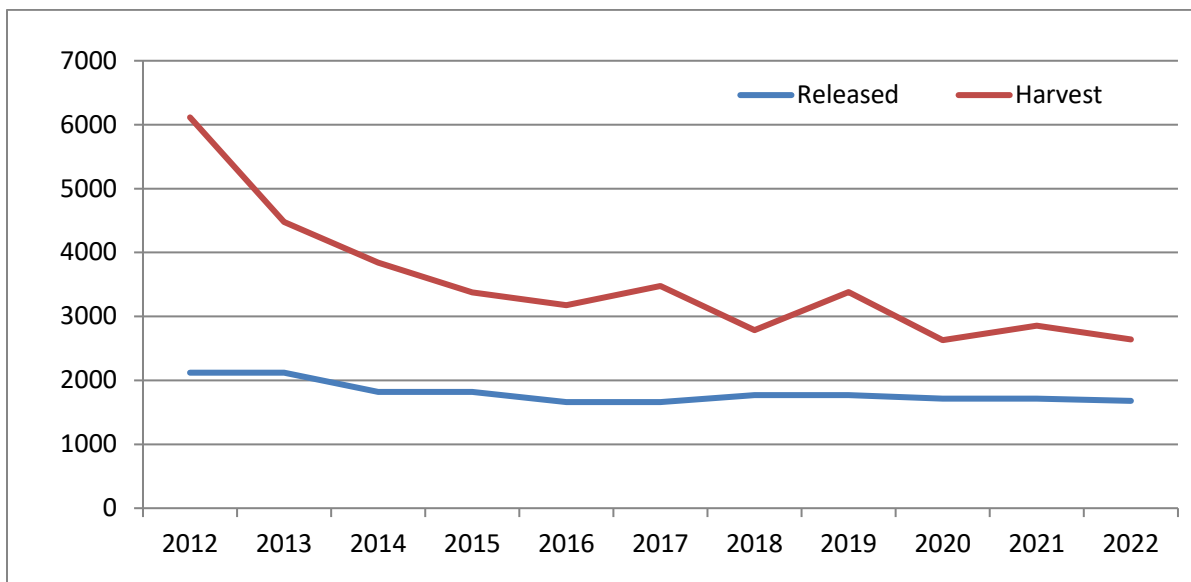


Figure 18. The number of released pen-raised pheasants and harvest estimates based on hunter reporting for pheasants in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

QUAIL



Figure 19: Quail perched atop a fence post.

California quail can be found in most non-timbered portions of the district. The best habitat and highest number of quail are typically in the lower Yakima Valley. The trend has been for declining total quail harvest for the last ten years (Figure 20), and 2021 was the lowest harvest ever recorded. Last season, harvest rebounded significantly. A variety of factors, from deep snow (2016-17) drought (2020-2021), and fires have reduced quail populations. Additionally, closures of public land because of fires in the 2021 and 2022 season may have had some effect on the decline in harvest.

Quail in riparian draws surrounded by sagebrush are getting hard to find. Most of the quail habitat in the Wenas Wildlife Area has burned in recent years. The best chance of finding good coveys will be near rivers and irrigated land. The best quail hunting opportunity in District 8 can be found along the lower Yakima River on the [Yakama Nation](#). WDFW has parcels along the river on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area \(SSWA\)](#), but registration boxes show poor harvest. Roughly 87% of upland bird hunters are unsuccessful at harvesting quail on SSWA, and harvest averages 0.16 per day.

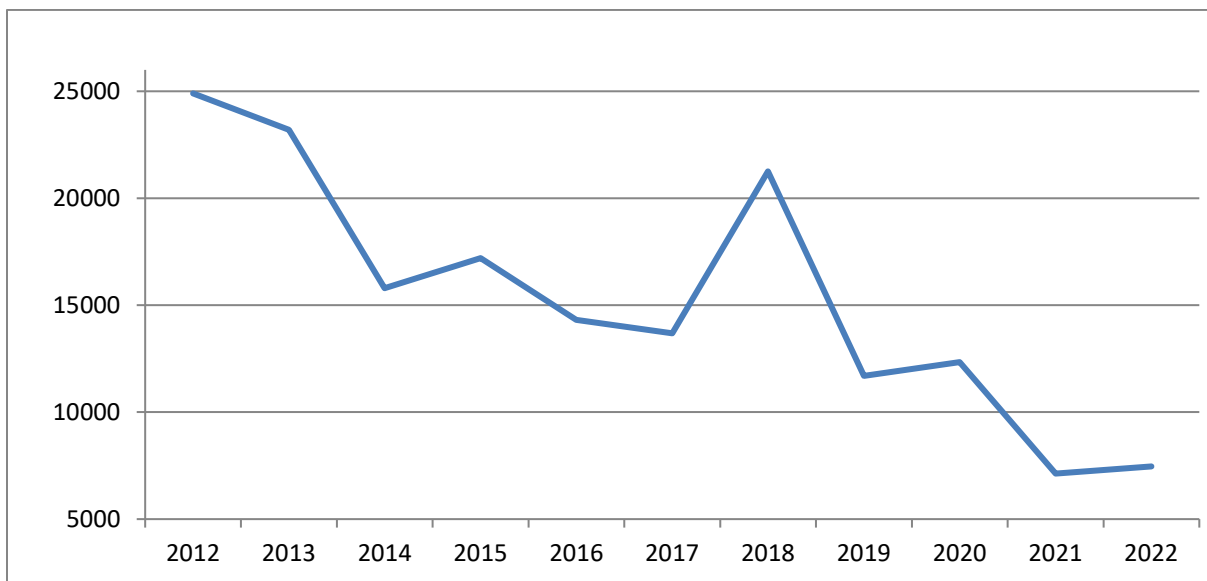


Figure 20. Harvest estimates for quail in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

TURKEY

[Turkey](#) harvest has been increasing since 2014 (Figure 21). The best hunting early in the spring is on private lands in the lower elevations of GMU 335, which is why most of the District 8 harvest comes from GMU 335 (Table 5). However, this GMU sees 40% of the district's hunter days spent a field. By May, some birds will move into higher elevations which opens opportunity on the Teanaway Community Forest. The remainder of GMUs yield a harvest of fewer than 30 birds. The 2022 season saw the highest hunter success rates in GMU 346 (25%), 336 (23%), and 340 (19%).

Turkey hunting can be one of the most exciting and shareable hunts. Adequate scouting and preparation are important for hunter success. Finding where birds roost at night and sneaking into a spot nearby before sunrise is a common tactic used by die hard turkey hunters. Because the hunting season aligns with the spring breeding season, male turkeys respond well to calls and decoys. They are trying to attract a mate at this time, so males will strut to display their dominance and will occasionally fight with other males often resulting in a very entertaining and memorable hunt. A great resource for new turkey hunters is [The Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) document released by WDFW's hunter education program.



Figure 21: First-time turkey hunter found success in Cle Elum – Photo credit: Orlando Naranjo

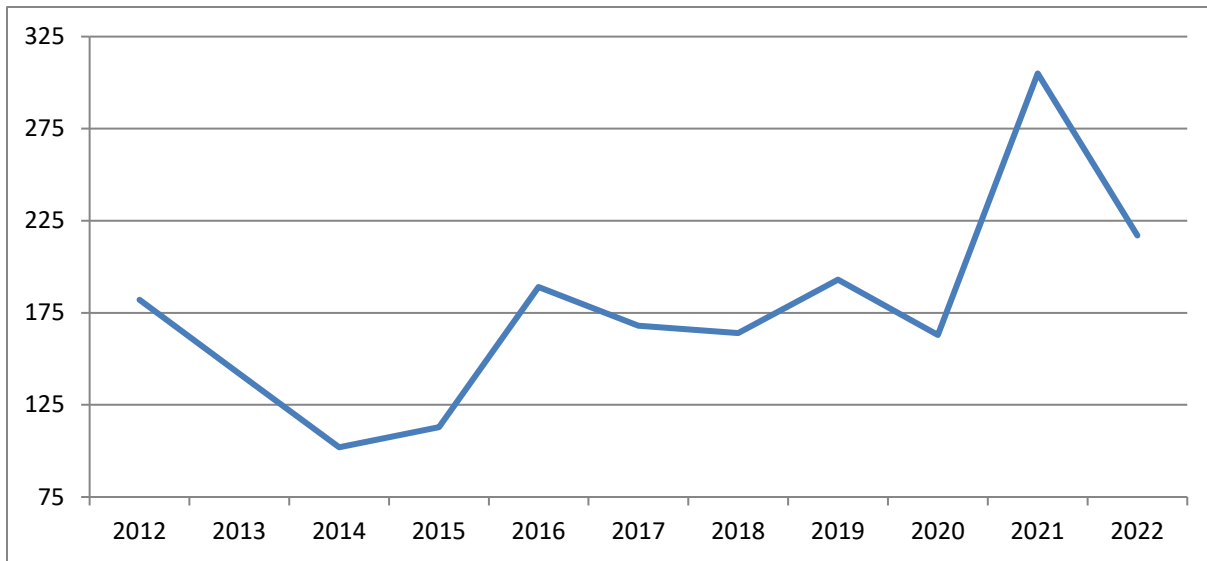


Figure 22. Harvest estimates for turkey in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2012-2022.

Table 5: District 8 spring turkey harvest by GMU for the 2019-2022 seasons.

| GMU | GMU Name | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | AVG |
|-----|-------------------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| 328 | NANEUM | 25 | 17 | 27 | 24 | 23 |
| 329 | QUILOMENE | 16 | 11 | 25 | 3 | 14 |
| 334 | ELLENSBURG | 17 | 14 | 20 | 20 | 18 |
| 335 | TEANAWAY | 70 | 59 | 112 | 84 | 81 |
| 336 | TANEUM | 20 | 26 | 42 | 33 | 30 |
| 340 | MANASTASH | 16 | 9 | 32 | 25 | 21 |
| 342 | UMTANUM | 16 | 18 | 17 | 13 | 16 |
| 346 | LITTLE NACHES | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 352 | NILE | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| 356 | BUMPING | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 360 | BETHEL | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| 364 | RIMROCK | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| 368 | COWICHE | 10 | 4 | 10 | 9 | 8 |
| 372 | Rattlesnake Hills | 2 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 4 |
| | Total | 195 | 165 | 305 | 217 | |

PARTRIDGE (CHUKAR/HUNGARIAN)

Partridge harvest in the district has been decreasing since 2018 (Figure 24) with drier conditions. As hunter numbers and harvest decline it makes estimating total harvest more difficult and less accurate. This is why it is important for all hunters to accurately report their harvest, even if it was zero.

History has shown that abundant snow and a wet, cold spring produces a lot of vegetation and birds. There are few three-year-old game birds, so the population is composed primarily of hatch-year birds. Precipitation came late in 2022, and the spring was cold. Hatches in 2022 were better than in 2021 but were late because of the delay in precipitation. This year, we experienced a dry early spring, with ample water later than usual. This may result in similar conditions to last year. The best hunting in recent years has been on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#) and the [Colockum Wildlife Area](#).



Figure 23: A successful chukar hunt – Photo credit: Marissa Sandoval

The [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC) is very popular with long-time chukar hunters. Much of YTC has burned in the last decade, and 2021 was an extreme drought year for the area. The hatch in 2022 was better, and this year's wet spring may result in an increase in local populations.

To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

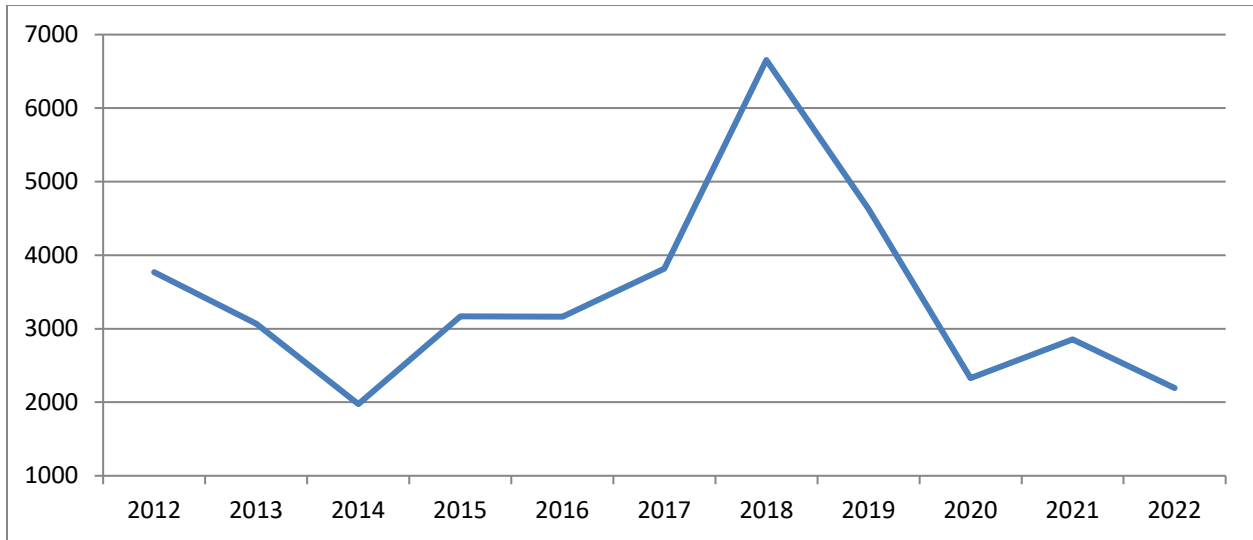


Figure 24. Combined harvest estimates for chukar and Hungarian partridge in District 8 from 2012-2022.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permits for any GMU and Permit Hunt for all game species are online at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-harvest

Updated detailed information on population size, compositions, or trends of game species is available through annual [Game Status and Trend Reports](#). You can use the search tool on the online document to quickly find the species and population of interest.

WDFW has released a Hunt Planner Web Map to search for game seasons and private land access around the state: geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/. A good starting point for hunters looking for a place to hunt is the Web Map, which provides hunters with information about public and private lands access points, GMU boundaries, species area units, hunting seasons, pheasant release sites, water access points, landscape features such as roads and topography, public lands, and much more (Figure 25).

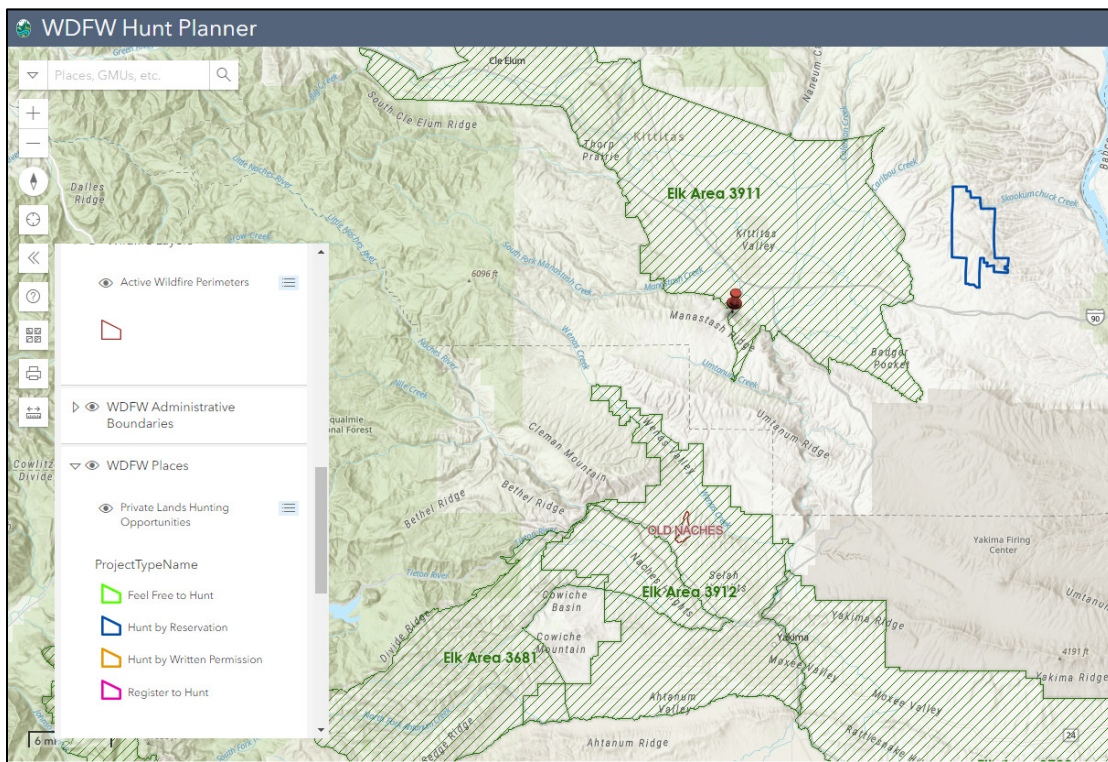


Figure 25. Depiction of active wildfire perimeter, private lands access, and elk area layers in District 8 from WDFW's Regulations Web Map. Pink, Green, Orange, and Blue bordered parcels are lands in the various public lands access programs.

Together with the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and private landowners, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) cooperatively manages many roads within Yakima and Kittitas counties under a "[Green Dot](#)" system. This system provides access

for camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, and ATV and off-road vehicle riding, while protecting sensitive habitat from damage caused by motorized vehicles. The maps can be used in an internet browser on a computer or phone or can be accessed in the field with your smartphone by downloading the “Avenza Maps” app to your phone, then download one of the 38-inch-by-26-inch Green Dot area maps listed on this page. When you open the map in the app, you'll be able to see your location on the map to aid in navigation. Hard copies of Green Dot maps (in useable black-and-white format) are available at individual wildlife area headquarters, and the following locations:

WDFW Yakima Regional Office

1701 S. 24th Ave
Yakima, WA 98902
509-575-2740

WA DNR Southeast Regional Office

713 Bowers Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926
509-925-8510