

# 2024 District 14 Hunting Prospects

## Skagit and Whatcom counties

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Washington  
Department of  
**FISH &  
WILDLIFE**

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Cover photo: flock of snow geese in flight by Robert Waddell.

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## District 14 general overview

District 14, comprised of Skagit and Whatcom counties, is the most northwestern in the state. The district's western extent is associated with the marine waters of Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia and features a vibrant and varied agricultural land base. The lowlands of the Skagit Flats and western Whatcom County support abundant wildlife species and populations. Most notable are the diverse and large flocks of resident and wintering waterfowl species, offering world-class hunting opportunities.

The Skagit and Nooksack rivers are the two primary river systems in the district. They are fed by the Cascade Mountains and flow into Puget Sound. Most lower elevation forested uplands within these watersheds are owned or managed by private timber companies and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). These lower-elevation working forests provide reasonable to excellent big game hunting opportunities for elk, black-tailed deer, black bear, and cougar. Federally owned public lands, such as the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park, comprise many higher elevation forest lands within the district, including the Ross Lake National Recreation Area, where hunting is allowed. These federal lands are associated with the North Cascade Mountains and support game species such as mountain goats, black bears, and black-tailed deer.

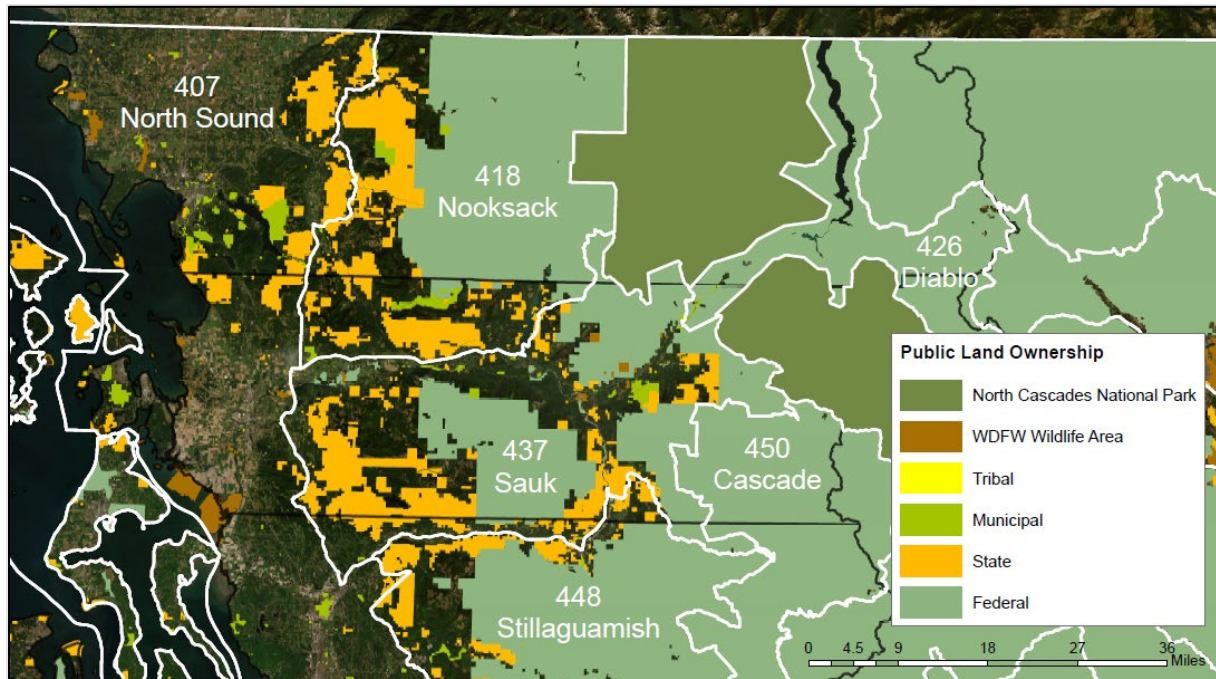
We suggest the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) [Hunt Planner web map](#) for access information and e-scouting.



Photo 1: View of Mt. Baker in Whatcom County. Photo by Robert Waddell.

From north to south, the core game management units (GMUs) that comprise District 14 are Nooksack and Diablo (GMUs 418 and 426), which are mainly in Whatcom County, and Sauk (GMU 437), which is almost entirely within Skagit County. Portions of North Sound, Stillaguamish, and Cascade (GMUs 407, 448, and 450, respectively) also fall within the district boundaries (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Game Management Units (GMUs) in Skagit and Whatcom counties.



Among the many hunting opportunities within this district, perhaps the most notable are:

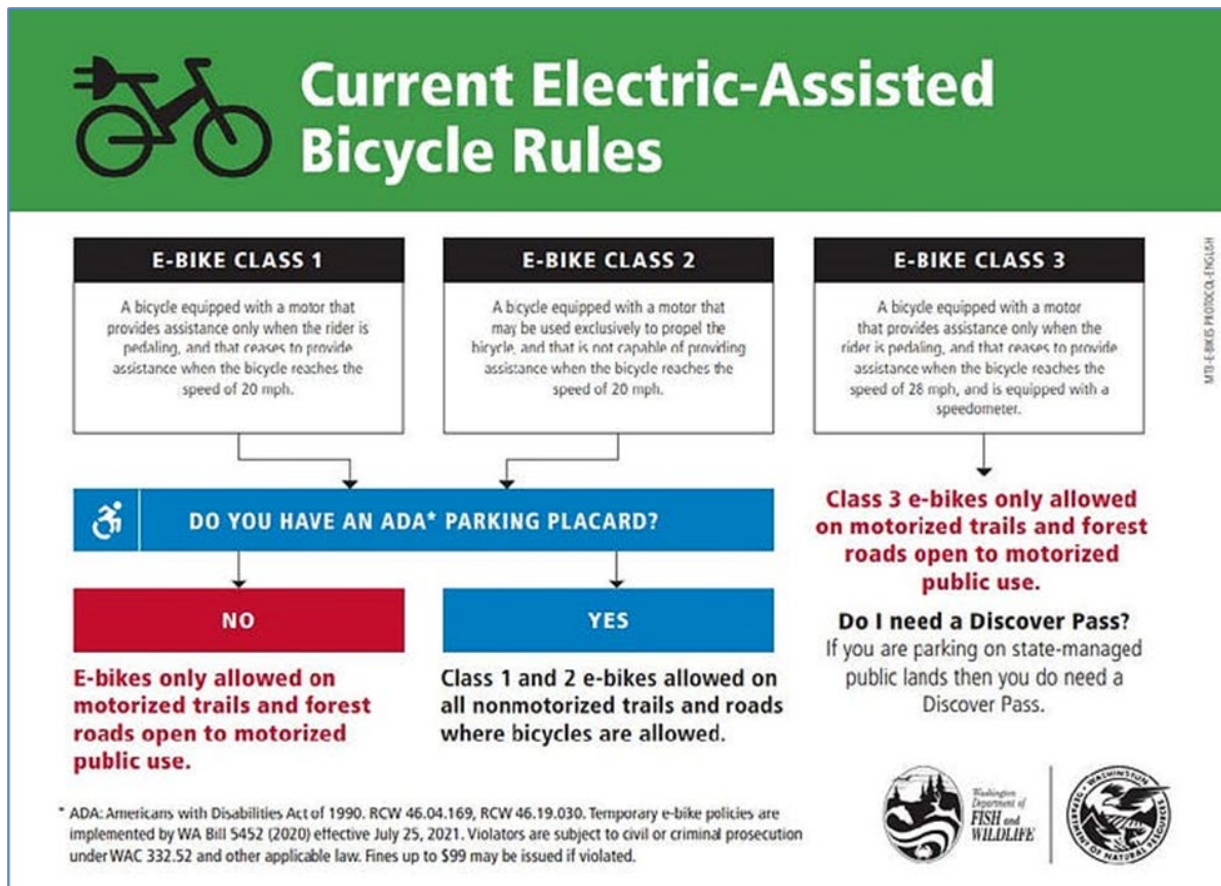
- Both saltwater and inland waterfowl hunting opportunities with the highest harvest of ducks and geese in Western Washington. Statewide, it boasts the second-highest duck and goose harvest.
- Some of the state's most diverse waterfowl species hunting opportunities include hunts for lesser snow geese, Canada geese, Pacific black brant, long-tailed ducks, and scoters.
- Extensive walk or bike-in access to public and private forest lands that do not currently charge an access fee for hunting big game and/or forest grouse.
- Special permit only, quality bull elk hunts within the North Cascades elk herd, with liberal season dates and the potential for trophy quality animals.
- Once-in-a-lifetime mountain goat harvest opportunities for six Mt. Baker Wilderness Area permit holders.



Photo 2: Johannesburg Mountain looming over the Cascade River Valley. Photo by WDFW.

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 about e-bike use on state public lands managed by WDFW and DNR.

Figure 2. Infographic of current e-bike rules.



## Current Species Status

The primary big game species in District 14 are elk, black-tailed deer, cougar, black bear, and mountain goat. Each species remains open for hunting with restrictions, as outlined in the [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). Over-the-counter tags for cougars are available for the entirety of District 14. Over-the-counter tags are also available for elk (GMUs 407 and 448 only), black-tailed deer, and black bears. Elk hunts in GMUs 418 and 437 and all mountain goat opportunities are managed as special permit-only hunts. Tag availability is based on the sensitivity of each species and their populations to hunting. For elk, the population estimate for the North Cascades elk herd remains below the population objective, and mountain goats have low reproductive rates that limit harvest opportunities in most North American populations.

Like most of Western Washington, District 14 does not host native upland game bird populations (other than forest grouse) and is not managed for these species. However, WDFW will continue implementing a pen-raised pheasant release program in Skagit and Whatcom counties during the 2024–2025 hunting season. District 14 has healthy populations of forest grouse, including ruffed, dusky, and sooty (formerly blue) grouse. Hunters after forest grouse enjoy a liberal season from September 15 – January 15.



Due to high overall population sizes and stable reproductive rates of waterfowl, states within the Pacific Flyway will continue to enjoy a liberal hunting season structure for most species with ample hunting days and bag limits. Northern pintail's decrease to a one-bird daily bag limit still applies this season in response to population estimates for this species falling below established threshold limits. Other restrictions for sea ducks will continue into this season.

Thirty-eight Harlequin duck permits will be available to eligible applicants through a lottery-style drawing. Visit [WDFW's Harlequin Duck Hunting Permit webpage](#) or review page 20 of the [2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting regulations](#) for more details. Electronic calls are ONLY allowed during white-goose only season segments in Goose Management Area 1 from Feb. 8-18, 2025.

All waterfowl hunters must apply for and possess a special migratory bird authorization when hunting lesser snow geese, Pacific brant, and sea ducks. The species of sea ducks include long-tailed ducks; surf, white-winged, and black scoters; and common and Barrow's goldeneye. Additionally, a harvest report card must be submitted by each hunter by March 20, 2025, regardless of harvest success. Please reference page 26 in the [Washington 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information on the required Authorization and Harvest Record cards.

# Elk

The North Cascades (Nooksack) elk herd (NCEH) appears to be stable and is found in forested uplands and valleys in GMUs 407, 418, 437, and 448, including agricultural areas where elk-related crop damage can occur. The most recent post-hunt survey conducted in March 2023 resulted in an estimated population of around 1,600 elk within the herd's core area. The survey estimated a bull-to-cow ratio of 18 bulls per 100 cows, within the WDFW objective of 12 to 20 bulls per 100 cows. The calf-to-cow ratio was estimated at 22 calves per 100 cows. A calf-to-cow ratio of 40 calves or greater per 100 cows is considered excellent calf recruitment. For more information on elk management within this herd, visit the [WDFW North Cascades Elk Management webpage](#).



Photo 3: Successful hunter with a mature bull in GMU 418. Photo by Brad Richard.

The WDFW population objective of approximately 2,000 elk has yet to be met. Since establishing a very limited hunt of this population in 2007, hunting opportunities have been limited but have increased to the current levels that have been in place for several years. The current harvest strategy provides some recreational and damage-related harvest while allowing the population to continue to grow.

Archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm hunters fortunate enough to draw one of 50 available bull permits have the chance to harvest a bull elk in GMUs 418 and 437 (29 permits in GMU 418 and 21 permits in GMU 437). Securing applicable access permissions and sufficient scouting are essential for a successful hunt.

Due to limited hunting pressure and lengthy seasons, the annual harvest success rate since 2007 has been relatively high, ranging up to 100% depending on the hunt method type. During the 2023-24 season, the harvest success rate in GMU 418 for all hunt method types combined was 57%, with 17 of 30 permit holders (raffle hunter also hunted in GMU 418) harvesting a bull elk. At least 13 of these bull elk had antlers with five points or better (five bulls had antlers with six points or better). In GMU 437, 10 of 21 permit holders harvested a bull elk for a 48% success rate for all weapon types combined. At least eight of these bull elk had antlers with five points or better (six bulls had antlers with six points or better).

The [WDFW Private Lands Access Program](#) has partnered with Sierra Pacific Industries to provide access to their properties within GMU 418 for all GMU 418 elk special permit holders. WDFW will provide information about access to these lands to permit holders before the 2024 hunts. Within GMU 418, hunters looking for the highest chance of success should focus most of their efforts within the core elk area that includes: a northern boundary from Acme due east to Baker Lake, an eastern boundary along the western shorelines of Baker Lake, and Lake Shannon to Highway 20, a southern boundary along Highway 20 to its juncture with Highway 9, and a western boundary of Highway 9 from Sedro-Woolley to Acme. However, hunters may find pockets of elk, including some high-quality bulls, outside this core area. For those hunters interested in U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands, consult the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions](#) map for current conditions.

Hunters who draw a special permit in GMU 437 will find the most elk in the northern third of the GMU, with many in Skagit Valley on private property. Therefore, securing access to private property in the valley and islands in the Skagit River can increase your chances of success in this GMU.

Youth, senior, and disabled hunters who draw one of the 15 permit opportunities for antlerless elk should consider securing access to private lands within Skagit Valley, where opportunities are likely to be best. In 2023, nine of 15 permit holders harvested a cow elk for a 60% success rate. All special permit holders for GMU 437 will be mailed a letter with tips regarding hunting on private land in Skagit Valley before the 2024 hunts.

General season harvest opportunities for any elk in GMU 407 (North Sound) in Skagit and Whatcom counties and bulls with a three-point minimum in GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) in Skagit (District 14) and Snohomish (District 13) counties exist on both private and state lands. However, elk densities in these two units are low, and hunting pressure may push elk into adjacent GMUs that remain closed to general harvest. In 2023, seven cows and 13 bulls were reported harvested in GMU 407. No elk were reported harvested in GMU 448 during the 2023 season. Hunters seeking public land access opportunities for these general season elk hunts should visit the [WDFW Hunt Planner web map](#) for more information.

GMU 407 tends to have greater numbers of elk than GMU 448, but access to private property may be vital to getting a real opportunity. Most elk in GMU 407 occur in and around Acme Valley, with a few elk found west of the South Fork Nooksack River or north of the community of Van Zandt along Highway 9. The public area most likely to yield success for hunters in GMU 407 is the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Van Zandt Dike property northeast of Acme and just east of private property in Acme

Valley. Though hunting pressure can be high, hunters who scout, do their homework, and hunt away from roads are likelier to harvest an animal. When hunting Van Zandt Dike, hunters should know the DNR property boundary and not trespass onto private property without permission or enter GMU 418.

Interested parties can find annual harvest reports and harvest statistics online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). Hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the [WDFW Hunt Planner web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 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.

## Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington since 2008, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the North Cascades elk herd area. Several conditions can result in limping or hoof deformities. However, research conducted by WDFW and a panel of scientific advisors from 2009–2014 found that hoof abnormalities in this region were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria. This bacterium is known to cause a hoof disease in cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis.

Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington, where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is less prevalent in elk herds further away from the core affected area, like the North Cascades elk herd in District 14. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are apparent:

**Vulnerability:** The disease is highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, including young or old or male or female elk.

**Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to an elk's hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and hunters practice good hygiene during harvest, processing, and cooking, it is considered safe to eat.

**No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven ways to treat it in the field. Similar conditions in livestock have been successfully treated by cleaning and bandaging hooves and giving them foot baths, but this is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

More information is available on the [WDFW elk hoof disease webpage](#).

## How hunters can help

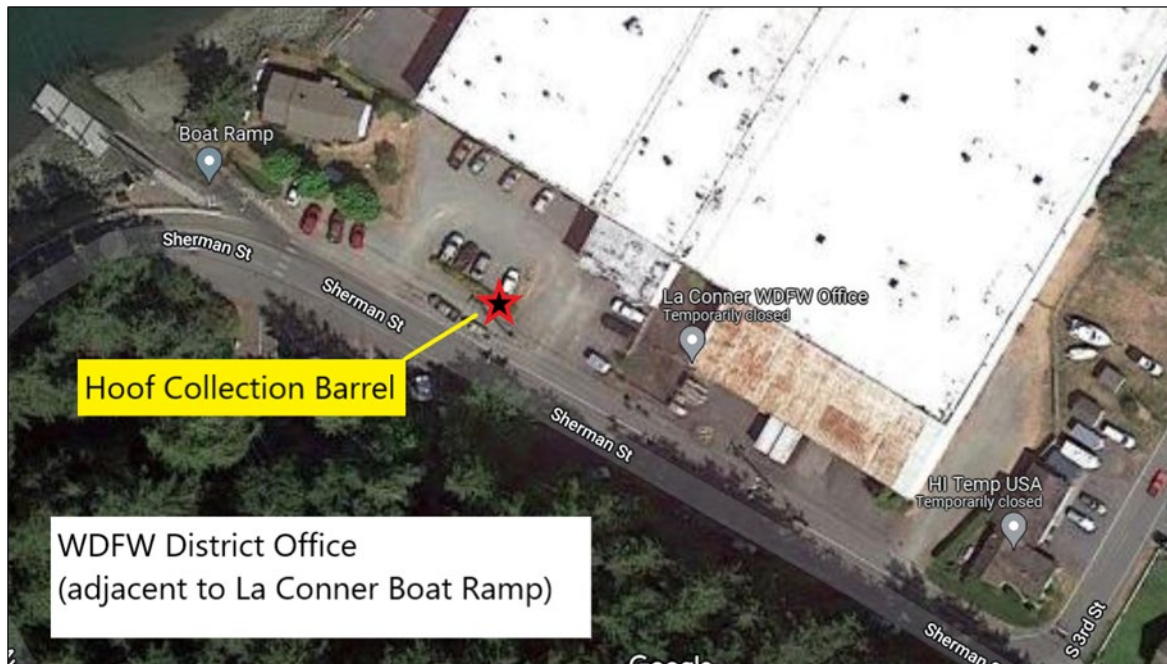
WDFW has implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage westside (400, 500, and 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing the prevalence of the disease over time. This program aims to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest rather than

increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in Western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington will be awarded with Sep. 1 – Dec. 31 season dates. Additionally, all participants will receive a waterproof license holder.

*So, what can hunters do to help?*

- **Harvest a limping elk** from any 400, 500, or 600 series GMUs
- **Turn in your elk hooves** along with a [complete registration form](#) at one of several collection sites in Western Washington. In District 14, the collection barrel will be located at the following location: [WDFW La Conner District Office, 111 Sherman St., La Conner, WA 98257](#) (Figure 3). Please provide all four hooves, cut just above the dew claws, in a plastic bag with a registration form or a piece of paper with your name, GMU and date of harvest, and WILD ID. Place the registration form or piece of paper with your hunter and hunt information in a small plastic bag inside the larger plastic bag containing the four hooves.

**Figure 3. WDFW District Office at 111 Sherman St, La Conner, WA 98257.**



- **Report observations** of affected elk on the Department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires** after hiking or driving off-road in a known affected area to help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas. Remove all mud from shoes and tires before leaving your hunting site.

WDFW works with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, Tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit the [WDFW elk hoof disease webpage](#). Additional details on TAHD and this incentive program can be found on pages 65 and 66 of the [2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet.

## Deer

WDFW is not conducting black-tailed deer surveys currently in District 14, primarily due to the difficulty in accurately surveying deer in dense, western Washington habitats. However, biologist observations and other anecdotal reports support the general notion that black-tailed deer population numbers and densities are down in GMUs 418 (Nooksack), 426 (Diablo), 437 (Sauk), and 450 (Cascade). In contrast, portions of GMU 407 (North Sound), the most urbanized GMU in the district, have high local deer densities that can cause damage to private property.



Photo 4: A black-tailed deer buck in District 14. Photo by Greg Green.

Hunters reported 755 harvested deer during the 2023 general season in the primary GMUs within District 14 (GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437). This harvest number is a slight increase over the 692 deer harvested during the 2022 season. From a hunting perspective, GMU 407 provides the best opportunity

to harvest deer successfully in the district. In 2023, 534 deer (69 does and 465 bucks) were harvested in GMU 407 during the general season hunts. The next best option for hunters is GMU 437, with 164 deer (19 does and 145 bucks) harvested during the 2023 general season. Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online at [Game Harvest Reports](#).

The drastic difference in harvest rates between GMU 407 and other GMUs within the district is related to the number of hunting days available, deer densities, and ease of access. GMU 407 provides hunting opportunities that the other GMUs do not, and hunters have learned to take advantage of them. Though some public land opportunities exist in GMU 407, the key to a successful harvest in this GMU is securing the appropriate permission to hunt on private land and scouting the area before the hunting season. Hunters who intend to hunt deer in developed areas should review page 90 of the [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet and check with local jurisdictions regarding firearm restrictions.

Modern firearm hunters in District 14 may apply for a permit only quality buck hunt during the late season in GMUs 418, 426, and 437. These quality buck tags provide some of the best opportunities for hunting bucks during the rut. Permit hunter success rates during the 2023 season were 12% in GMU 418, 20% in GMU 426, and 12% in GMU 437 for hunters who participated. A total of 60 tags were issued in the three GMUs, and hunters reported harvesting eight bucks for a 13% success rate overall.



Photo 5: A young black-tailed deer. Photo by Stephanie Pelham.

WDFW negotiated access to Sierra Pacific properties for six of the 25 permit holders in GMU 418 during the 2023 season and will likely provide the same opportunity for 2024 hunters. Hunters who draw a quality buck tag for GMU 418 will be provided details by mail about how to be included in a lottery-style drawing for one of six available chances to win access to Sierra Pacific properties in the GMU.

For those seeking a more remote and rugged trophy black-tailed deer hunting experience, high elevation areas in the Mt. Baker Wilderness in GMU 418 and Glacier Peak Wilderness in GMU 450 are open for the High Buck Hunt from September 15 – 25. The “High Hunt” has become increasingly popular and it’s common to see numerous other hunters even after hiking five to ten miles. Hunters should also be prepared for thick and steep terrain and heavy concentrations of hikers and other recreationists during fair weather. Physical fitness, quality gear, and ample scouting are typically required to determine where deer are concentrated, as well as to avoid crowds. Smaller alpine basins and lightly forested ridges not accessed by main roads and trails can be productive. Visit the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail map](#) for current conditions. **Note that the Noisy-Diobsud Wilderness Area is NOT open to the High Buck Hunt.**

Within District 14, some hunting opportunities exist on private industrial timberlands and public property managed by Washington DNR and USFS. However, some areas may be gated due to timber theft, dumping, vandalism, etc. Many of these gated areas can be accessed on foot or with mountain bikes, allowing those willing to do the work an opportunity to hunt deer that do not receive as much hunting pressure.

Deer hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 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.

## Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease

WDFW documented an Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) outbreak in black-tailed deer in several island GMUs within District 13 and Skagit County in District 14 in 2021. AHD is caused by a viral infection transmitted by direct contact between deer, through bodily fluids or possibly airborne routes. This makes the virus more likely to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

The disease was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020 and then on Orcas and San Juan islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart Islands. On Whidbey Island, WDFW responded to and investigated the deaths of several deer that displayed symptoms consistent with AHD. The disease was confirmed in Anacortes in Skagit County in July 2021. District 13 and 14 biologists continue to actively monitor for the presence of this disease in any island and mainland deer populations. As of July 2024, there have been no confirmed cases of AHD this year.

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people through contact with or by consuming the meat. However, disposable gloves are always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer in AHD-impacted areas. Hunters should note that AHD symptoms in deer include rapid or open-mouth breathing, foaming or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation.



This disease is fast acting, so a deer that dies from this virus does so within three to five days of contracting it.

If you see a deer displaying any of these symptoms, please report the location of the sighting on the [WDFW Sick, Injured, or Dead Wildlife reporting page](#). Please visit the [WDFW Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease \(AHD\) webpage](#) for more information on AHD.

## Black bear

Black bears live in diverse forested habitats throughout the state, from coastal rainforests to the dry woodlands of the Cascades' eastern slopes. In general, black bears are strongly associated with forest cover, but they occasionally use relatively open country, such as clear-cuts and the fringes of other open habitats.



Photo 6: A large black bear. Photo by Greg Green.

Black bears are common in District 14, though formal estimates of the population in this district were unavailable until recently. In 2021, WDFW biologists conducted a population monitoring effort in GMU 418 (Whatcom County) to obtain a more accurate population density estimate for this area. Using hair snare corrals (Photo 7), biologists collected more than 1,300 hair samples from 92 individual bears (52

females and 40 males). They obtained an estimate of 28 bears/100 km<sup>2</sup> (i.e., 28 bears/39 mi<sup>2</sup>) in GMU 418. In addition, hunter harvest reports and age data obtained from premolar teeth submitted by successful hunters are used to determine age and sex ratios and infer population size and trends. This information helps WDFW set bear harvest guidelines.



Photo 7: One of the hair snare corrals used during the 2021 bear density estimation study in GMU 418. Photo by WDFW.

Hunters harvested 146 bears during the fall 2023 hunt in GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437. This is a decrease from the 168 bears harvested during the 2022 season. Hunters experienced a 10% overall success rate in the four GMUs, with 59% of the harvest occurring in GMU 418.

District 14 hunters that choose to hunt in GMUs 418 and 426 will be hunting in a grizzly bear recovery area identified by the [Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee](#) (IGBC). This federal/state working group includes WDFW. **Before hunting bears in the recovery area, bear hunters must pass the annual WDFW [online bear identification exam](#) with a score of 80% or higher. Proof of successful exam completion or an equivalent test from another state must always be on your person when afield.** For information on the federal government's proposed North Cascades Ecosystem grizzly bear restoration effort led by the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), review [this WDFW statement](#) or [visit this NPS webpage](#).

Opportunities for harvesting a black bear in District 14 have more to do with access and berry production than does the previous year's harvest. Access behind gates may be available by walking or via mountain bike, providing hunting opportunities within abundant younger age class clear cuts that

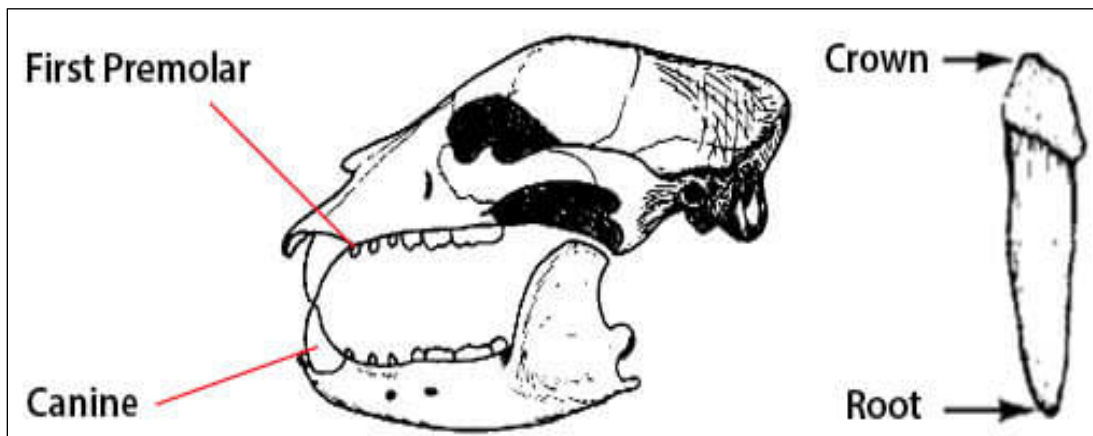
attract bears. Check with the appropriate public or private landowner to be certain that behind the gate access is allowed.

Hunters willing to pursue bears during the early season at higher elevations can hunt in classic alpine environments where bears forage on abundant huckleberries, increasing the potential for spot and stalk opportunities.

The WDFW Private Lands Access Program has partnered with Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) to facilitate vehicle access to a section of SPI lands on a reservation basis during August and September 2024 for bear hunting. This limited-entry section is nearly 15,000 acres and stretches from Highway 542 to the U.S. – Canada border. To reserve your spot, visit the WDFW [Hunt by Reservation](#) webpage and search for “Black Mountain”. Hunters must make a reservation for each date they hunt the property and for each party member. 50 reservation permits are available daily. The continuation of this opportunity depends on each hunter's understanding and following of all access rules.

All successful fall black bear hunters statewide MUST submit a black bear premolar tooth per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department within five days of harvest or by Dec. 1, 2024. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw. Tooth envelopes are available at all WDFW offices.

**Figure 4. Location of a black bear’s first premolar for required tooth submission to WDFW.**



Bear hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 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.

## Cougar

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently approved changes to cougar hunting seasons. Hunters should be sure to review cougar hunting rules online. As detailed below, the new rule

establishes the Washington cougar hunting season from Sept. 1 to March 31, sets a cap of 13 percent of each population management unit (PMU) using a specific statewide density, and includes all known human-caused cougar mortalities to determine when to close a PMU during the season.

The Commission incorporated an amendment in the cougar hunting rule to clarify that all known human-caused cougar mortalities contributing to the 13 percent cap will be counted between April 1 of the current year and March 31 of the subsequent year. Additionally, the Commission decided that in PMUs that reach the 13 percent cap prior to the cougar hunting season starting on Sept. 1, the cap would be increased to 20 percent of the population to provide hunting opportunity in those PMUs for the current season. The Commission also directed staff to initiate rule making for the 2025-26 cougar hunting season.

Cougar hunting opportunities in District 14 are opportunistic, with most cougars harvested by hunters that happen upon them while pursuing other game animals. The primary prey for cougars in the district is black-tailed deer, so hunters who spend time in areas with more deer will increase their chances of seeing and harvesting a cougar.

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 use of dogs to recreationally pursue and harvest cougars is illegal statewide.

Cougar hunting season and regulations have changed some for the 2024-2025 hunting season. See page 69 of the [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet. The new changes are as follows:

- The cougar season is from September 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025.
- Instead of a harvest guideline, GMUs 418, 426, and 437 (combined) are under a 13 percent cap, based on a 13% intrinsic growth rate, of 13 total cougars. This cap will include all known human-related independent-aged cougar mortality, including harvested cougars, cougars killed in response to conflicts, and any other form of human-caused mortality. Cougar mortality is documented beginning April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025.
- GMU 407 will have no cap on cougar harvest during the 2024-2025 season.
- If combined cougar harvest in GMUs 418, 426, and 437 reaches 13 cougars prior to the recreational season, the cap will be increased to 20 percent (or 20 total cougars) to provide hunting opportunity. However, once mortality for 20 independent-aged cougars is documented, the season will close in all three GMUs. If closure of the season occurs, it will do so within 72 hours of the cap being reached.
- It is each cougar hunter's responsibility to verify if the cougar hunting season is open or closed in hunt areas with a harvest cap by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline (1-866-364-4868) or visiting the WDFW webpage for [Cougar Hunting Area Openings and Closures](#).
- As in previous years, all successful hunters must: (1) Report their harvest within 72 hours to the cougar hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 3 after greeting) and state name, WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill; (2) present the unfrozen hide and skull for mandatory sealing and

sample collection by WDFW within 5 days of the kill (please leave proof of sex attached); and (3) report their kill in the [WDFW Wild system](#).

Cougar hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more.

## Mountain goat

Mountain goat hunting in this state is a once-in-a-lifetime harvest opportunity and a limited-entry tag only a few lucky individuals draw in any year. Drawing a goat tag is a commitment to spend a fair amount of time in rugged, high-elevation terrain that can be as treacherous as it is awe-inspiring. To increase the success and enjoyment of the hunt, hunters should anticipate spending time researching online and scouting the unit in person before the season opener. This hunt is physically and mentally challenging, so prospective hunters are encouraged to determine if they are up to the challenge before applying for a permit.



Photo 8: Two mountain goats in the North Cascades. Photo by Greg Green.

In 2024, seven special permits were issued for the three mountain goat hunt areas in District 14: Chowder Ridge (1 permit), Lincoln Peak (3 permits), and Avalanche Gorge (3 permits). A seventh permit

was issued for Mt. Baker (instead of the usual six) due to an error involving software from a third-party vendor used to conduct the draw. See the [WDFW Director's statement](#) for more information.

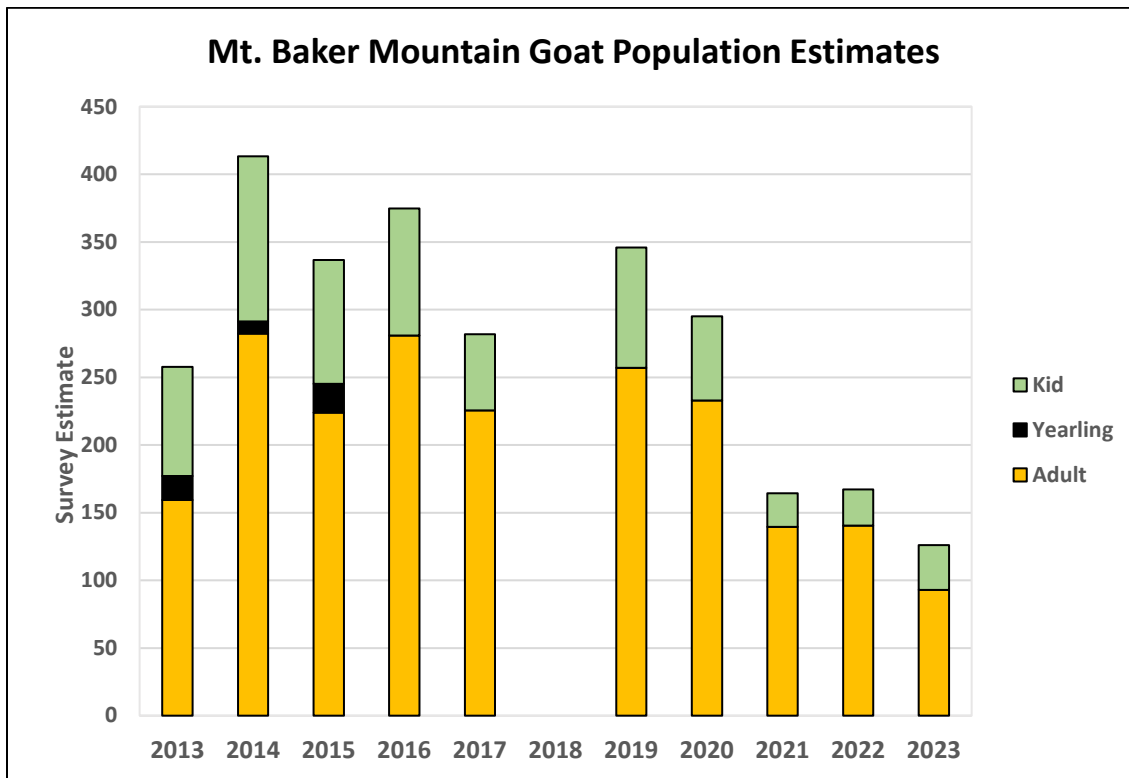
Although permit holders can legally harvest a female mountain goat (nanny), WDFW and most state wildlife agencies **strongly encourage each hunter to only harvest a male mountain goat (billy)**, since mountain goat populations are very sensitive to the harvest of nannies. This is because goats are slow to reach sexual maturity (three years) and have a slow production rate (do not produce young every year). Thus, a goat population's health is reliant on the number of mature females in a population, since they have a better chance of producing young that will survive.

Mountain goat hunt applicants drawn for a permit can only purchase their license after completing the WDFW online mountain goat gender identification training. Additionally, hunters who draw a permit must review provided educational material and make all efforts to harvest a male (billy). **This is crucial given documented declines in goat populations statewide.**

Harvest success rates for the three Mt. Baker hunt areas are generally 50% or greater in any year and has produced some mature goats of exceptional quality. During the 2023 season, seven hunters (six special permit and one raffle tag hunter) harvested three billies and four nannies for an overall success rate of 100%.

Mountain goat populations have been declining on Mt. Baker for the past several years (Figure 5). This mirrors declines recorded in almost all other goat populations in Washington, particularly in the North Cascades region. The reasons for the decline are not fully understood but are likely complex. They may include climate-related issues, recreation, habitat degradation, avalanches, predation, and weather patterns, including hot, dry summers following a severe winter, that impact habitat quality and recruitment. WDFW is working with Tribal co-managers and federal agencies to better understand this decline and determine next steps for managing Mt. Baker's goat population.

Figure 5. Population estimates for mountain goats on Mt. Baker, 2013 – 2023.



A hunter who kills a mountain goat in Washington must present the head with horns attached for inspection within ten days of harvest to a WDFW Regional or District office or a location designated by a WDFW representative. Call a [WDFW Regional or District office](#) to schedule an appointment with a biologist for inspection. After inspection, hunters may keep the head/horns of a lawfully harvested mountain goat in Washington for personal use.

Heavy precipitation since November 2021 has caused washouts and other travel issues on some U.S. Forest Service (USFS) roads and trails in District 14. Hunters are encouraged to reference the following interactive map from USFS to get the status of roads and trails within each goat hunt unit before your hunt begins: [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions](#).

## Upland birds

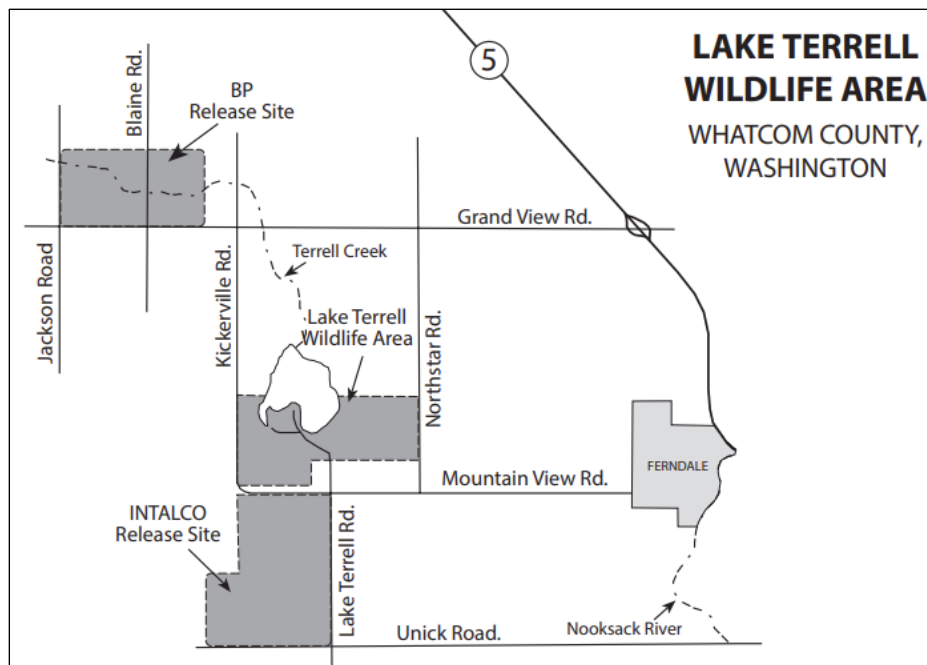
Upland bird opportunities available to hunters within District 14 include released ring-necked pheasants at designated release sites, sooty grouse, ruffed grouse, California quail, band-tailed pigeons, mourning doves, and an ever-growing population of non-native Eurasian collared-doves. Although some of these species are quite similar, each offers a unique opportunity to hunters throughout the state. For more general information on upland bird hunting in Washington, follow these links for a summary of [upland bird seasons](#), find ideas for [where to go upland bird hunting](#), and find information on [the basics of upland bird hunting in Washington](#).

## Pheasant

The [pheasant release program](#) in Western Washington provides upland bird hunting opportunities in areas that cannot sustain naturally reproducing populations due to our cool, wet climate and lack of grain farming. This program encourages participation from new, young, and seasoned hunters. Approximately 35,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released yearly at 25 sites throughout western Washington. Pheasant releases will occur at four sites in District 14 this fall.

Whatcom County has three pheasant release sites, including the WDFW [Lake Terrell Unit of Whatcom Wildlife Area](#), the adjacent [Alcoa Intalco Works](#), and the BP release site along Grand View Rd. Volunteer members perform releases on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday of each week during the season, with approximately 300 birds released each week between the sites.

**Figure 6. Release sites at Lake Terrell Wildlife Area.**



The fourth site in District 14 is in Skagit County at the [Samish Unit](#) of Skagit Wildlife Area. There will be two releases, one just prior to the youth hunt and the other on the Monday of the senior hunt week. No further releases will occur after this. However, hunters may pursue the remaining on-site pheasants until the opening of the statewide waterfowl season on October 12 (see page 20 of the pamphlet). This site is closed after this date to minimize conflicts between pheasant and waterfowl hunters since the unit is managed and used primarily for waterfowl hunting. To hunt at these sites in District 14 or other pheasant release sites in western Washington, hunters must purchase a Western Washington pheasant license. A small game license is not required to participate.



Additional requirements to hunt pheasants and other upland birds include:

- Must wear a minimum of 400 square inches of hunter orange or fluorescent hunter pink clothing.
- Mandatory to use and carry only non-toxic shot for all upland bird hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide.

Please refer to the [WDFW 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet and [WDFW's Pheasant Hunting webpage](#) for more detailed information.

## Forest grouse

Ruffed and sooty (blue) grouse are found on public and private forest lands throughout District 14. Ruffed grouse are the most widespread grouse species in the district and statewide. They are most abundant in lowland secondary succession coniferous and deciduous forests under 2,000 feet of elevation, often near riparian areas. Therefore, hunters after sooty grouse should seek higher elevation sites along trails and ridgelines above 2,000–3,000 feet within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. Also, areas with berry-bearing plants like huckleberry and grouse whortleberry should be sought when hunting this species. To find more information, check out the [hunting forest grouse](#) page.

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 September 1 to the new season dates of **September 15 – January 15**. The rule was recommended by WDFW biologists based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. Setting the season back to September 15 helps protect brood hens that are more vulnerable to harvest during early September. **This same rule will be in effect for the 2024 season.** More information is [available in this 2021 blog post](#).



Photo 9: A male ruffed grouse along a road. Photo by Michael Schroeder.

During the 2023 hunting season, hunters reported harvesting 1,086 grouse in Skagit county and 580 grouse in Whatcom County. Hunters averaged five hunting days in Skagit County and seven hunting days in Whatcom County. For the 2024 season, hunters should expect reliable hunting conditions if effort and time are put forth.

## **WDFW forest grouse wing and 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 14 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. Please be sure to use the provided brown paper bags at the site and fill out all necessary information. To find the most up to date wing barrel locations in Skagit and Whatcom counties, as well as other locations in Washington, review the [WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) webpage.



Photo 10: An example of a wing barrel site. Photo by Robert Waddell.

## Dove: mourning and Eurasian collared

To hunt mourning doves, hunters must possess a small game license and a state migratory bird permit. The season runs from September 1 – October 30, with a daily bag limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45. While dove hunting has decreased in popularity, the hunters who do pursue these birds are often successful. In 2023, 16 hunters in Skagit County harvested 95 birds and 17 hunters in Whatcom County harvested 78 birds. To maximize success, we recommend that hunters take the time to scout cut grain fields that will attract doves.

While hunting mourning doves, hunters can harvest an infinite number of Eurasian collared doves because they are a non-native species. Hunters can also pursue this species year-round because of its non-native status. In contrast to mourning doves, Eurasian collared doves tend to occupy more developed areas. Therefore, we recommend that hunters take the time to properly scout and acquire landowner permission in lowland agricultural areas with barnyard settings.

**Figure 75. Comparison between a mourning and Eurasian collared dove.**



Hunters should take the time to learn how to correctly identify Eurasian collared doves from mourning doves on the ground and in flight, as they can often be challenging to identify on the wing by inexperienced birders/hunters. Eurasian collared doves are much larger than mourning doves, but size can be difficult to gauge when only one species is present. Aside from the diagnostic black collar on the backs of their necks and overall lighter color, they also have a squared tail, while mourning doves have a pointed tail. Identification is especially crucial when hunting Eurasian collared doves outside the mourning dove season to prevent the accidental take of a species out of season.

Hunting Eurasian collared doves requires only a small or big game license. As for all hunting activities, hunters should confirm that the area they plan to pursue has no firearm restrictions and be mindful of people, buildings, farm equipment, or power lines while hunting.

## **Band-tailed pigeon**

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest of Washington's pigeons and doves and are native to the state. Harvest trends for this species have been declining for some time. The decline is likely linked to decreases in hunter interest and participation. Hunting this species requires more tact than hunting other species in the pigeon/dove family. Finding areas that birds pass over, the sites they use for grit, and any mineral springs can increase success. They have a fruit and seed diet and are fond of elderberries, cherries, and other fruiting trees. Finding where they feed and pass and shooting as they enter and leave a site is a commonly used tactic.

Another solid hunting strategy is to target managed forest lands with mixed stand age classes that provide feeding areas with adjacent roosting areas. Additionally, band-tails are more challenging to bring down than mourning and Eurasian collared doves, so staying hidden and reducing your movement when hunting is essential to getting them in range and getting a good shot.

District biologists perform mineral site surveys annually in mid-July at historic mineral sites throughout the state. In District 14, two sites are actively monitored, one in Whatcom County and the other in Skagit County. Biologists use these surveys to monitor changes in the local breeding population, allowing them to anticipate trends in the regional population. However, the open season (September 17–23) usually corresponds with fall migration, when northern birds move into this area. Making predictions

about the quality of the hunting season for this species is difficult without an analysis of flyway-wide survey results, which takes time and isn't released before the hunting season.

A small game license, state migratory bird permit, and migratory bird authorization card with band-tailed pigeon harvest report card are required. The daily limit is two (2) birds with a six (6) bird possession limit. The mandatory harvest reporting deadline for this species is Sep. 30, 2024.

## Waterfowl

### Important regulations in the 2024-2025 season

- **Harlequin ducks are moving to a PERMIT SYSTEM.** Only 38 permits will be made available through a drawing to eligible applicants. Hunting Harlequin ducks without this permit is illegal. To apply for a harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington state small game hunting license, migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. Applications will be accepted July 1- August 14 and can be submitted by following instructions on the [Harlequin Duck Hunting Permit](#) webpage.
- **Electronic calls** are allowed during white-goose only season segments in GMA 1 (Feb. 8-18, 2025)

### Special hunting dates

#### Youth hunt

Youth hunts will be held in Western Washington on September 21, 2024. Open species include Canada geese, white-fronted geese, ducks (including scaup), and coots. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt (see page 26 of the pamphlet). The youth hunt is open to hunters under 15 years of age who must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old who is not hunting.



Photo 11: Hunter and daughter head home after a successful day of hunting in Skagit County. Photo by Tucker Seitz.

Youth, Veterans & Active Military Personnel Hunt - This hunt will be held statewide on February 1, 2025. Open species include Canada geese, white-fronted geese, white geese, brant, ducks (including scaup), and coots. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt. Veterans and Active Military are individuals who have served in the active military, naval, or air service and those discharged or released under Honorable conditions. The active-duty military also includes National Guard and Reserve members on active duty (other than for training). During the hunt, these hunters must have one of the following on their person (a copy is sufficient): DD214, Veteran Benefit Card, Retired Active Military I.D., or Active-Duty I.D. card. Please refer to the [Youth, Veterans & Active Military Personnel Hunt Information webpage](#) or pages 21 and 27 of the pamphlet for bag limit details for this hunt.

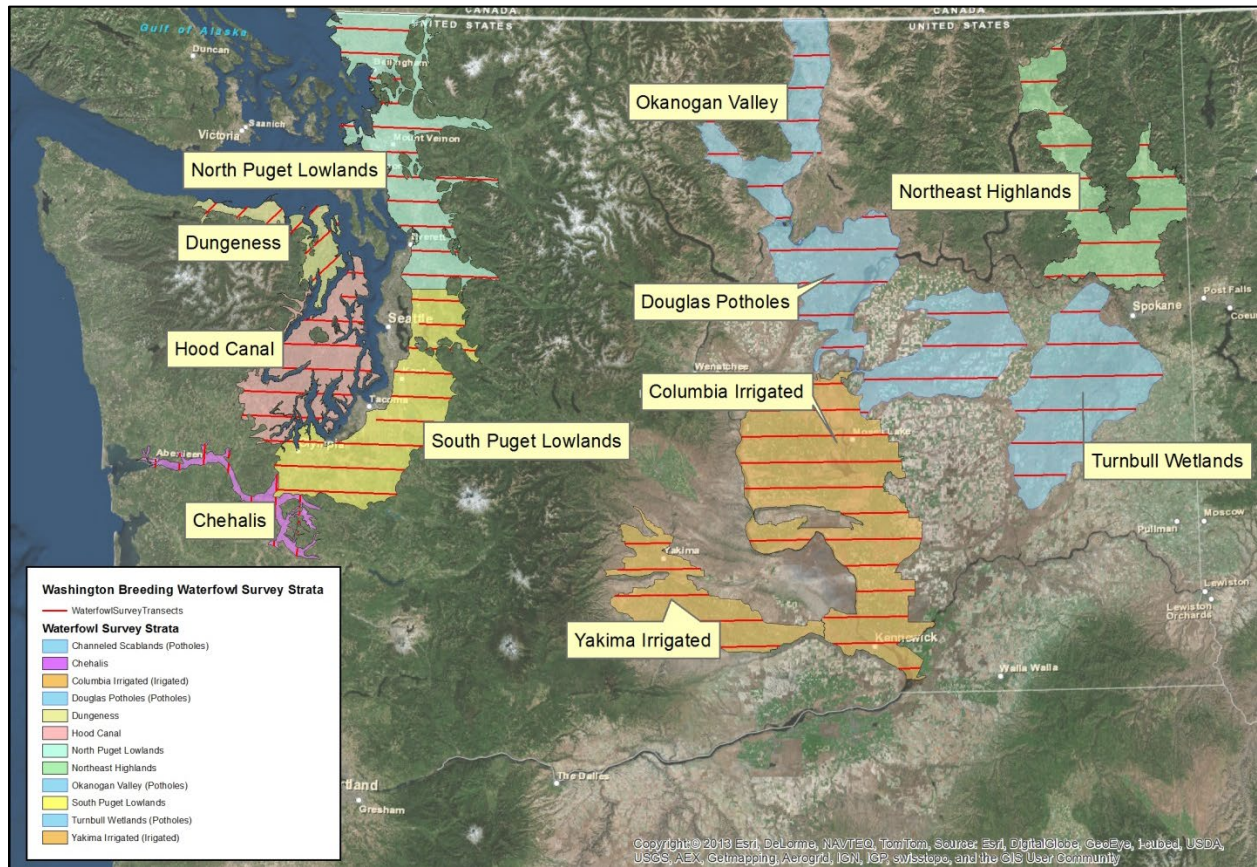


Photo 12: A youth hunter triumphantly holds her first duck at the Samish Wildlife Unit. Photo by John Garman.

## Dabbling ducks

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. Surveys are conducted in late April through early May. District 14 falls within the North Puget Lowlands survey area (Figure 8). The breeding survey estimated 160,027 ducks statewide, a 22% decrease from 2023. The North Puget Lowlands holds approximately 26,807 ducks. The most common species viewed were mallards, green-winged teal, and wood ducks. Mallards decreased by 15% since 2023, but in comparison to the long-term average have only decreased by 6%.

**Figure 86. Washington State breeding waterfowl strata and long-term Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey transects.**



Based on 10-year average data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s annual [National Migratory Bird Harvest Survey](#), Skagit County boasts the second best duck harvest out of 39 counties in the state and 26<sup>th</sup> out of the 3,115 surveyed U.S. counties. Whatcom County ranks a respectable 7<sup>th</sup> in the state and 137<sup>th</sup> nationwide for duck harvest. During the 2023-24 season, Skagit County was second in duck harvest only to Grant County, with 57,580 ducks harvested, which is 13% higher than last year. The Whatcom County harvest was 26,158 ducks, up 6% higher than the previous season.

Hunters have several resources to help them get started if they want to hunt waterfowl in District 14. If you are new to hunting waterfowl, please visit the WDFW webpage [Let’s Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) for an excellent introduction. Hunters are encouraged to visit the WDFW webpage and [Hunt Planner Web map](#). The web map is a tool that provides information on Washington’s 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.

Another resource for those planning to hunt the popular Skagit Wildlife Area and its many units productive for waterfowl hunting is the [WDFW Skagit Wildlife Area Waterfowl Hunting Guide](#).



Early season hunting opportunities in District 14 are generally more successful in saltwater marshes. On opening day, hunters can expect a mixed bag of species, including the less common blue-winged teal and wood duck, since they do not leave for their southern wintering grounds until later in the season. Then, large numbers of northern breeding ducks start to arrive in late October and November when colder weather pushes them south.

The bag limit for northern pintail is a one-bird daily limit. This change was made for the 2020-21 season because population estimates fell below federal management thresholds and have yet to rebound. Although this district supports a large northern pintail population, this is not typical in many other areas of the country and therefore does not accurately reflect the species' population status across North America.

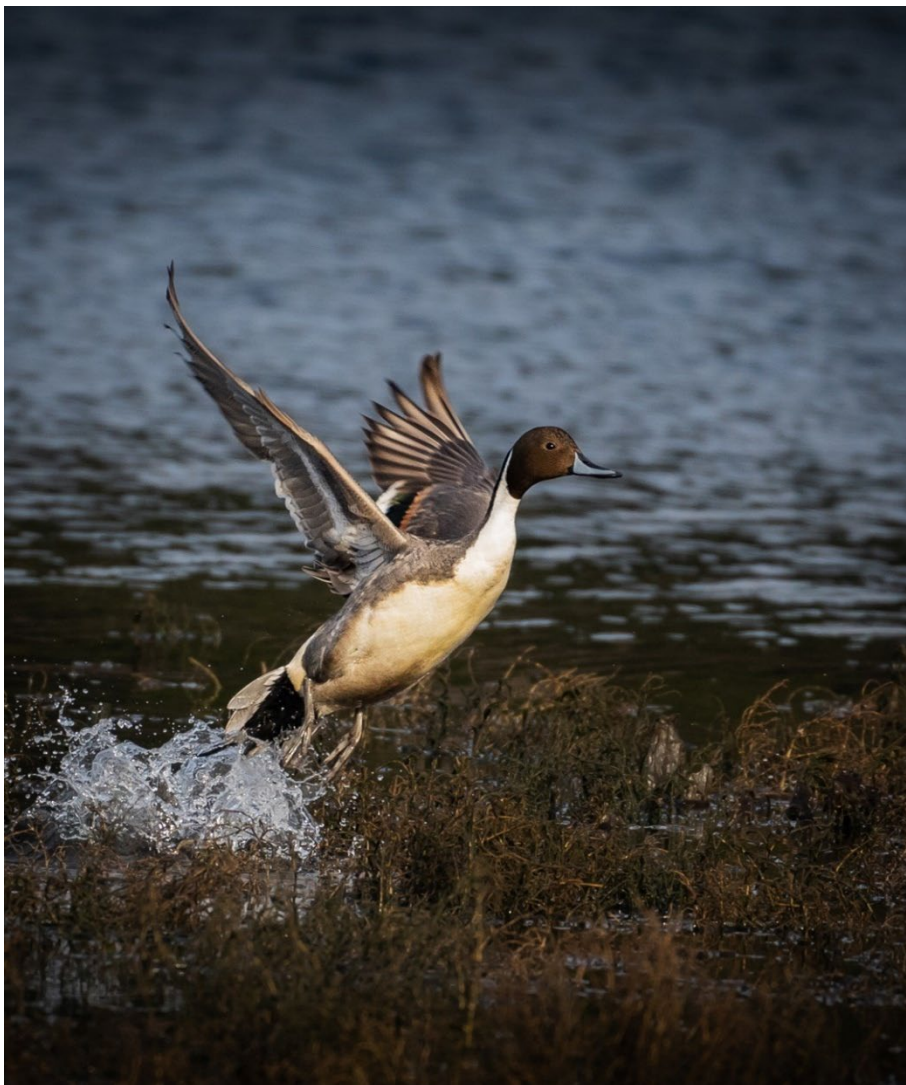


Photo 1310: A northern pintail takes off from the water. Photo by Chad Morrison.

This year's general season will run from October 12–20 and October 23, 2024 – January 26, 2025, except for Greater scaup, which is open from November 2, 2024 – January 26, 2025. Bag limits are restricted to seven ducks. The species-specific daily bag restrictions mean a hunter cannot harvest more than two hen mallard, one pintail, two scaup (when open), two canvasback, and two redhead statewide. For sea ducks in District 14, bag limits should not include more than two scoters, two long-tailed ducks, and two goldeneyes. For more details, refer to page 21 in the pamphlet.

Please acquire all the appropriate authorizations and harvest record cards for the species/areas you are pursuing. Refer to the pamphlet for more information. In addition, authorizations and harvest record cards are available at WDFW license dealers or online using [WDFW's Wild System](#). Hunters are responsible for selecting each harvest record card for the species they intend to hunt.

**Figure 97. Information about mandatory bird authorizations and harvest report cards.**

**Mandatory Bird Authorizations & Harvest Record Cards**

**MANDATORY HARVEST REPORTING DEADLINES:**

- Band-tailed Pigeon  
September 30
- Brant, Sea Duck, Harlequin Duck Permit  
February 15
- SW Canada Goose (GMA 2),  
Snow Goose (GMA 1)  
March 20

To improve management of certain limited migratory bird species, you are required to possess a Migratory Bird Authorization and Harvest Record Card(s) if you are hunting those species (see page 11). Immediately after taking a band-tailed pigeon, brant, sea duck (scoters, long-tailed duck, goldeneyes) in western Washington, Harlequin duck, snow goose (Goose Management Area 1) or any goose in Goose Management Area 2 – Coast & Inland into possession, you must fill out the required harvest record card information in ink within the designated spaces provided.

You must report hunting activity on your harvest record cards to WDFW using the online reporting system at: <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login>

**Please note that you must comply with these reporting requirements or you will be required to pay a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card the next year.**

## Sea ducks

When pursuing intertidal and saltwater areas for sea ducks and diving ducks in Skagit County, hunters can use public boat ramps in Conway, the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit on Freshwater Slough, or under the twin bridges that cross over the Swinomish Channel on Highway 20. In Whatcom County, public boat ramps are available at most harbors, including Blaine, Squalicum, and Fairhaven. Birch Bay State Park is another popular access point for sea ducks and brant hunting. Boat access can significantly improve hunting options and success, but caution and preparation for a successful, enjoyable, and safe hunt are imperative.

## Pacific brant

Skagit County has a historic and well-known tradition of Pacific brant (including black brant) hunting. Brant wintering in Padilla and Samish bays mainly belong to the sub-species referred to as western high arctic brant, also known as grey-bellies. This sub-species nests in a small area in the western Canadian high arctic and is vulnerable to excessive harvest because of their limited nesting and wintering grounds. Open season dates are determined by aerial surveys to prevent overharvest. The survey is flown to

determine a wintering population estimate and is then compared to current management thresholds established by the agency. The estimate dictates whether there is a six-day season (if surveyors count more than 6,000 birds), a three-day season (a count between 3,000 – 6,000 birds), or no season at all (a count under 3,000 birds).

The survey is flown in late December-early January to provide biologists with the data necessary to determine if any harvest will be sustainable for the population. Survey results and possible season dates will be provided via a WDFW news [release](#). Hunters can subscribe to the [WDFW email list](#) to receive news releases and other Department information.

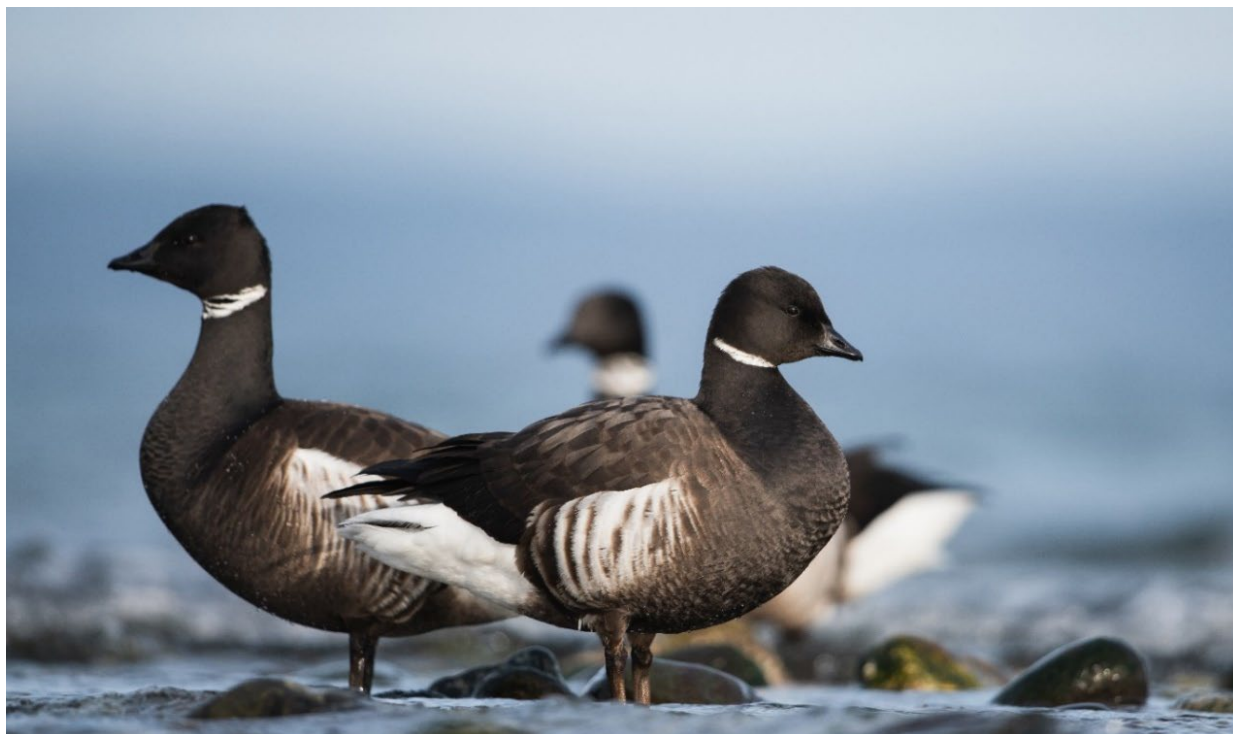


Photo 1411: Brant loafing on a gravel bar in Puget Sound. Photo by Ryan Askren.

In Whatcom County, the population is primarily made up of black brant, a more abundant and less vulnerable population to overharvest than grey-bellies. Clallam County exhibits similar subspecies patterns: thus, the two counties have been grouped for brant management. The guaranteed season dates for these two counties are January 18, 22, and 25.

Like last year, only Whatcom County will be opened for brant hunting on the special youth, veterans, and active military hunt day on February 1, 2025. Whether Skagit County is open for brant harvest on this day will be determined by aerial survey results, like the regular brant season. A special migratory bird authorization card is required to hunt brant during the general and special seasons. Lastly, the mandatory harvest reporting deadline for brant is February 15, 2025. Data obtained from these reports are essential for managing this species.

Location and strategy are vital for successful brant hunting. These birds will congregate in feedings areas where eelgrass is exposed at low tide, often near estuaries, spits, and mudflats, then head to open water nearby to "loaf" during hide tide or after being pressured. Depending on the location, successful hunters use layout blinds, small boats, kayaks, and various decoy configurations, including long lines, to intercept these iconic geese during their daily routine.

## Canada geese

Skagit County hunters reported harvesting 149 birds during the early goose season and 1,718 during the regular 2023-24 season. Whatcom County hunters harvested 288 during the early season and 1,840 during the regular season. Cumulatively, the district accounts for around 7% of the statewide Canada goose harvest.

This year, the early Canada goose season will occur September 7–12, 2024, and offers early season hunting opportunities for hunters in Goose Management Area 1, which covers both Skagit and Whatcom Counties. Refer to page 26 of the pamphlet for more detailed information about Goose Management Areas. During this early season, bag limits are set at five birds per day, with a possession limit of 15. Higher limits are in place because early seasons target and decrease the population of resident birds, while later seasons see an influx of migrating geese.

This season's Western Washington Youth hunting date is September 21, 2024. Hunters under 16 can harvest Canada geese or white-fronted geese during this hunt, with a bag limit of four for Canada geese and ten for white-fronted geese. The regular open season occurs from October 12 – December 1, and December 14 – January 26 with daily bag limits of four Canada geese and a possession limit of 12. The **mandatory** harvest reporting deadline for Canada geese harvested in Washington is March 20, 2025.

## Lesser snow geese

Snow goose hunting is another mainstay of waterfowl hunting in District 14, providing a very different alternative to hunting dabbling ducks. Whatcom County was added to Goose Management Area (GMA) 1 during the 2020-21 season. This population is healthy and stable and is evaluated using data collected on snow goose breeding grounds and during winter aerial surveys of the Skagit-Fraser River Delta. During the 2024-2025 season, hunters in Skagit and Whatcom will enjoy a liberal bag limit of 10 white geese per day and a 30-bird possession limit.

The winter Skagit-Fraser River Delta snow goose aerial population survey was flown in March 2024. If the productivity on Wrangel Island, Russia is good, hunters can expect the population to be similar to or slightly less than the population that arrived in the fall of 2023. Should conditions on the breeding grounds result in poor productivity, a slight to medium population decrease is expected.

Hunters interested in harvesting snow geese should seek access to multiple properties before the season. The early season is the best time to lure geese, particularly juveniles, with decoys. In this area, flocks stay within a several mile home range but do not necessarily return to the same field they were feeding in the previous day. Due to their large numbers and aggressive feeding, the species exhaust a

food source quickly. Hunting in corn stubble is a widespread technique at the beginning of the hunting season. As the season progresses, snow goose diets diversify, and geese begin to feed in a variety of crop fields, including winter wheat, hay or silage, and potatoes. Snow geese are most abundant on public and private land on Fir Island in District 14. However, geese do spend time in areas on either side of Interstate 5, north of Burlington and in the Edison area. Snow geese routinely rest on saltwater bays throughout the district. Flocks fly low enough during severe weather, opening up opportunities for pass shooting on various public and private lands and waters. For ethical reasons, hunters should avoid wounding or failing to retrieve waterfowl.

No changes have been made to this year's season structure for white geese (lesser snow, Ross', and blue geese) in GMA 1, which covers the entire district. The 2024– 2025 season will continue to include a late hunting season for white goose only from February 8–18, 2025. Electronic calls will **ONLY** be permitted during the white-geese-only season in GMA 1 from February 8–18. Electronic calls are **not** permitted during any other open goose season.

Hunters will need a federal migratory bird stamp (if over 16 years of age), a small game license, a state migratory bird permit, and a special migratory bird authorization with GMA 1 snow goose harvest record card. You must [report hunting activity](#) on your harvest record cards to WDFW using the online reporting system or by mailing the cards to WDFW, Wildlife Program — Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141 Olympia, WA 98504. The deadline for submission is March 20, 2025.

**Submission of harvest record cards is mandatory for hunters that request them, even if you did not harvest birds.** These reports must be postmarked by the reporting deadline to avoid penalties. You must comply with these reporting requirements to avoid a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card next season. The deadline is strictly enforced because WDFW must collate the data, develop preliminary reports, and provide the information to Department biologists across the state to set permit levels for the coming hunting season.

Hunters should note that many WDFW managed lands and National Wildlife Refuges are closed to goose hunting during this late-season opportunity (refer to page 26 in the pamphlet). All standard regulations regarding plugged shotguns, non-motorized decoys, and bag limits apply during both seasons. The bag limit for the late white geese season is 20 birds, with a possession limit of 60.

Whatcom and Skagit counties hold certain waterfowl species that could be confused with snow geese. Several thousand trumpeters and tundra swans reside throughout western parts of District 14 from mid-fall through spring. Waterfowl hunters **must** be able to distinguish between mature or juvenile swans and their snow goose counterparts, which can be a challenge for inexperienced hunters. With proper species identification and patience, there should be little confusion between the species. Hunters should review waterfowl identification materials to sharpen their skills before the season begins. Under state and federal laws, harming swans in Washington State is illegal. Emperor geese have been documented infrequently in District 14. They too are closed to harvest in the lower 48 states under federal migratory bird regulations.

**Figure 108. Differentiating swans from snow geese.**



## Hunter access

Access to private lands for big game hunting opportunities remains limited. Because of experience with theft, vandalism, dumping, and other problems, private industrial timber companies generally do not allow vehicular access. Some timber companies limit public access to walk-in opportunities only, while others allow for vehicular access under a permit system. Less hunting pressure on these walk-in-only sites results in good hunting opportunities for those willing to use bicycles or hike behind locked gates when private companies allow this type of access.

One exception is Sierra Pacific Industries, which owns significant private industrial timberlands in Skagit and Whatcom counties. For the 2024–25 season, WDFW has facilitated access on Sierra Pacific properties in GMU 418 for special permit bull elk, some quality black-tailed buck permit holders, and fall general season bear hunters at a designated site near Black Mountain (under the Hunt by Reservation system).

Weyerhaeuser-Columbia Timberlands Corporation (Weyerhaeuser) sold properties throughout northwest Washington to Hampton Lumber. You can purchase a permit for motorized and non-motorized access to their forests in the North Cascades by following the links on the [Hampton Lumber](#) website.

Because much of the land in District 14 is private property, hunters should obtain permission to hunt from landowners. For safety, hunters must always be mindful of where houses, livestock, and outbuildings are situated. Portions of District 14 GMUs are under firearm restrictions. Hunters should research land ownership and understand local firearm limitations before hunting.

The Private Lands Access Program has negotiated access for hunters on dozens of private properties throughout Whatcom and Skagit counties. For the 2024-25 season, WDFW staff members have enrolled several deer and elk general season hunting sites in GMU 407 and continue to pursue more access opportunities. The Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program has over 60 sites on private lands for the upcoming waterfowl season (30 in Skagit County and 29 in Whatcom). These sites offer open field or blind-only hunting, primarily targeting dabbling ducks. While most of these sites are Register to Hunt

(note that sites are first-come, first-served), several are enrolled in the Hunt by Reservation system. Register to Hunt sites are very similar to Feel Free to Hunt sites (first-come, first-served), but you must complete a registration card when you use a site. Properties Enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program become available for public hunting once the agricultural practices are finished for the year. Because of this, many sites will not be open for the opening day of the waterfowl season. Our lands access program is constantly working to create more public access, so more sites may be added to the program before the season starts.



Photo 1512: A hunter and his dog crouch in a blind along the Skagit River. Photo by Duane Dixon.

The Hunt by Reservation program offers a quality hunting experience by limiting the number of days a site is hunted while guaranteeing the site will be available to whomever books the reservation. To reserve a Hunt by Reservation site, visit the [WDFW Hunting Access Webpage](#), create an account, choose a hunting site in the Hunt by Reservation category, and book your reservation. Reservations can begin at 8 a.m., two weeks before the hunt day. A fast internet connection improves your chances of securing a reservation.

Private Lands personnel have worked with landowners to grow forage for wintering waterfowl at some sites to provide additional feed for waterfowl. For those lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, this can generate some excellent hunting.

More information about individual sites, including maps, access rules, and the program, may be found on the WDFW [Places to go hunting](#) webpage. Waterfowl hunt units on private lands will open as crop harvests are completed, and other conditions are met, so only some units will be available on opening day.

In addition, the WDFW Private Lands program has developed and enhanced hunting opportunities on WDFW-managed lands. The five hunt sites are found on land managed by the Skagit Wildlife Area. They include South Padilla Bay (Bayview 1, 2, and 3) and Samish River (Edison East and West).

## Public lands

Vehicle access by big game hunters to certain Washington Department of Natural Resource (DNR) lands in Skagit and Whatcom counties may be impacted by logging activities during the upcoming hunting season. Access to Van Zandt Dike and Alger Hill Road via Skarrup Road at Parson Creek Road may be restricted by the DNR to manage access during times of active logging. Even if potential closures prohibit the use of vehicles, hunters are allowed access to these areas on foot, mountain bike, or by horse so long as they are respectful of active forestry operations.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) national forest lands offer some vehicular access throughout Whatcom and Skagit counties. Many road systems have been closed due to flood-related damage, and some roads are subject to seasonal road closures. The USFS plans to decommission or abandon a significant portion of its managed road network on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. These closures further restrict vehicular access to upper-elevation habitats for big game and forest grouse hunting. For updated USFS road and trail information, review the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions Map](#).

Among the WDFW-managed lands in District 14, waterfowl hunters should consider the Headquarters, Island, Samish (also known as the Welts property), and Johnson/Debay's Slough units in Skagit County, and Tennant Lake, Nooksack, and Lake Terrell wildlife area units in Whatcom County. All these sites are managed for waterfowl and provide walk-in and boat access, with some blinds available. Hunters can visit the WDFW [Wildlife Areas](#) webpage and search WDFW wildlife areas and units by name, county, and region for more information on each location.

## Skagit County

**For more information on hunting waterfowl at the Skagit Wildlife Area and its various units, please see our [Skagit Wildlife Area Waterfowl Hunting Guide](#) (updated August 2022).**

### Island Unit

The Island Unit totals approximately 268 acres and is a popular waterfowl hunting site. During the November 2021 flood event, a significant breach occurred on the east lobe of the unit. This area is now intertidal, with daily tides and river levels inundating the site like the surrounding marsh. The unit's west lobe was unaffected by the flood event and is still managed for enhanced waterfowl forage. Hunters can



still hunt the entire unit, but because the east lobe of the Island Unit is now intertidal, hunters using this part of the Island Unit should reference a tide chart and Skagit River gauges before going out in the field.

The Island Unit is accessible by boat only. Hunters typically launch from the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit or the Skagit County Parks boat launch under the Conway bridge. Be aware that river conditions, even short crossings, may be challenging or dangerous for small boats during high flows.

## **Samish Unit**

The Samish Unit has 410 acres of agricultural fields, grass, and seasonal wetlands. Approximately 220 acres of barley, millet, fava beans, and corn are planted on the site. Funding for the agricultural enhancements on this unit is provided through the Washington State Duck Stamp program. There are 23 shallow ponds and swales developed in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. Water control structures also allow a high percentage of the area to be flooded with sheet water during the hunting season. The Samish Unit is north of Highway 20 and can be accessed from the parking lot on Samish Island Road.

This site is very popular for waterfowl hunting, and all blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis. In addition to the existing permanent blinds, temporary blinds will be installed at locations varying yearly, depending on crop plantings and water conditions. Be sure to check the map on-site for the most updated information.



Photo 16: View of a mowed pond at the Samish Unit. Photo by WDFW.

## Telegraph Slough Unit

The Telegraph Slough Unit is a freshwater wetland created when highway construction crossed the Swinomish Channel to Fidalgo Island. WDFW and the Department of Natural Resources have a land-use agreement to manage the wetland for waterfowl hunting and wildlife observation opportunities. Parking is available off State Route 20, and several small ponds and channels are present depending on water levels. Hunters should be familiar with private property boundaries.

## Johnson/DeBay's Slough Unit

The Johnson/DeBay's Slough Hunt Unit is 23 acres and can be a productive hunting site. The unit is planted with barley and corn, depending on the year. Due to its small size, the unit can only accommodate four to five hunting parties. Because this is a field hunting site, it should be hunted with decoys. Temporary blinds are installed in various locations each year, depending on the plantings and water conditions. The blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Figure 119. Location of Johnson/DeBay's Slough blind and parking lot on the hunt unit.**



## Skagit Bay Estuary Unit

The Skagit Bay Estuary Unit starts at the bayfront edge of the delta of the Skagit River (North to South Forks). It extends south towards Stanwood along the north shore of Camano Island or the South Bay area. A large portion of this area's first-class and second-class tidelands are owned by WDFW (approximately 16,000 acres), with private ownerships interspersed. The property provides prime waterfowl hunting from a boat or by foot during low tides. WDFW manages two game reserves in this area, Skagit Bay Delta and Fir Island Farm Reserves.

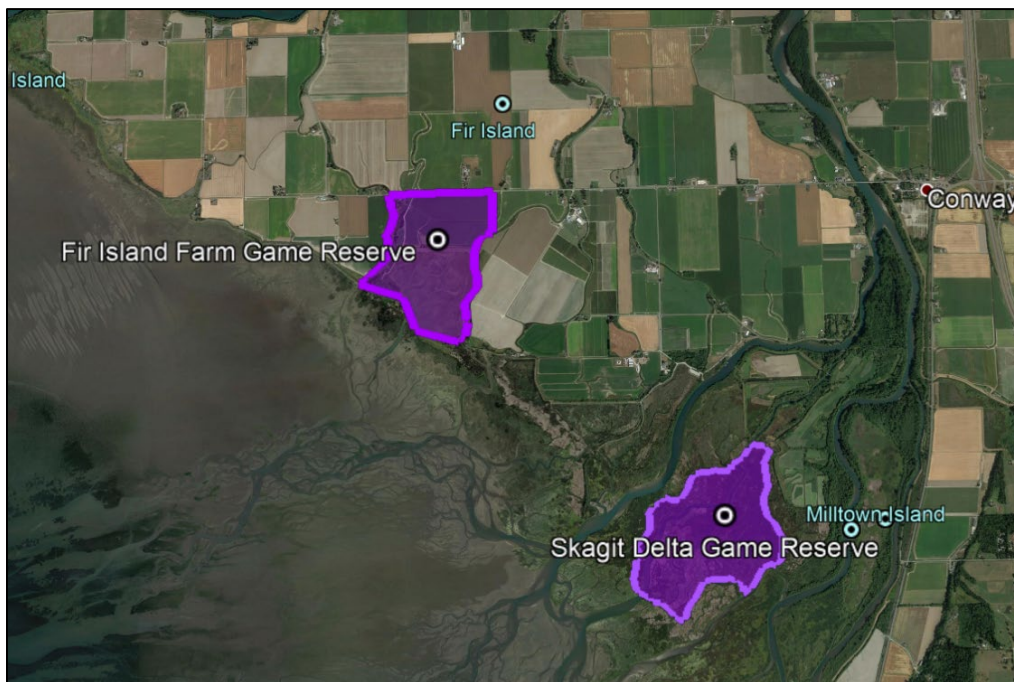
The diverse Skagit Bay topography includes open saltwater, mudflats, low marsh (grass), and a high marsh of cattails, brush, and taller woody vegetation. The entire area is a maze of channels, cut by both

tidal action and currents from the various sloughs of the Skagit River delta. Most bay front hunters set up on the edge of the vegetation line and in the higher marsh, channels, and backwaters. Some hunters prefer to hunt the open water on Skagit Bay.

The entire bay front can offer good shooting, but the most heavily used sites are on the South and North Forks of the Skagit River, downstream from the more popular boat launch access of Skagit Headquarters Unit (WDFW) and Conway Launch (Skagit County). For information about walk-in access options, refer to the [Skagit Wildlife Area webpage](#) for more details.

Large tide swings in Skagit Bay and nearby areas present challenges for waterfowl hunters every season, and both boat and walk-in hunters must be familiar with local tide tables and have a plan for their day before every hunt. Walk-in hunters should pay particular attention to deeper ditches and sloughs that may prohibit return routes or prevent the retrieval of downed waterfowl.

**Figure 1210. Map of game reserves within the Skagit Wildlife Area.**



## Whatcom County

### Lake Terrell Unit

The Lake Terrell Unit of the Whatcom Wildlife Area is an important and productive waterfowl hunting site. This unit has over 15 permanently constructed hunting blinds, all on a first-come, first-served basis. One ADA-accessible hunting blind was built by the Whatcom County Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association. To make a reservation for this blind, visit the [WDFW Private Lands Hunt by Reservation webpage](#) and search for “Lake Terrell Disability Access Site”.



Photo 1813: Lake Terrell Unit. Photo by Robert Waddell.

## **Tennant Lake Unit**

The Tennant Lake Unit of the Whatcom Wildlife Area has three waterfowl hunting blinds available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters can sign in on the day of the hunt at the sign-in box at the top boat launch to let others know which blind they will be using. This site is reliably productive throughout the hunting season.



Photo 17: Tennant Lake Unit. Photo by WDFW.

## **Nooksack Unit**

The Nooksack Unit is located south of Slater Road at the Nooksack River. It is heavily used during the waterfowl hunting season. At the north end of the unit is a 120-acre agricultural field that is usually planted with corn, potatoes, and barley during the spring. Upon harvest, 10 acres of corn and 15 acres of barley are left standing to provide winter waterfowl forage, providing for a high-quality hunting area. Several permanent hunting blinds and temporary stand-up blinds are located within the farm field, with all blinds on a first-come, first-served basis. An ADA-accessible blind is available at the Nooksack Unit. To make a reservation for this blind, visit the [WDFW Private Lands Hunt by Reservation webpage](#) and search for “Shady Lane Disability Access Site”.