

# 2024 District 11 Hunting Prospects

Thurston and Pierce counties and Lewis County GMU 667

---



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH &  
WILDLIFE**

September 2024

# 2024 District 11 Hunting Prospects

Thurston and Pierce counties and Lewis County GMU 667

## Authors

Michelle Tirhi, District Wildlife Biologist

Emily Butler, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

District 11 hunter G. Reed with his first cougar harvest, 2023. Photo by G. Reed.

---

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or [CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov).

# Table of Contents

<b>Your District 11 wildlife management team .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>District overview .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Western District 11 .....	7
Eastern District 11 .....	7
<b>Firearm and weapon restrictions .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Major public lands.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Private industrial forestlands.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Muckleshoot.....	8
Manulife .....	9
Hampton Lumber .....	10
Weyerhaeuser .....	11
Rayonier.....	13
Bascom Pacific.....	13
Port Blakely.....	14
Manke Lumber Co. ....	14
Major timber company contact information .....	14
<b>Tribal hunting.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Road closures .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Hunting organizations .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation .....	17
Washington Waterfowl Association.....	17
Washington Mule Deer Foundation.....	17
Eyes in the Woods.....	17
Washington Backcountry Hunters and Anglers .....	17
Ducks Unlimited - Washington.....	18
Izaak Walton League of America, Greater Seattle Chapter .....	18
Washington Brant Foundation .....	18
Washington Outdoor Women.....	18
<b>Online tools and maps.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Forest Service online .....	19
District 11 USFS maps.....	19
Other maps.....	19

<b>2024 forage moisture conditions and fire</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Elk</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Elk bacterial hoof disease — TAHD.....	35
<b>Deer</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Black bear</b> .....	<b>45</b>
Important bear hunting considerations .....	49
<b>Cougar</b> .....	<b>50</b>
Important considerations.....	53
Mandatory reporting/sealing.....	53
Cougar outreach and education .....	54
<b>Small game</b> .....	<b>54</b>
Bobcats .....	54
Red fox.....	56
Raccoons.....	56
Coyotes .....	57
Cottontail rabbits .....	58
Beaver, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk, and river otter.....	59
Beaver .....	59
Mink.....	60
Muskrats .....	60
River otters .....	61
American marten.....	62
<b>Ducks</b> .....	<b>62</b>
Where to hunt waterfowl in District 11 .....	66
Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge.....	66
Centralia Mine .....	67
Lakes and flooded agricultural fields.....	68
<b>Geese</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>Mourning dove</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<b>Forest grouse</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>Pheasant</b> .....	<b>77</b>
JBLM pheasant release.....	80
JBLM youth and senior pheasant hunt.....	80
<b>Quail</b> .....	<b>80</b>

**Turkeys ..... 81**  
**Band-tailed pigeons..... 82**  
    Special regulations ..... 84  
    Research ..... 84

## Your District 11 wildlife management team



Biologist Tirhi collects black bear hair samples as part of a 2020 District 11 bear density monitoring project. Photo by WDFW.



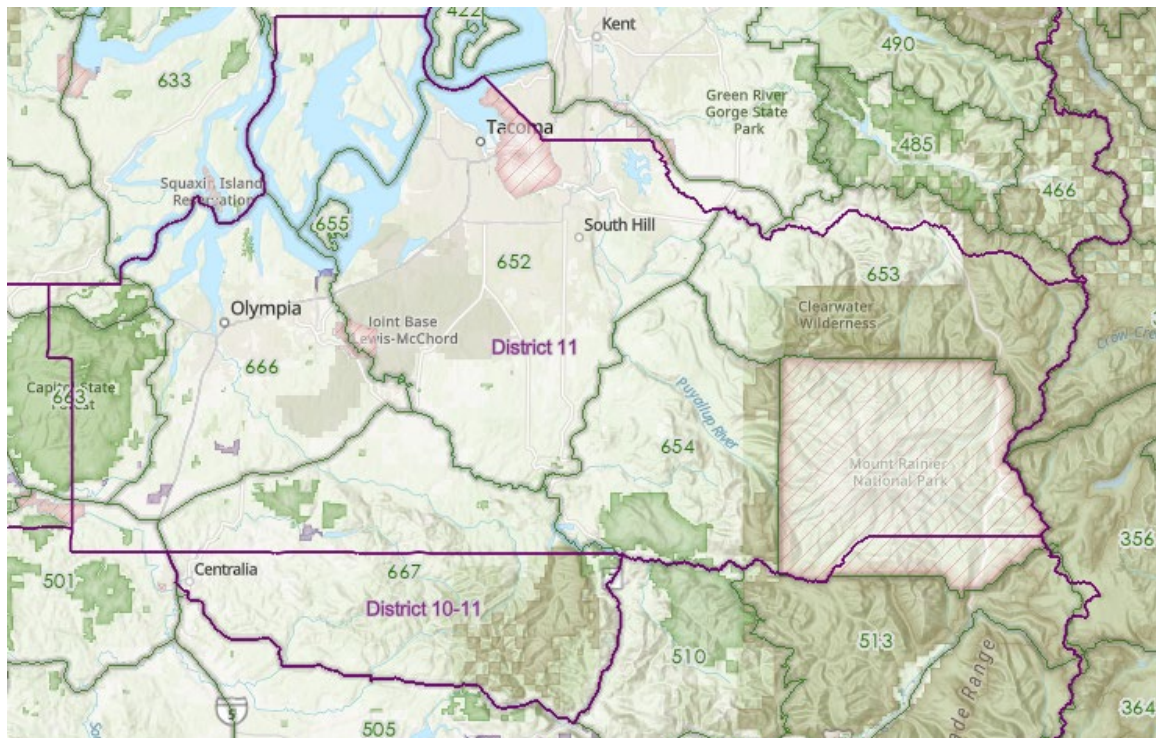
Biologist Butler checks western gray squirrel hair tubes on Joint Base Lewis McChord in 2019. Photo by WDFW.



## District overview

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

**Figure 1. Map depicting the six District 11 game management units and surrounding units in neighboring districts (400s for Region 4 and 500s for Region 5).**



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

## Western District 11

The western GMUs within District 11 include Anderson Island (GMU 655), Puyallup (GMU 652), Deschutes (666), and the western half of Skookumchuck (GMU 667). This side of the district is more urbanized than the eastern half. Because of this, WDFW often uses hunting regulations and management to stabilize game populations and mitigate wildlife conflicts with humans. For example, WDFW provides hunters in these western GMUs with more liberal seasons and damage hunts for deer and elk. However, urbanization also results in more private property in the western half, and hunters must seek access permission for most hunting. In addition, hunters can only access Anderson Island by private boat or ferry. Despite these hurdles, urbanization in the western GMUs also contributes to less hunting pressure and pockets of higher game species density, in particular deer, elk, coyote, beaver, river otter, and waterfowl.

## Eastern District 11

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

## Firearm and weapon restrictions

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



## Major public lands

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

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

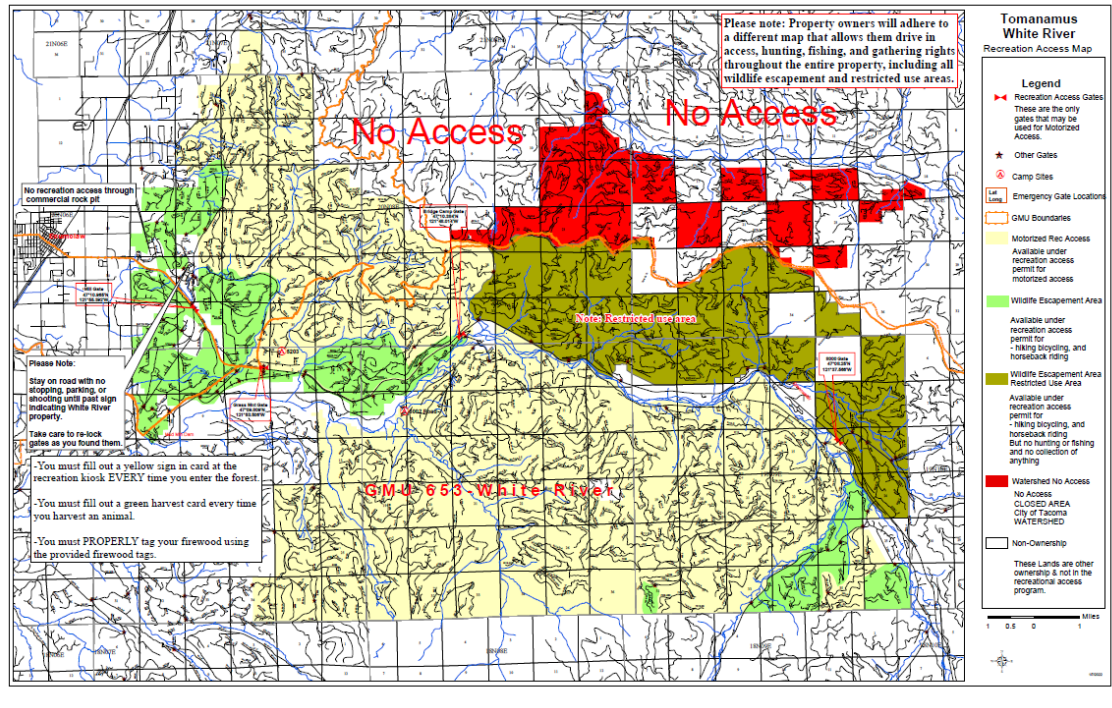
## Private industrial forestlands

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

### Muckleshoot

The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe owns the 78,121-acre Tomanamus (White River) Tree Farm along H-410. Hancock Natural Resource Group, later known as Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture Inc. (Manulife), previously owned and managed the land. The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe continues to allow hunting and both non-motorized and motorized access, but only under a fee access program. The license allows access April to December, with no access July 2-5. Starting in 2024, access permits must be purchased directly from the Tribe and will be issued **in person only** at the tribal office in Enumclaw. At the time of this publication, the Tribe was still putting together the process for permits and suggested contacting manager Melissa Calvert at [Melissa.Calvert@muckleshoot.nsn.us](mailto:Melissa.Calvert@muckleshoot.nsn.us) to be placed on a list to receive a permit. Clearly include contact information in the email and put Requesting Access Permit in the subject line. A map of Muckleshoot Indian Tribe ownership and access is below. For prices, application process, and rules and conditions for the fee access program contact the Muckleshoot Wildlife Program at 253-876-3266.

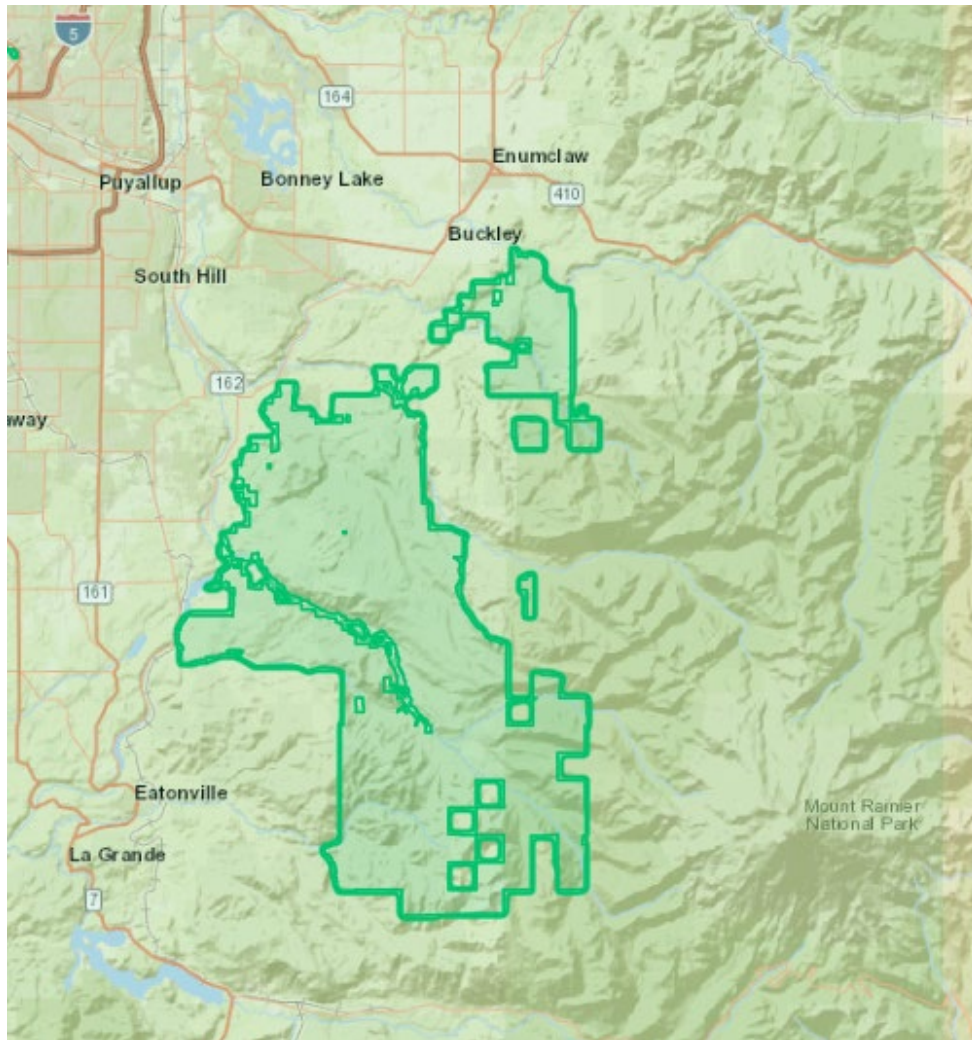
**Figure 2. Muckleshoot Indian Tribe's Tomanamus (White River) Tree Farm and access.**



## Manulife

Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture Inc. (Manulife, previously known as Hancock Forest Management) continues to own 103,462 acres of the Kapowsin Tree Farm but has sold a significant amount of land to other companies and tribes. A Manulife Recreation Access License is required for motorized and non-motorized access. Maps of this tree farm, along with prices, application process, rules, and conditions for the fee access program, can be found at [hancockrecreation.com](http://hancockrecreation.com) Elk hunters should read about the limitations on general season elk hunting before purchase by opening the PDF at that site titled 'Promotional Contest of Chance.' Elk and deer hunters: refer to the Kapowsin Permit Area Rules PDF also found at the link above for special restrictions on hunting both species. Other timber companies have small inholdings within the Kapowsin Tree Farm that may have additional access restrictions. Currently, most permits allow access from April 1 to March 30, with no access the first week of July or during bull elk seasons.

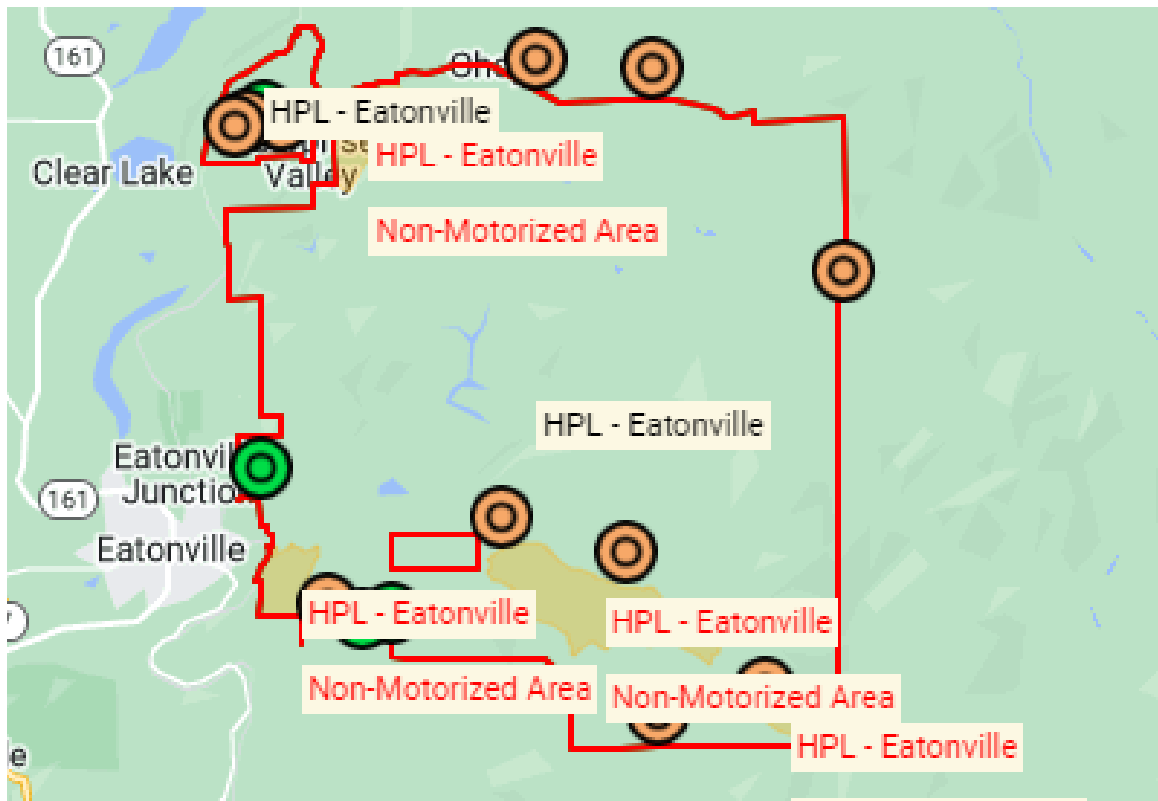
**Figure 3. Manulife's Kapowsin Tree Farm.**



## Hampton Lumber

[Hampton Tree Farms](#) owns and manages the 53,000-acre Eatonville Forest. A recreational access permit is required and can be purchased through [My Outdoor Agent](#) (scroll down and choose West to find Eatonville Motorized Permit details). The recreation term begins May 1 and ends Dec. 31 each year. The property is closed to all recreation access from Jan. 1 to April 30.

Figure 4. Hampton Lumber's Eatonville Tree Farm.

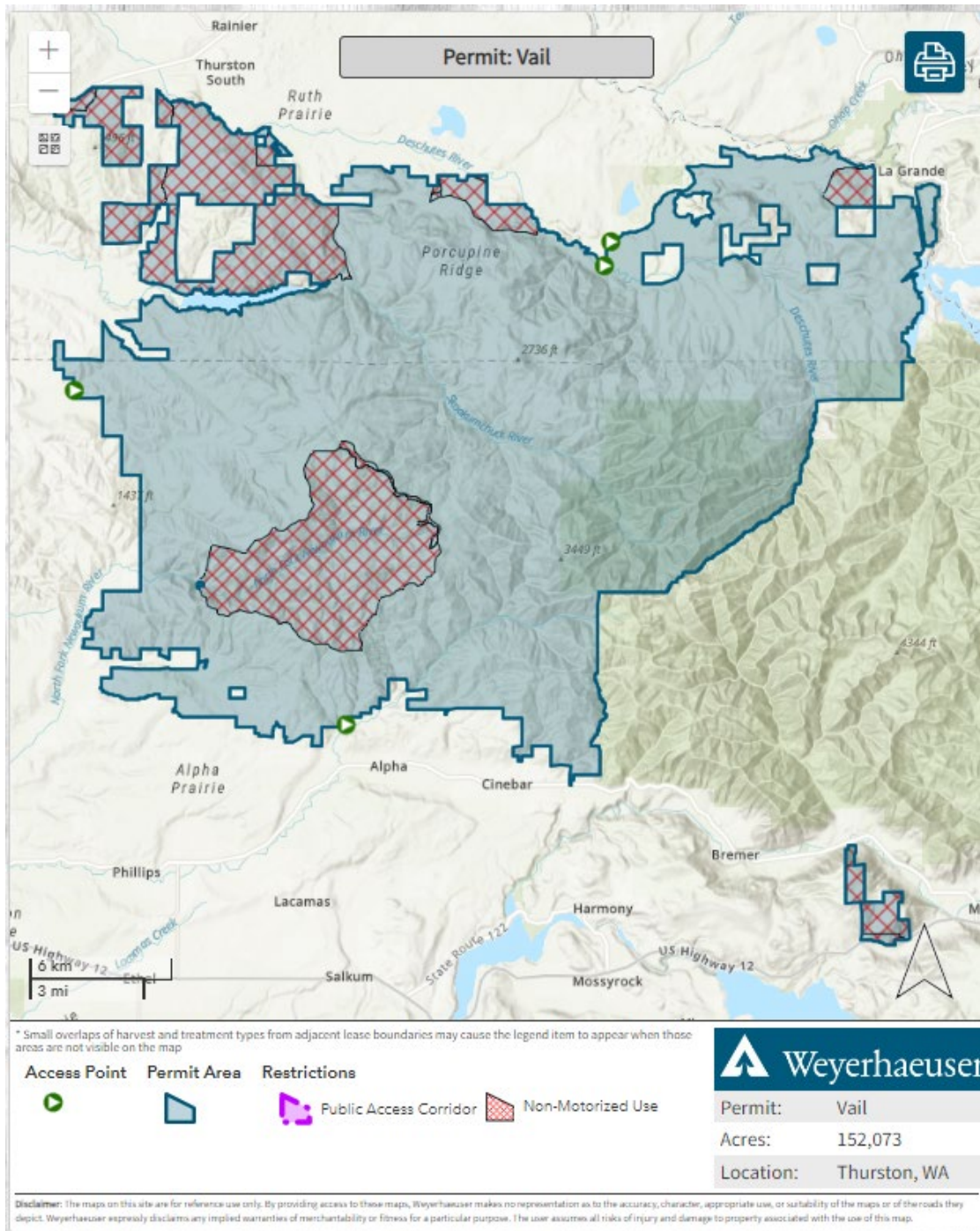


## Weyerhaeuser

Weyerhaeuser owns property across District 11, including the 152,073-acre Vail Tree Farm in GMUs 654 and 667. A recreational access permit is required for all Weyerhaeuser property. Two types of programs are available: lease and permit. Three types of permits are available: motorized, motorized premium, and non-motorized. Motorized and non-motorized permits go on sale in spring (dates and times are announced on the website in April) and allow access for one year (August through the following July). They typically sell out well in advance of the hunting season. All forestry operations continue during the permit season. Information on leases and permits can be found on [Weyerhaeuser's recreation page](#).



Figure 5. Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm.







## Port Blakely

Port Blakely owns two parcels just east of Delphi Road SW and three parcels south of Old Highway 99 (just east of the Highway 12/Interstate 5 interchange) that are open for non-motorized public access only, including walking, bicycle, and horse. Information on the Port Blakely public access program can be found [at PortBlakely.com](http://PortBlakely.com).

## Manke Lumber Co.

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

## Major timber company contact information

In eastern Pierce County (GMUs 652, 653, and 654), the following ownership and contact information may be found (hover over name for direct link to company website):

- [Hampton Lumber/Mid Valley Resources](#) (access managed under Manulife Access Program)
- [Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture](#) (Phone: 800-782-1493)
- [Muckleshoot Indian Tribe](#) (access managed by Manulife Access Program)
- [Rayonier Forest Products, Timber & Land Management Company](#)
- [Manke Lumber Company](#)

In Thurston County (GMUs 666 and 667):

- [Manke Lumber Company](#)
- [Port Blakely](#)
- [Weyerhaeuser](#)
- Bascom Pacific LLC (no website available)

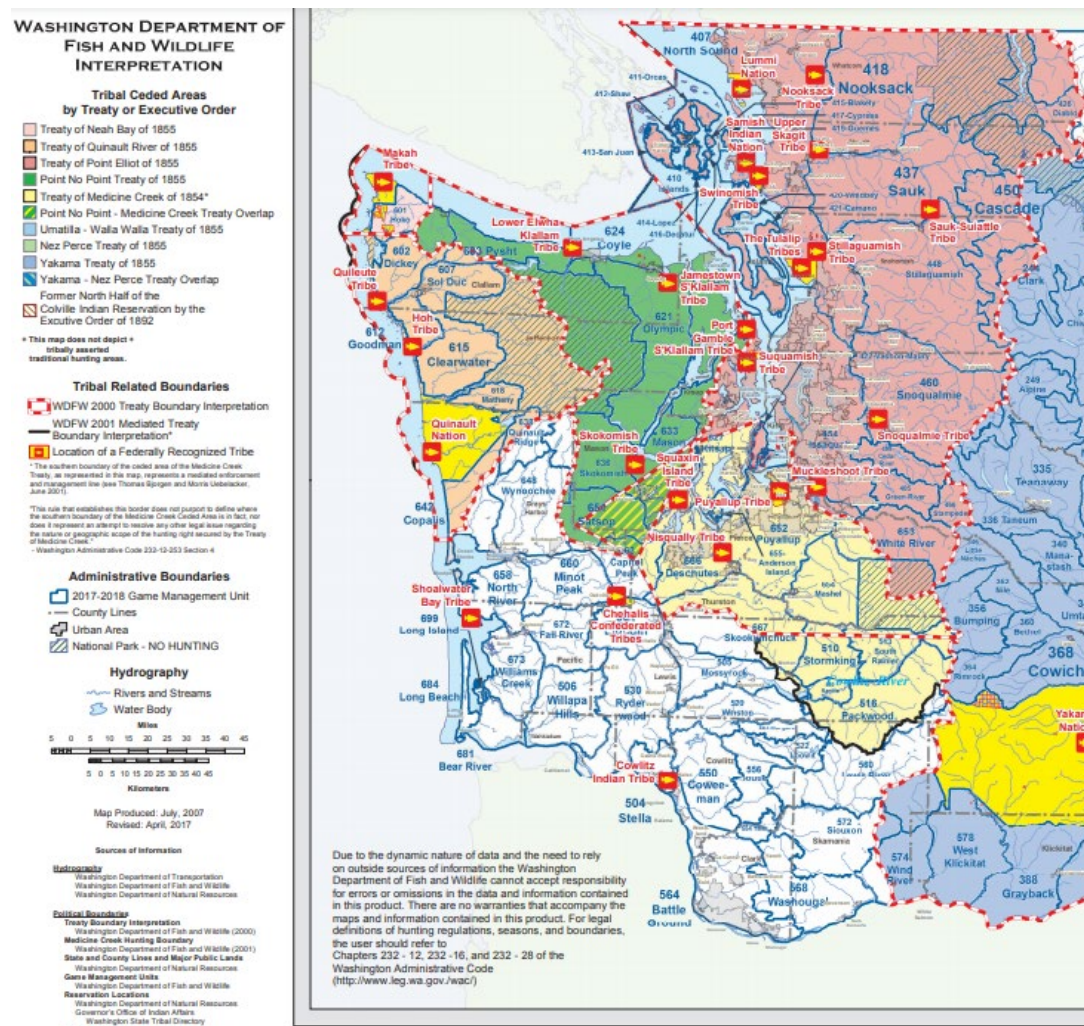
Anderson Island (GMU 655) is almost entirely privately owned with the exception of small parks that either the Anderson Island Park & Recreation District or [Pierce County](#) own. Hunting and trapping are prohibited on all parks owned by Anderson Island. For location and rules, reference. Hunters and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

# Tribal hunting

District 11 is within the ceded area of the Treaty of Medicine Creek of 1854 and the Treaty of Point Elliot of 1856 (reference graphic below). WDFW and tribal governments cooperatively manage wildlife populations. Treaty tribes with off-reservation hunting rights can hunt within their ceded areas or traditional hunting areas. Tribal hunting often occurs concurrent with WDFW hunting seasons. Tribal governments set their own seasons and bag limits. Tribal Enforcement personnel are responsible for ensuring compliance with tribal hunting regulations, which may differ from state regulations. Several tribes have entered into cooperative agreements with WDFW regarding hunting; those agreements can be found on [WDFW's website](#).

Tribal big game harvest reports are available at the Northwest Indian Fisheries [Commission website](#).

**Figure 8. Tribal ceded areas of Western Washington.**



## Road closures

**Table 1. Current road closures in effect in District 11.**

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

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

\*\*Review private lands access information above for fee access programs.

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

# Hunting organizations

Below is a list of known hunting organizations active in District 11. If other organizations should be included in this document, please contact WDFW.

## Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

[Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation \(rmef.org\)](http://rmef.org)

Alex Baier 425-293-2160

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

## Washington Waterfowl Association

Grays Harbor Chapter (Thurston and Lewis counties)

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

Southwest Chapter (Pierce County)

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

## Washington Mule Deer Foundation

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

Puget Sound Blacktail Chapter - WA 0115

Tacoma, WA 98360

Stephanie Cordes

253-232-3133

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

## Eyes in the Woods

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

## Washington Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

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

Cameron Lankhaar, West Side Co-Chair

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



## Ducks Unlimited - Washington

[ducks.org/washington](https://ducks.org/washington)

## Izaak Walton League of America, Greater Seattle Chapter

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

A. William Way

425-868-4759

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

3451 E. Lake Sammamish Lane NE, Sammamish, WA 98074

## Washington Brant Foundation

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

Maynard Axelson 360-445-6681

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

15929 Fir Island Road, Mount Vernon, WA 98273

## Washington Outdoor Women

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

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

## Online tools and maps

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

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

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

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

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

For questions about buying maps for a store, call 360-664-4343. For questions about roads in District 11, call the DNR office in Enumclaw at 360-802-7055.

Other maps that can be helpful for select areas include:

## Forest Service online

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

### District 11 USFS maps

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

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

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

## Other maps

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

**OnX app:** Many hunters use the OnX mobile phone app, especially since maps can be downloaded for use when cell service is unavailable: [onX: GPS Map Apps for Hunting, Hiking & Off-Roading \(onxmaps.com\)](#)

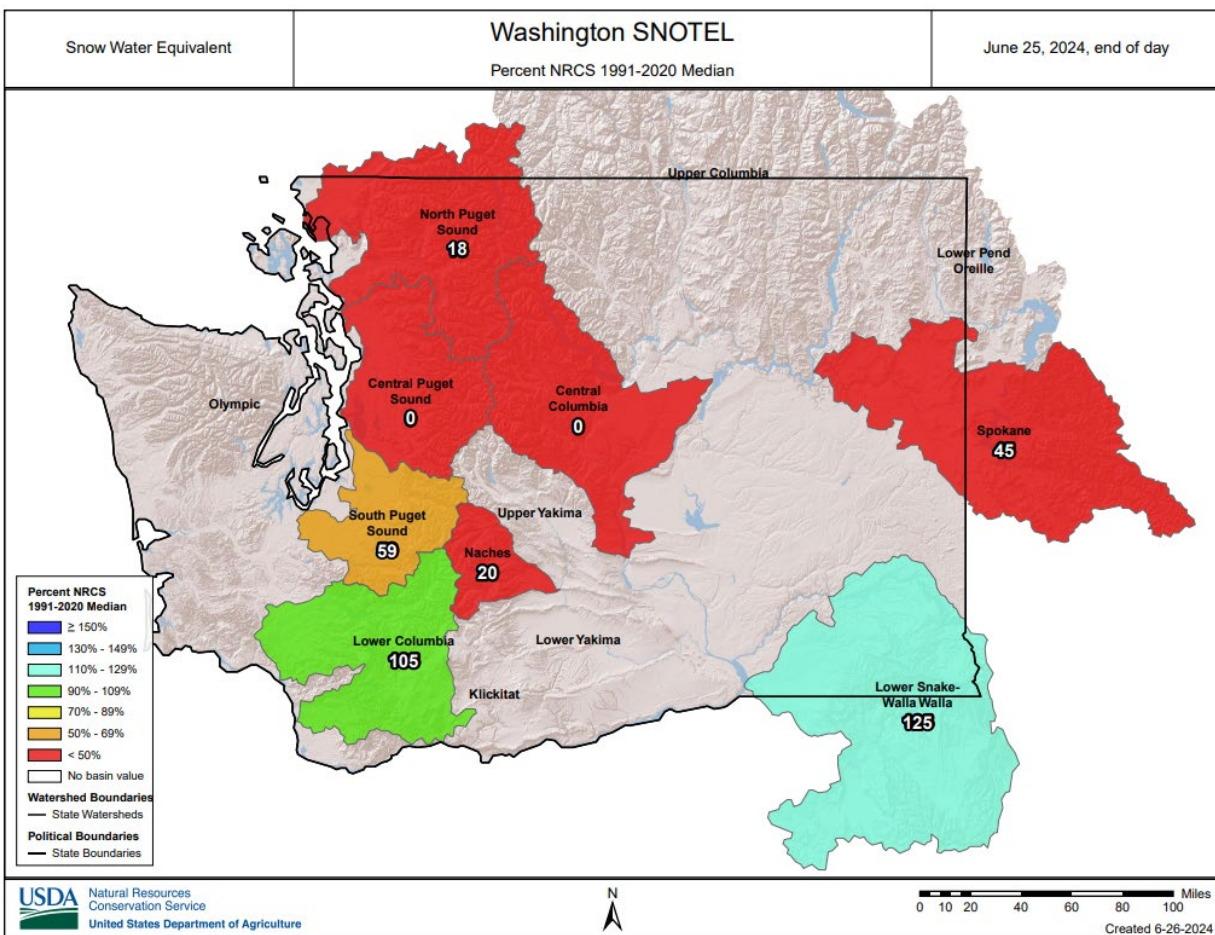
WDFW strongly encourages hunters to read more in-depth **WDFW hunting management and planning materials** by visiting the following:

- [WDFW hunting webpage](#)
- [WDFW game management materials](#)
- [The 2015-2021 Game Management Plan](#)
  - Note: The updated Game Management Plan process began in 2023.
- [The Game Status and Trend Report](#)
- [Hunting seasons and regulations](#)

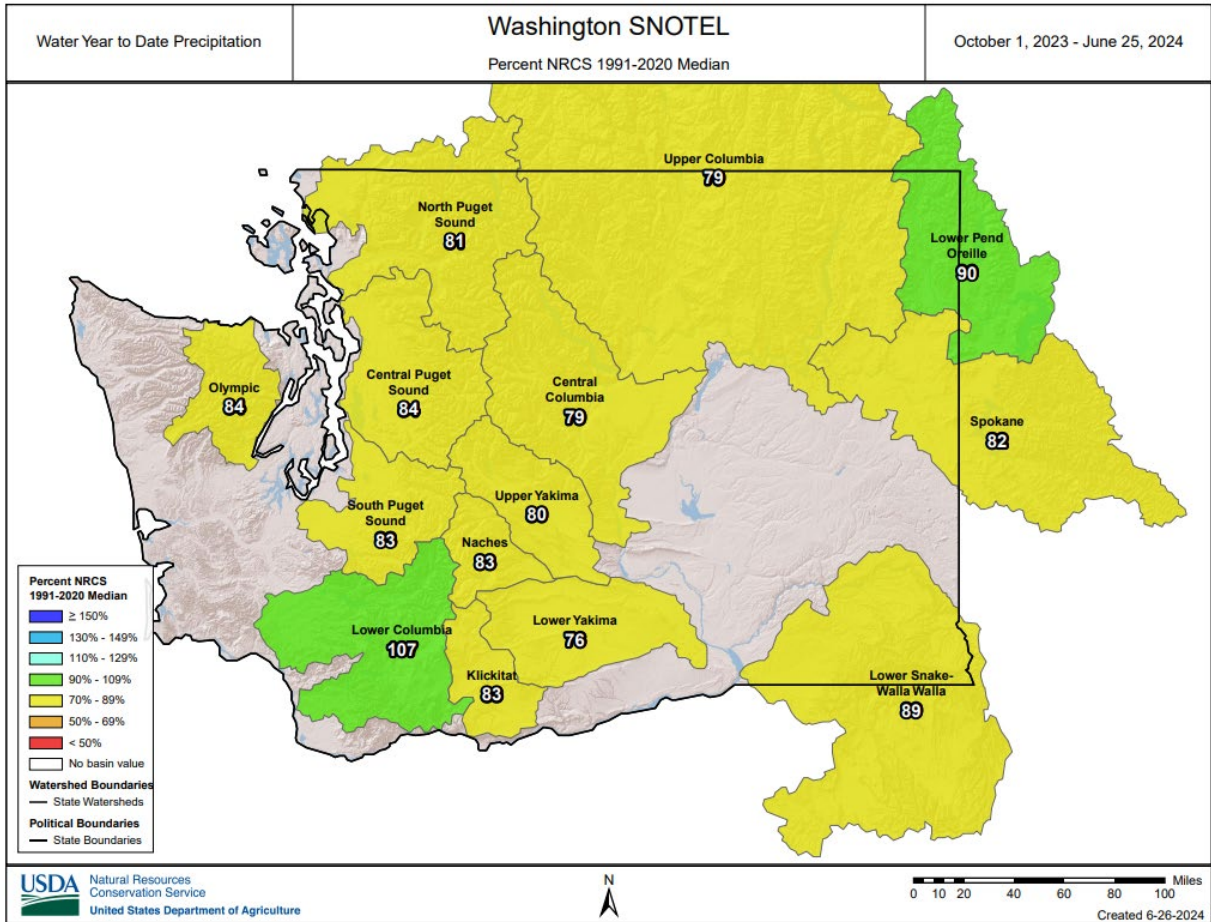
# 2024 Forage moisture conditions and fire

Snowpack is the most reliable indicator of moisture levels that contribute to forage persistence for large and small game through hunting seasons. This moisture level also affects the rate and intensity of the fire season, which has additional impact to forage persistence. The best measure of moisture for browse is the snow water equivalent and as a comparison to percent of normal. Going into summer, the South Puget Sound area of District 11 was at 70-89% of median normal (Figure 8). This suggests good browse and forage availability to game species for reproduction and survival as we lead into the hunting seasons. Similarly, District 11’s precipitation levels (non-snowpack) are also currently at 70-89% of median normal, which again should increase forage for game species, aiding survival and reproduction (Figure 9). For the most current information on climate trends and status for Washington, visit the [Office of Washington State Climatologist](#).

**Figure 9. Washington snow water equivalent as percent of median for the period 1991 – 2020 (Natural Resources Conservation Service).**



**Figure 10. Washington water year-to-date precipitation as percent of median for the period 1991 – 2020 (Natural Resources Conservation Service).**

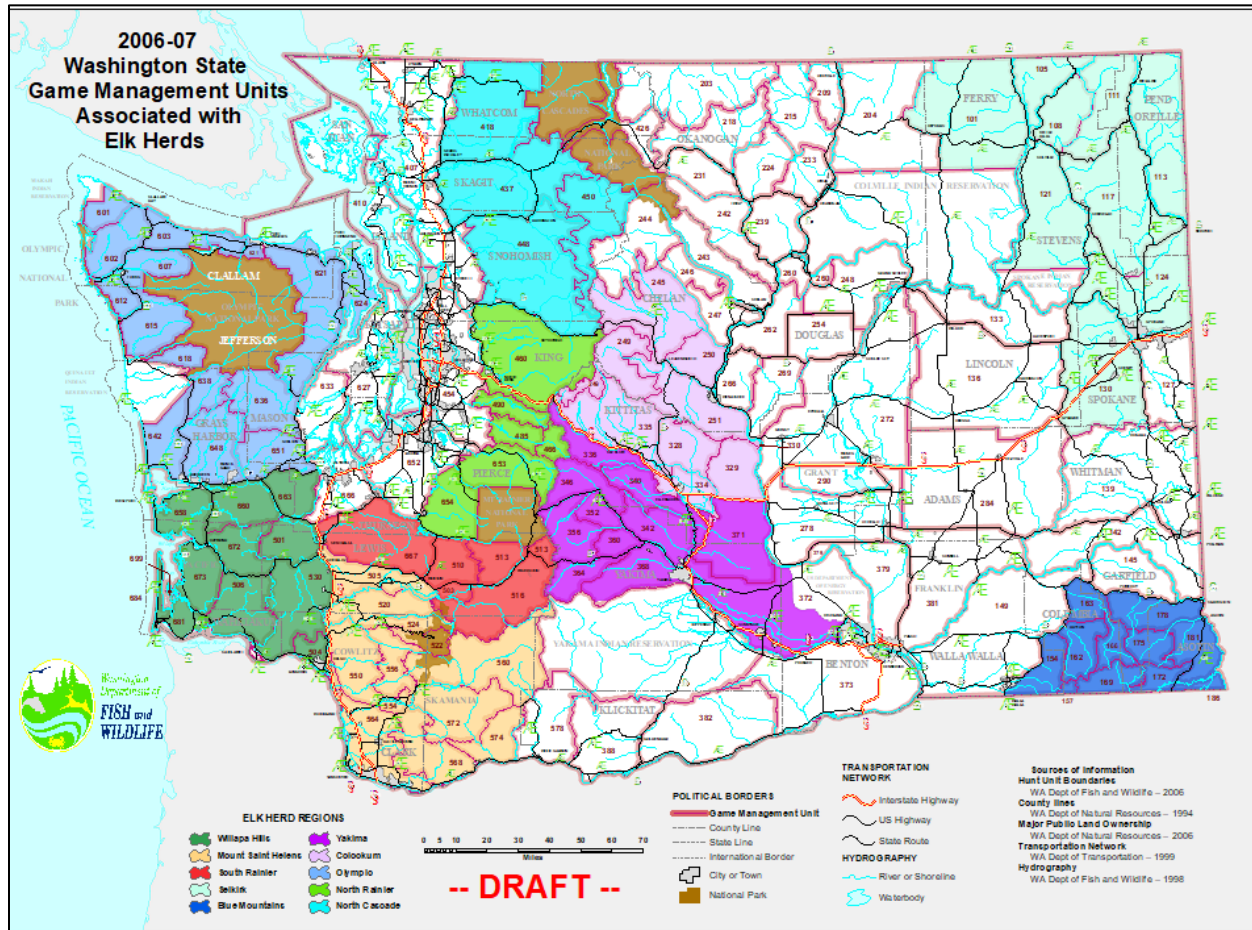




# Elk

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

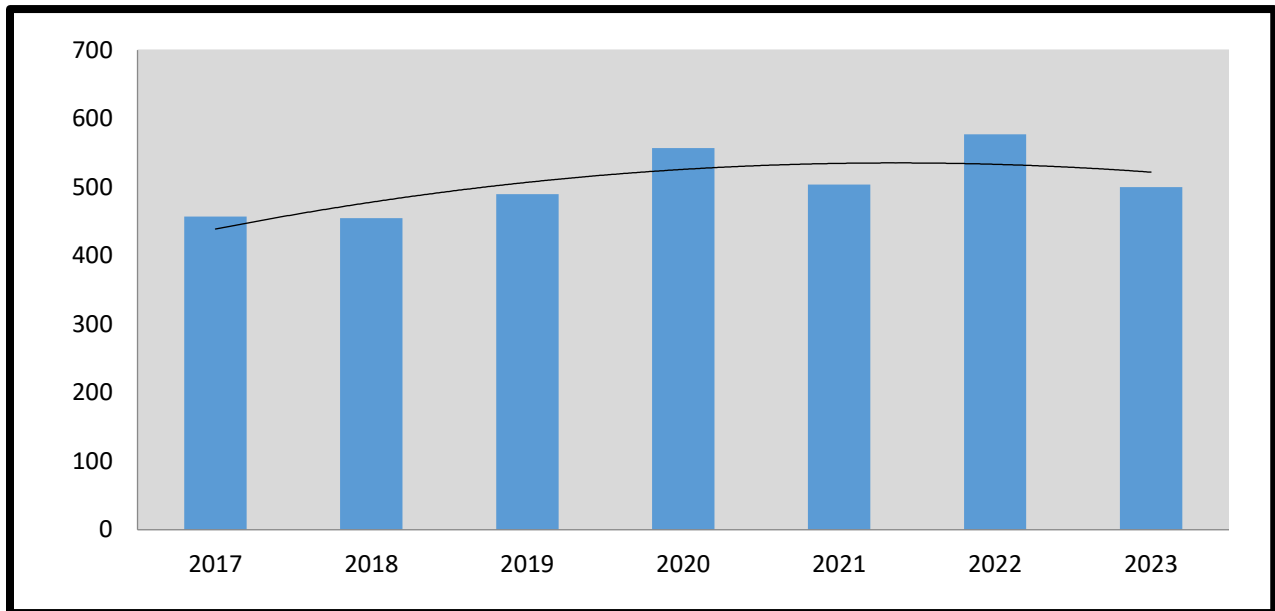
**Figure 11. The 10 elk herds of Washington.**



The long-term elk harvest trend has continued to increase in District 11 but dropped slightly in 2023 compared to 2022. Regardless, elk availability should continue to be similar to or slightly better than previous years in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier herds continue to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 20 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit recovery in the North Rainier herd. Hunters annually report quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull-only permit hunt.



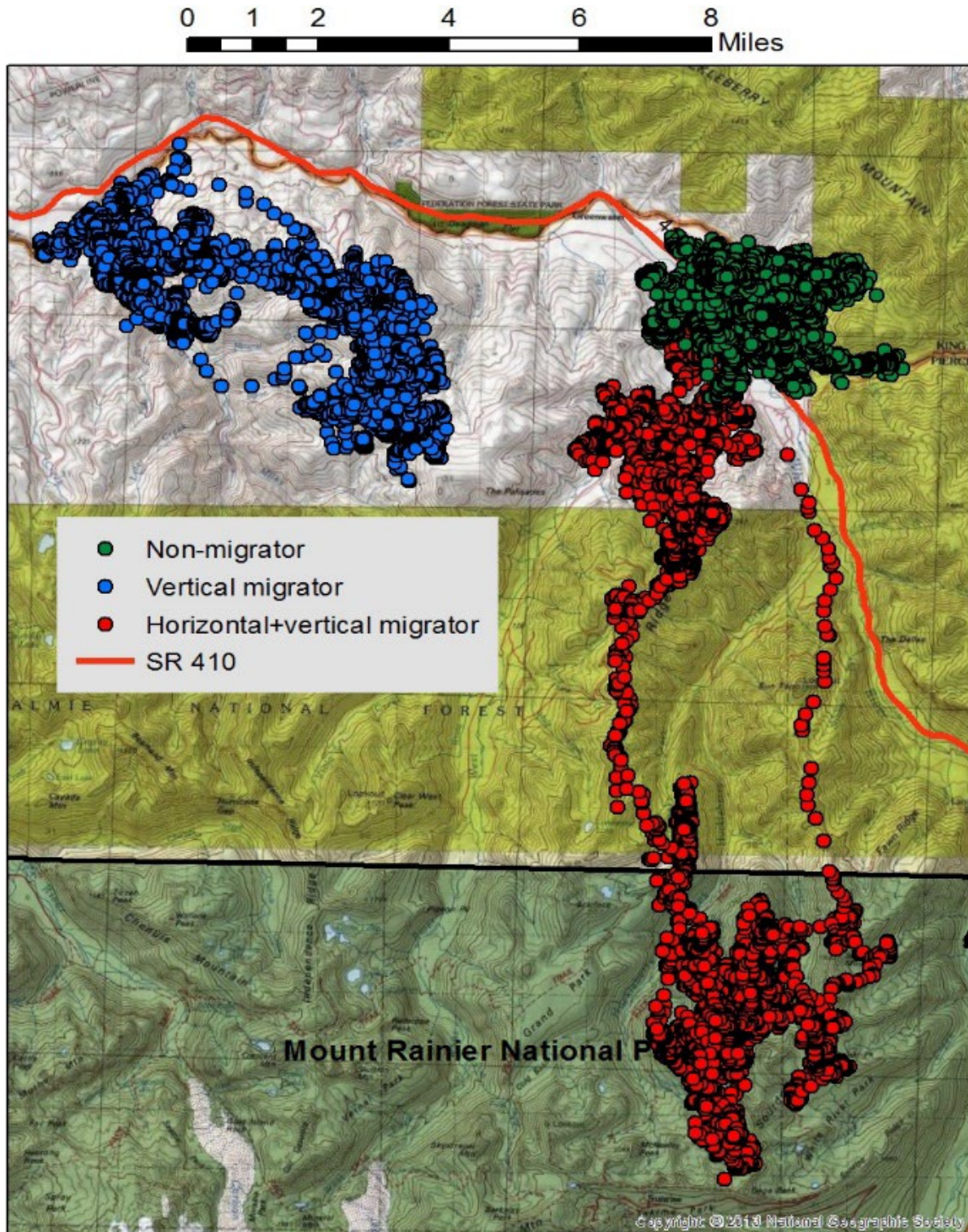
**Figure 12. General season elk harvest, all weapons combined, District 11.**



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

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

Figure 13. Examples of elk migration for three GPS-marked elk in GMU 653, showing non-migrator, vertical migrator, and horizontal+vertical migrator. The horizontal+vertical migrator (57% of study animals) moves to Mount Rainier National Park in summer. In summer, the vertical migrator (23%) moves to higher elevation that is adjacent to winter range, but also may use its winter range in summer. The non-migrator (20%) uses the same range year-round. (Muckleshoot Tribe of Indians unpublished data).

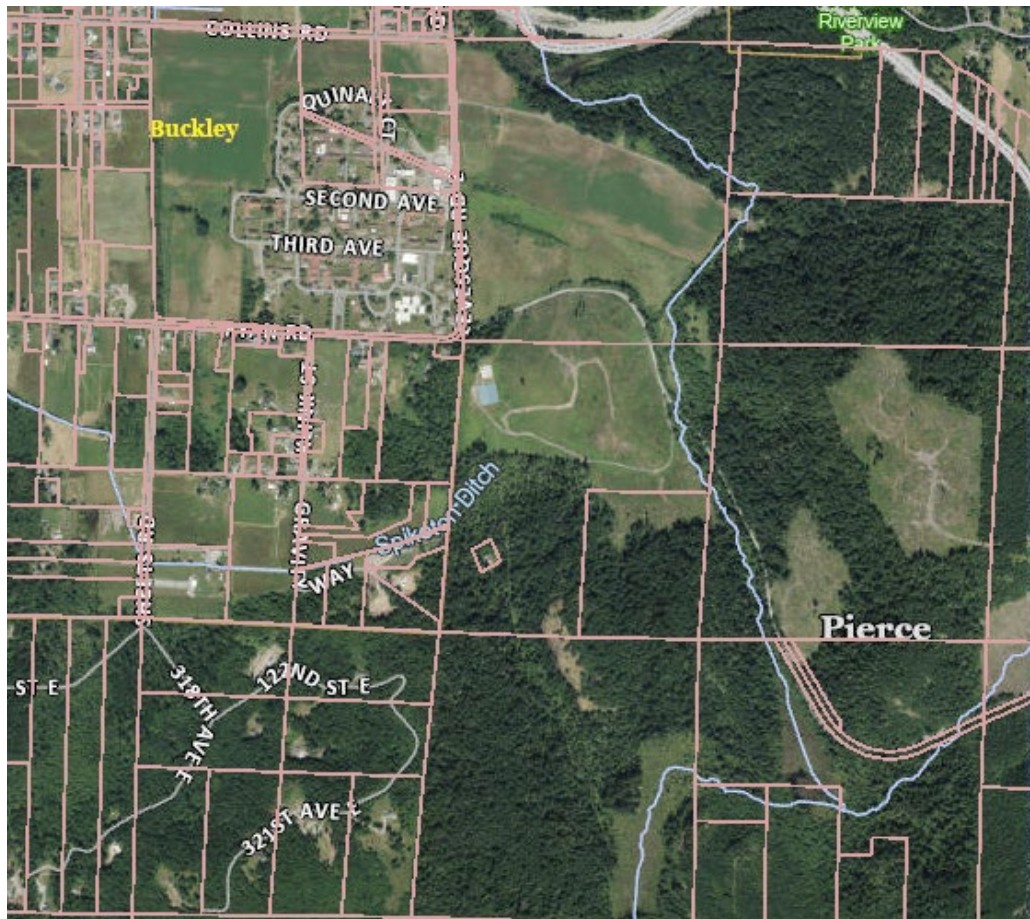




USFS, which permits the Crystal Mountain Ski Resort, reminds hunters that service roads built and maintained by the ski resort are not open to the public. Hunters may ask the resort for permission to haul out a harvested animal. Hunting is allowed in the [Clearwater](#), [Glacier View](#), and [Norse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

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

**Figure 14. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services lands open for hunting (White River School District).**



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

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

Some elk can occasionally be found and hunted on WDFW's [West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area](#) and on [Joint Base Lewis McChord](#) (JBLM) military property in Thurston County near the town of Rainier (GMU 666). JBLM changed its recreational access management system in 2023 and is now implementing a computer and smartphone-based platform called iSportsman. Learn about hunting, fishing, and other recreation [on JBLM's website](#).

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

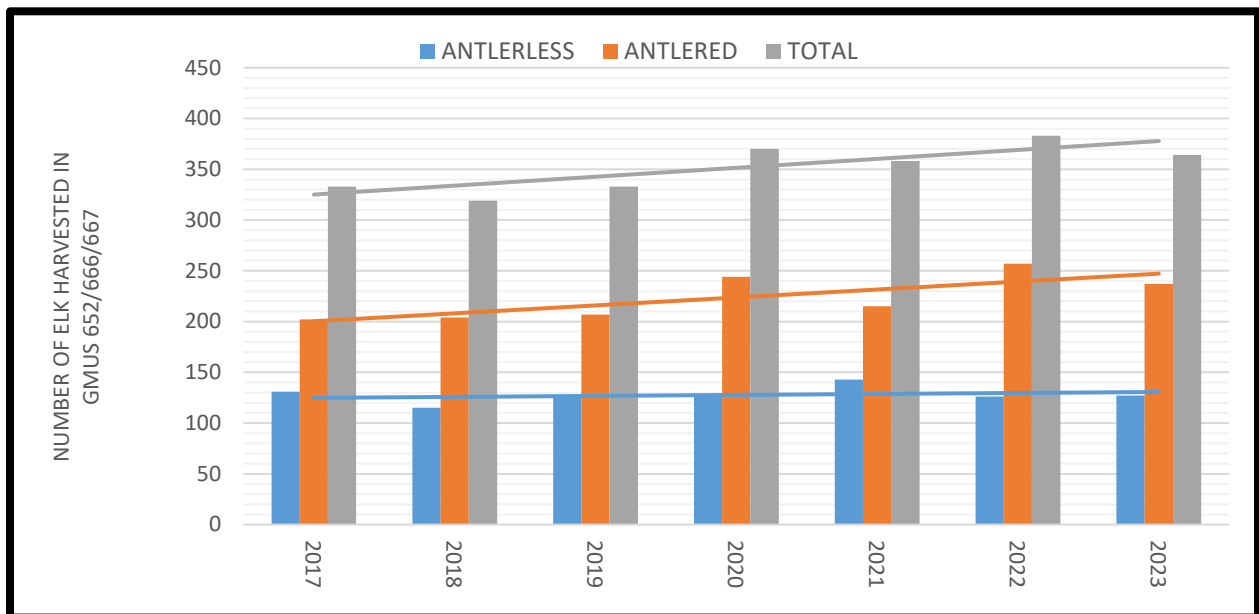
Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Orting, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Road SW). Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation. Hunters must request landowner permission to access private lands and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season. Elk Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced to encompass primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. Several hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aim to conserve elk for tribal purposes on

the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 was expanded and provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season, early and late archery and muzzleloader seasons, and three winter antlerless hunts allowing up to 10 elk per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is made up mostly of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes and supports about 150-200 elk. Access to these properties is limited and interested hunters are encouraged to obtain access before applying for these permits.

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

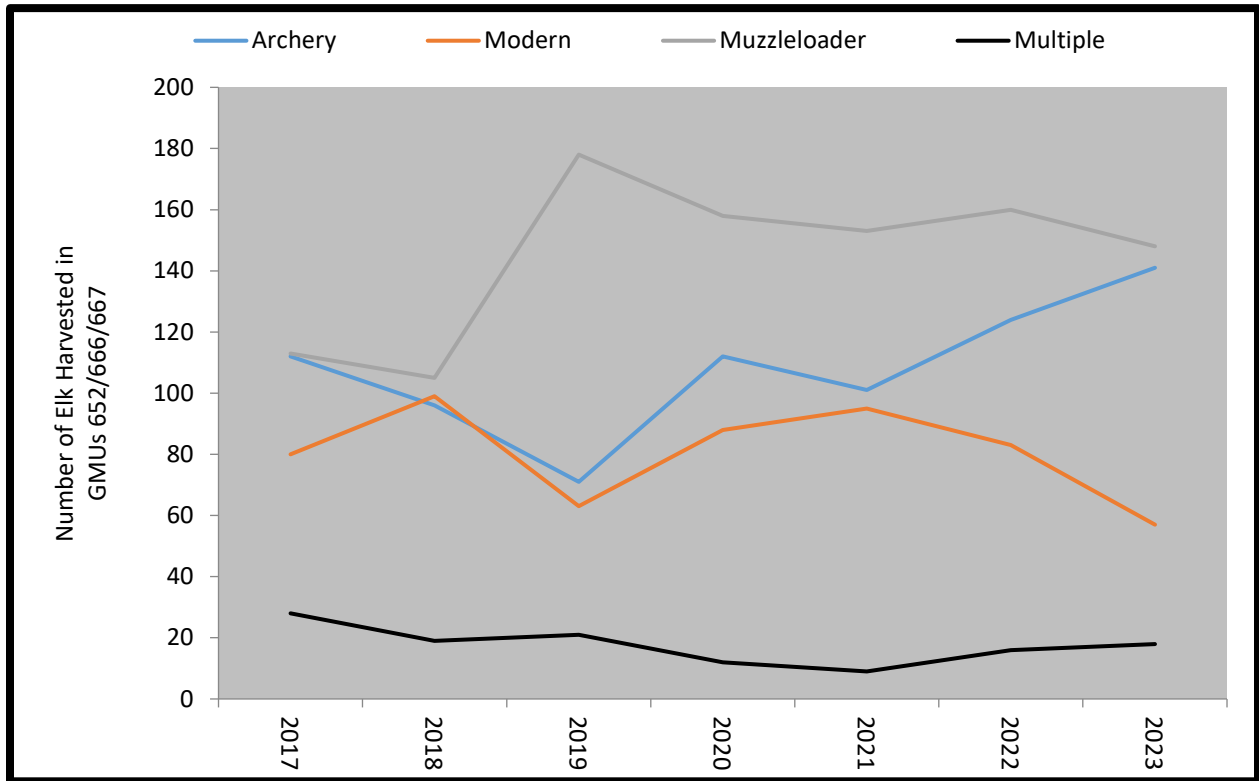
General season elk harvest has increased slightly over the past seven years within GMUs 652, 666, and 667 [combined these make up Elk Population Management Unit (PMU) 62], despite a slight decline in harvest by modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters from 2022 to 2023. Prospects should remain on average in these GMUs, with the highest success possible for archery hunters based on the seven-year trend.

**Figure 15. Number of elk harvested in Elk Population Management Unit 62 comprised of GMUs 652, 666, and 667.**



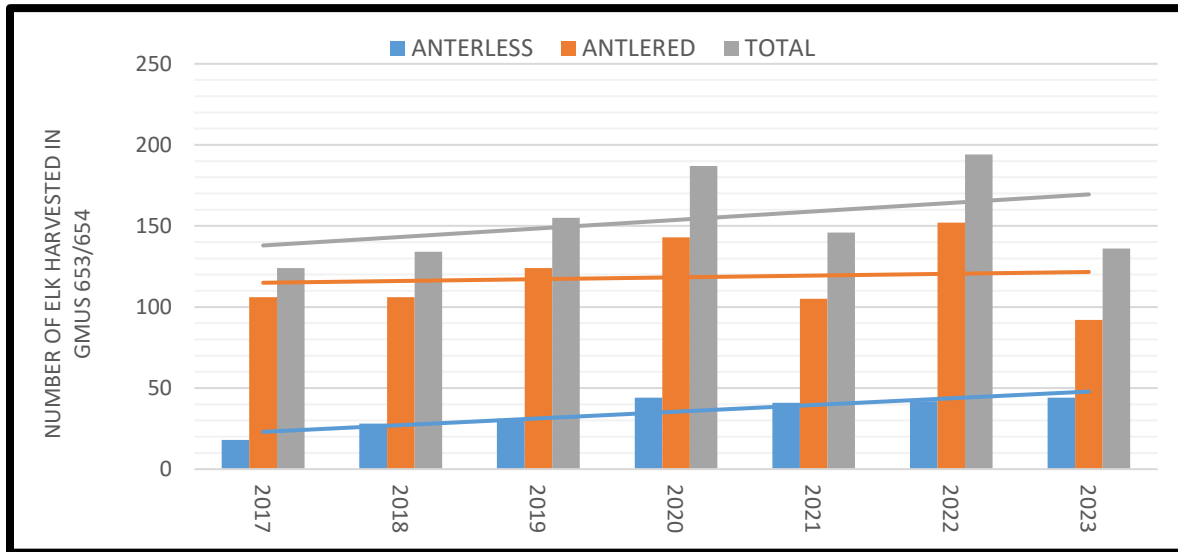


**Figure 16. Elk harvest by weapon type in Elk Population Management Unit 62 comprised of GMUs 652, 666, and 667.**

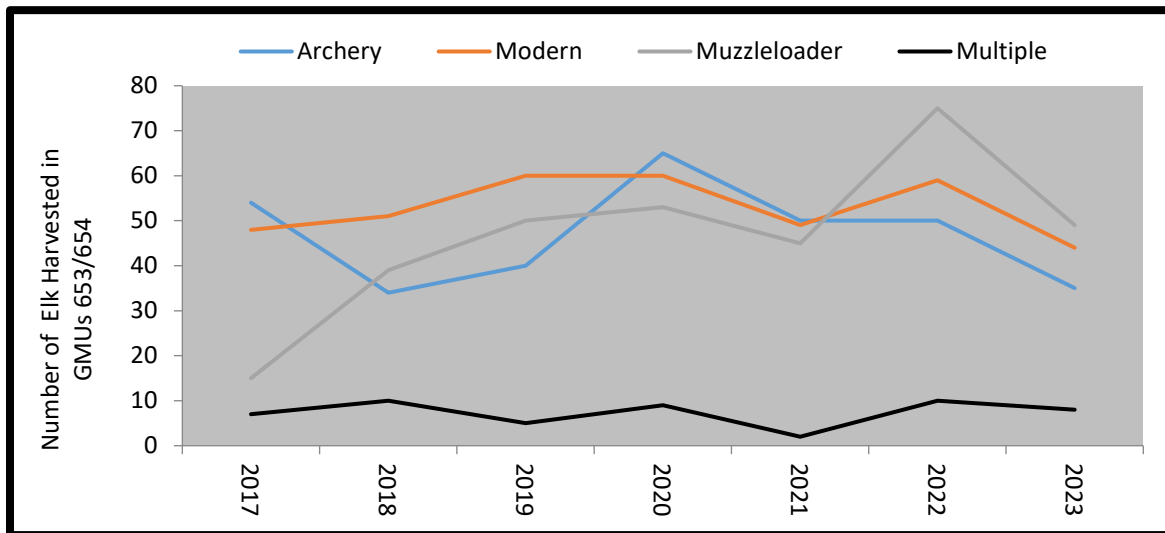


Elk harvest trends have also increased in GMUs 653 and 654 over the past seven years (combined these make up Elk PMU 67) but have fluctuated over the past four, including a decline in 2023. Antlerless harvest is only permitted in GMU 654 of PMU 67, and this harvest trend is increasing, slightly spurred by damage removal hunts for elk to abate increasing property damage caused by an increasing elk sub-herd. District 11 changed the boundaries of Elk Damage Hunt Area 6054 in 2019 to focus the hunt on properties experiencing damage. All weapon types experienced a harvest decline in this unit in 2023.

**Figure 17. Number of elk harvested in Elk Population Management Unit 67 comprised of GMUs 653 and 654.**



**Figure 18. Elk harvest by weapon type in Elk Population Management Unit 67 comprised of GMUs 653 and 654.**



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667, Manulife-managed forestland (Kapowsin in GMU 654), Hampton Lumber’s Eatonville Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Muckleshoot Indian Tribe’s Tomanamus White River Tree Farm in GMU 653 all support elk but require vehicle access permits (review Private Commercial Timberland section for information). Individuals who buy a Manulife recreational access license may enter a free drawing to participate in the GMU 654 limited elk hunt each year. Eleven recreational access licenses are drawn to hunt elk on the Kapowsin timberlands: five modern firearm, three archery, and three muzzleloader. One recreational access license holder is also drawn to hunt elk on the Eatonville timberlands under the GMU 654 elk season. No recreational access is allowed on the Buckley timberlands in GMU 653 during any bull elk season. Interested hunters who have purchased a

Manulife access license will find the drawing application [on Hancock's website](#) (open the PDF titled "Promotional Contest of Chance"). Hunters must be drawn for a WDFW bull elk permit to hunt elk on the White River timberlands in GMU 653. The Kapowsin and Eatonville drawing occurs in early May, and once winners have been notified, names are posted on the Manulife recreation website.

District 11 hunters harvest the greatest number of elk in GMUs 652 and 654 (reference charts below). Harvest spiked in GMU 652 in 2020 — possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed hunters more recreation time, or the increase in archery and muzzleloader opportunity — but has since declined. GMU 654 saw a significant decline in elk harvest from 2022 to 2023. GMUs 666 and 667 have significantly lower harvest because of fewer elk in both GMUs and difficult access onto private properties in GMU 666. More elk in GMU 667 can be found in the southern half of the Vail Tree Farm and southward to the Centralia Coal Mine.

GMU 653 is restricted to a bull-only permit hunt during general firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. Antlerless harvest is only allowed in the section of elk damage area 6014 that overlaps GMU 653 in the northeastern portion of the GMU near Buckley. Elk harvest trends in the GMU 653 permit hunt have fluctuated slightly over the past seven years except for a slight dip in 2017 and 2020. Hunter success has averaged 60%, making it a descent prospect for those lucky enough to be drawn for the hunt.

**Figure 19. GMU 652 general season harvest (all weapons combined).**

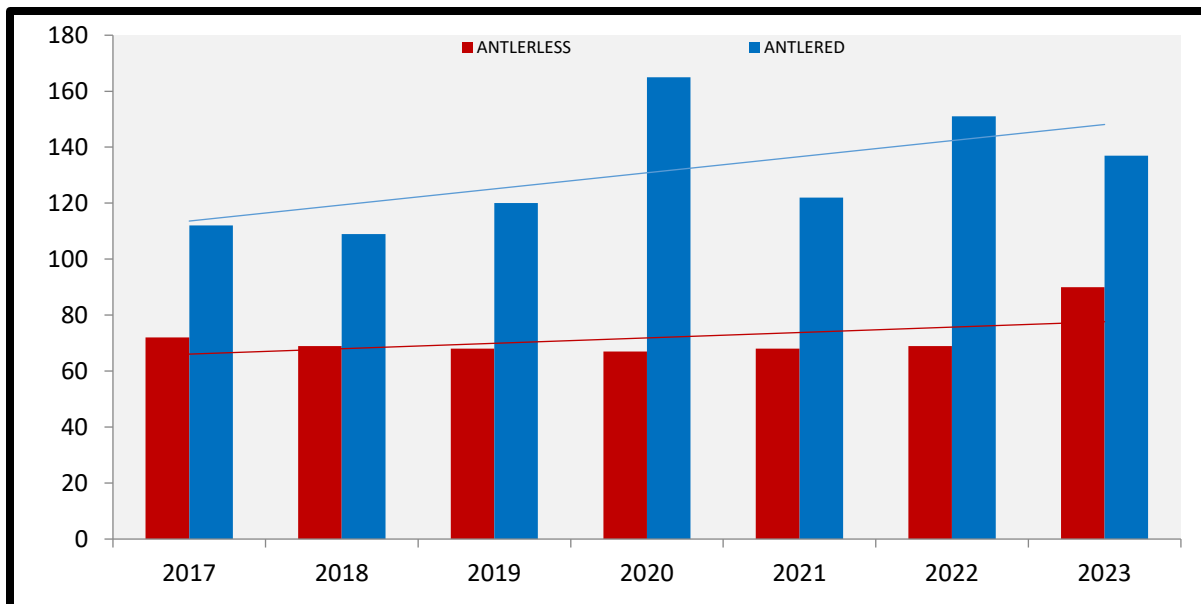


Figure 20. GMU 654 general season harvest (all weapons).

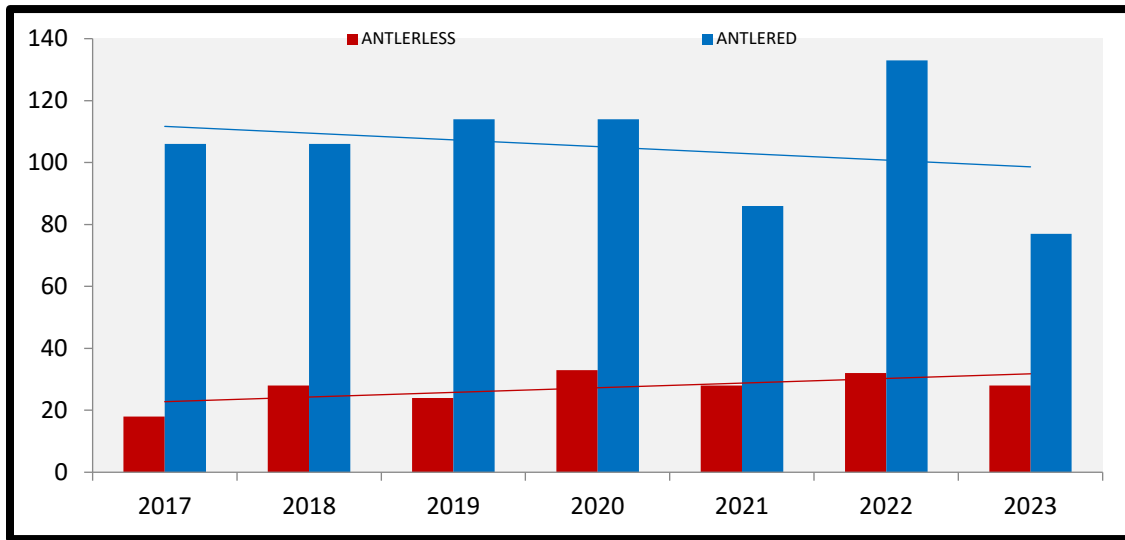
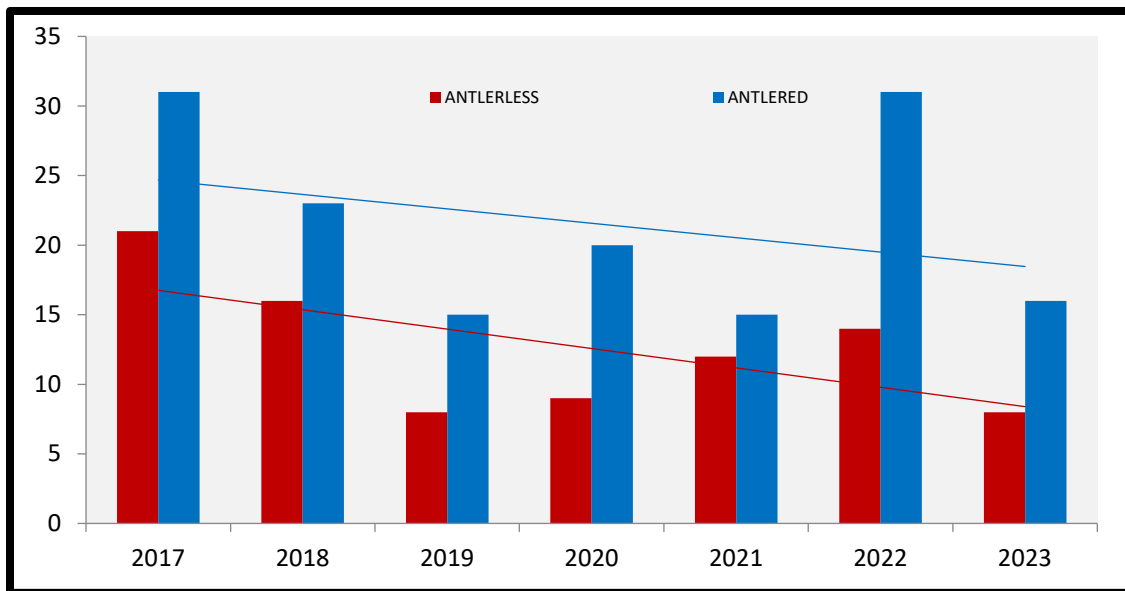
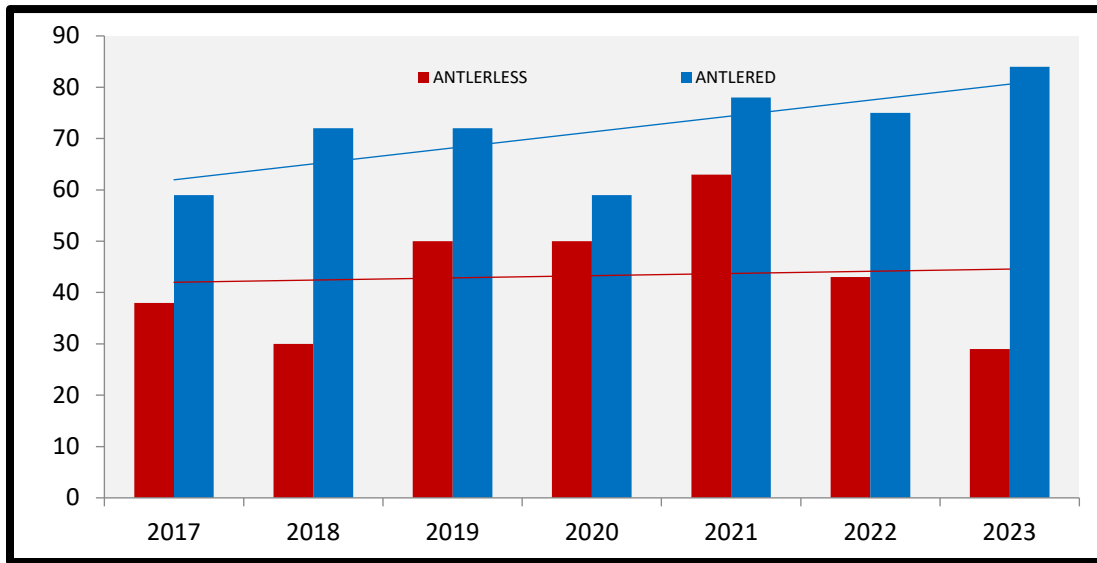


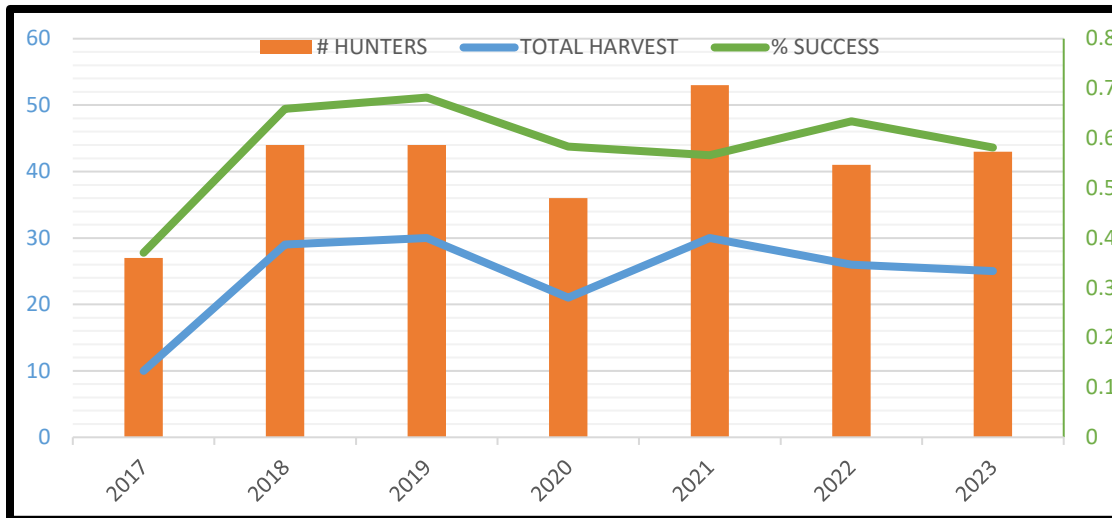
Figure 21. GMU 666 general season harvest (all weapons).



**Figure 22. GMU 667 general season harvest (all weapons).**



**Figure 23. GMU 653 bull-only permit hunters, harvest, and success (all weapons).**



Hunter success is expressed as both the percentage of hunters that reported harvesting an elk and by the number of days it took to harvest an animal and is displayed in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (GMU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk; reference charts below). While success rates in all District 11 GMUs have generally trended upward over the past seven years, only GMU 652 had an increase from 2022 to 2023. The increasing trend across the district is tracking elk population recovery in the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. GMUs 652 and 653 have the highest hunter success rate, followed by GMUs 654 and 666, with GMU 667 always the lowest. GMU 653 bull-only permit is a rugged, high alpine hunt, but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit.



Figure 24. GMU 652 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).

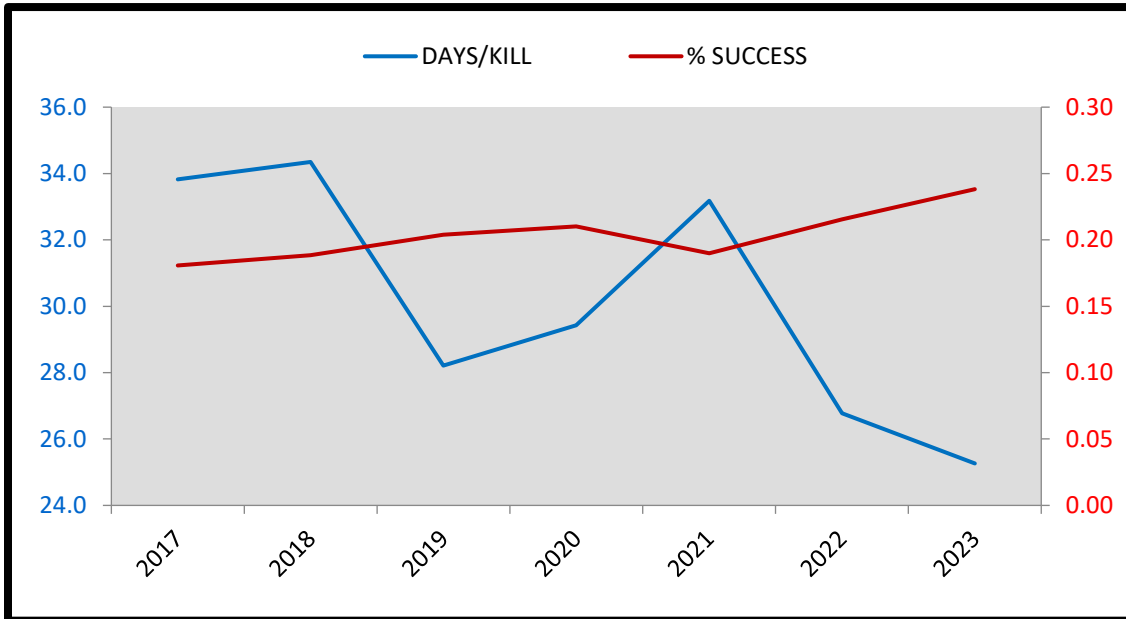


Figure 25. GMU 653 bull-only permit hunter success (all weapons combined).

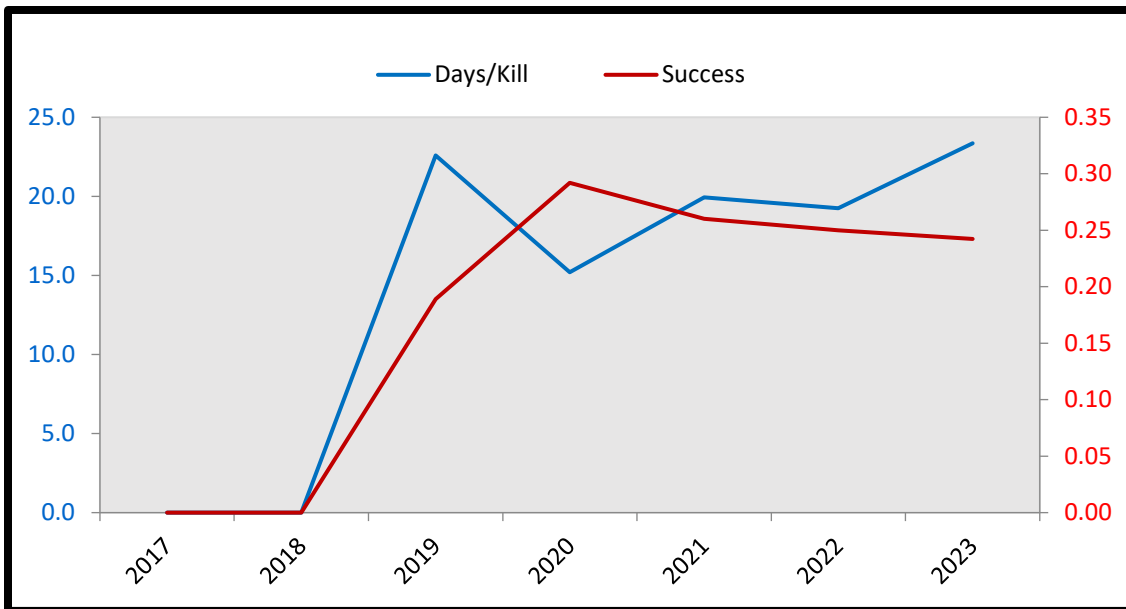


Figure 26. GMU 654 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).

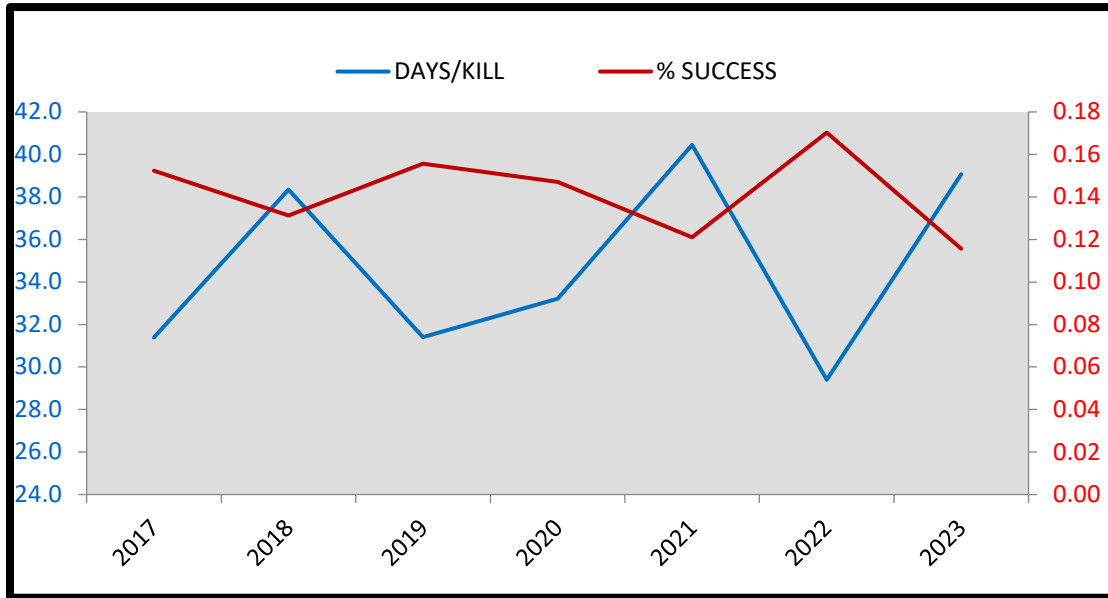


Figure 27. GMU 666 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).

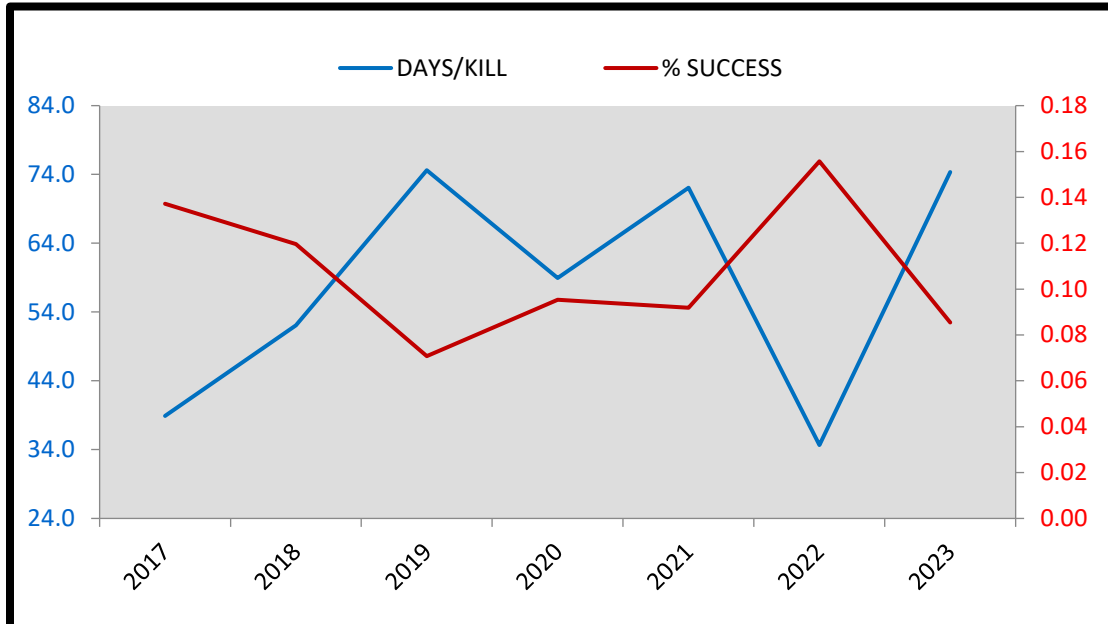
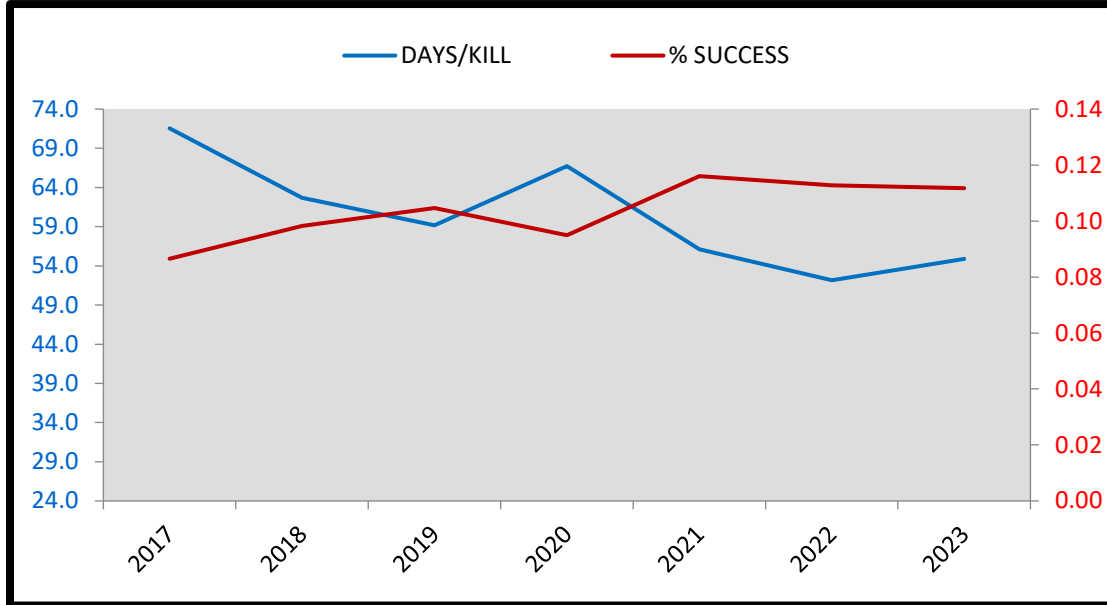


Figure 28. GMU 667 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).



### Elk bacterial hoof disease — TAHD

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within District 11 (Figure 29). While elk are susceptible to many conditions that result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington, where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including the North Rainier and South Rainier herds that occupy District 11.

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

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

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

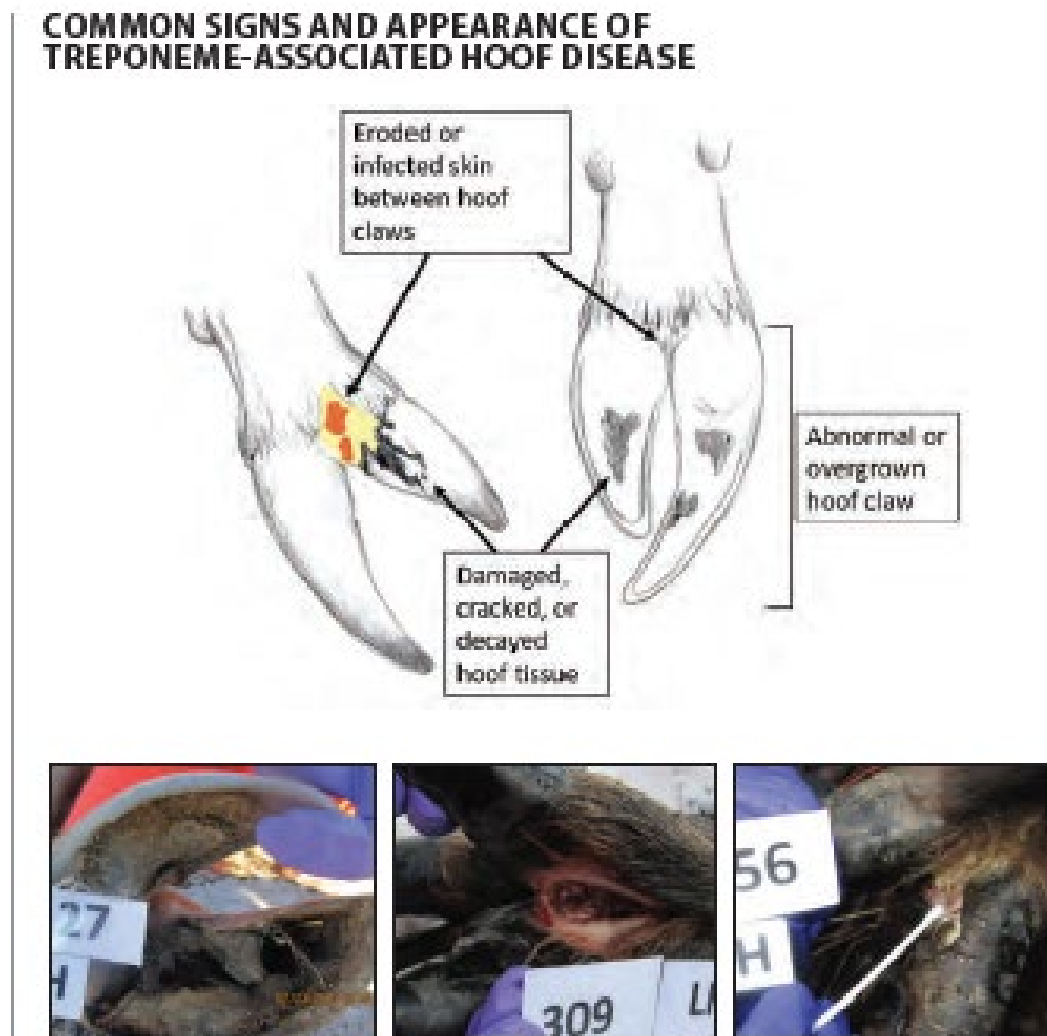
**How hunters can help:** WDFW has an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest elk with TAHD, thereby potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. Review the discussion of TAHD incentive hunts in the [Big Game Hunting Pamphlet](#) or [on WDFW's website](#).

What hunters can do to help:

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

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, Tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, reference WDFW's [website](#).

Figure 29. Treponeme-associated hoof disease signs and appearance.



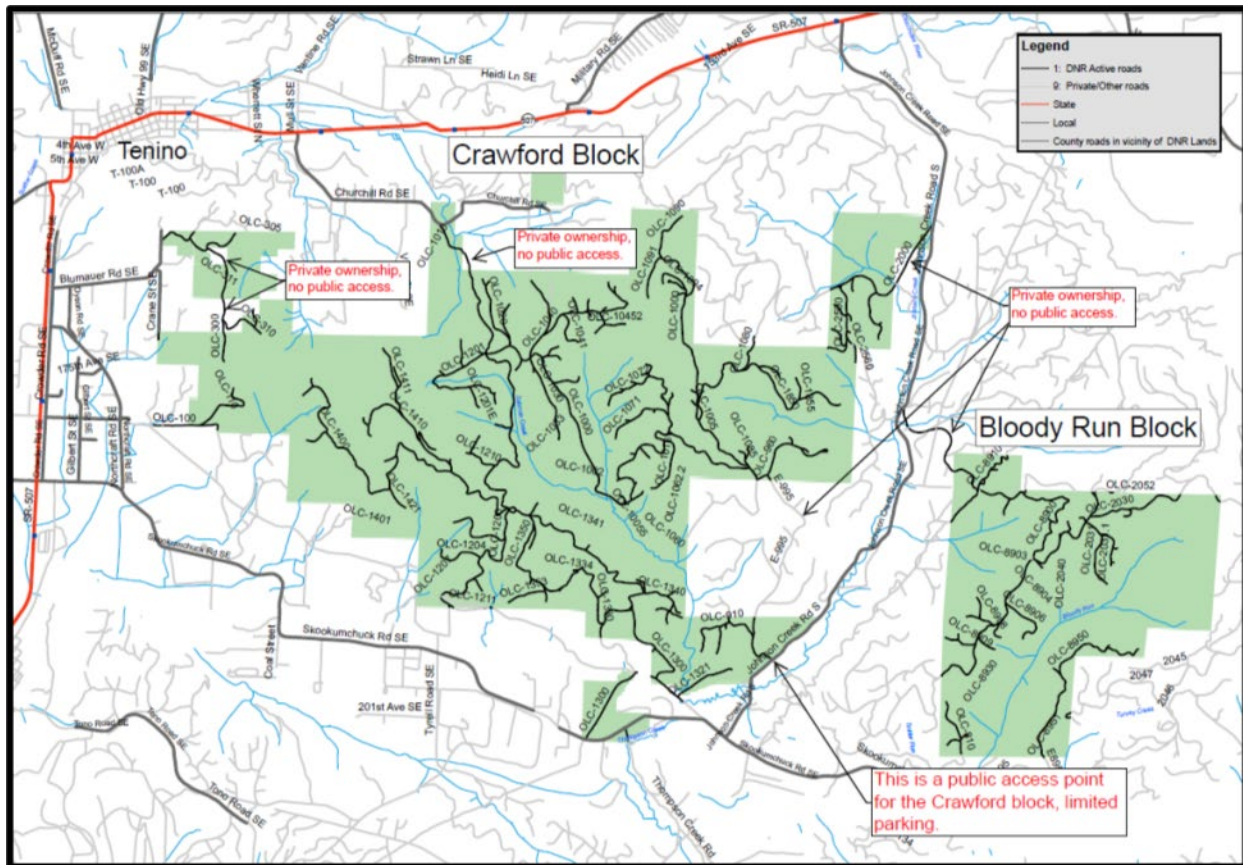
## Deer

WDFW does not survey black-tailed deer every year in District 11, and surveys are typically done in the highest quality location in the district and region (Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667).

Commercial and state-managed timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout regenerating clear cuts. Timberlands particularly worthy of scouting for deer and elk include Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm and DNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks in GMU 667 (Figure 30 and 31); Manulife- and Hampton Lumber-managed properties (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654), White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653); DNR's Elbe Hills and Tahoma state forests (GMUs 654) and DNR- and USFS-managed lands across District 11.



Figure 30. DNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks.



Hancock (now Manulife) has a two-point minimum buck harvest restriction for all deer seasons and weapon types on all its timberlands. Further, the Kapowsin [Manulife and Eatonville (Hampton Lumber)] permits do not allow general season antlerless deer hunting. Antlerless deer harvest is only allowed if the licensee is drawn from the youth, disabled, or 65 and over WDFW special permit categories. Manulife's reasoning is "an effort to increase deer populations over time and ultimately provide a better hunting experience, long term." There are no deer hunting restrictions on Muckleshoot Indian Tribe's Tomanamus White River Tree Farm.

Figure 31. Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667.



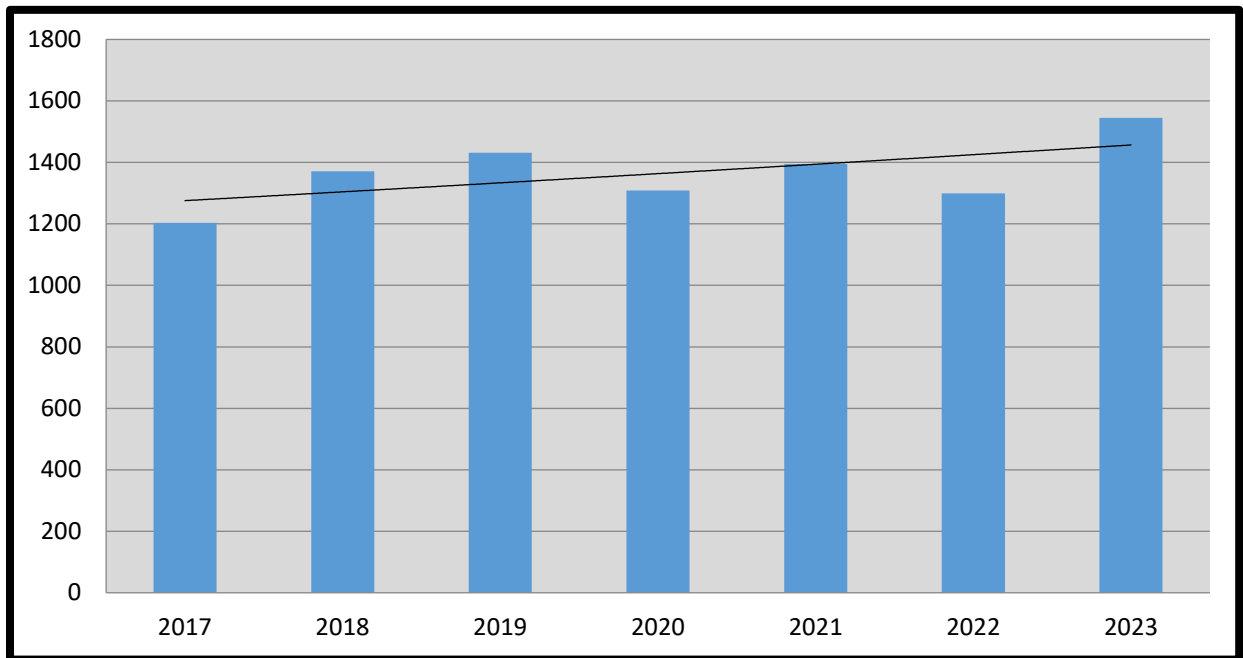
Hunters can find high-elevation trophy black-tail in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654. Hunters can access these areas via USFS road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View wilderness areas and Crystal Mountain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

District 11 deer harvest is average for the state but high for Western Washington. Deer harvest across the district held steady through 2022 but increased in 2023 among all four weapon types (reference graphs below). Harvest declined in GMUs 652, 654 (although steady last six years), 655 (from spikes in 2018-19), and 666 (although steady last four years). One factor in these trends is the decreasing number of deer hunters in the district; deer hunters declined from approximately 10,000 in 2000 to just over 5,000 by 2022. GMU 653 has a fluctuating but increasing trend. GMU 667 has remained stable over the past seven years and has significantly higher harvest than any other District 11 GMU. Hunter harvest has remained stable across the district except for GMU 654 over those same years.

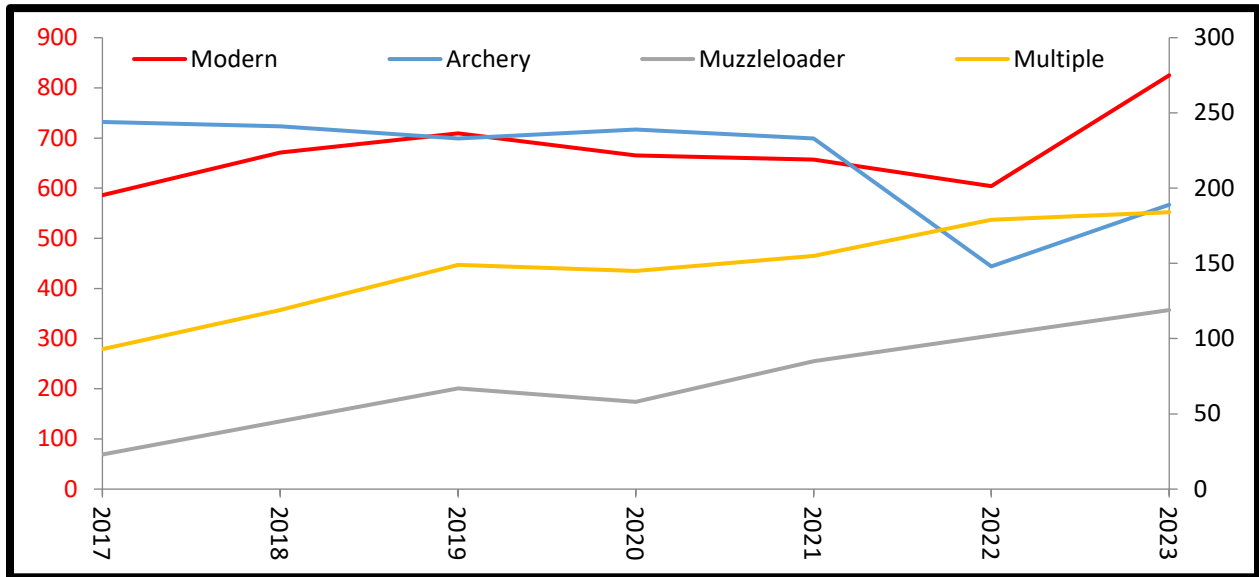
Harvest regulations have changed somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the years, playing a role in harvest trends. Limited access, combined with antler and doe restrictions, may ultimately increase deer numbers over time. Comparing hunter harvest success between GMUs is a useful tool to understanding deer status and harvest prospects. In general, in District 11, GMUs 653 and 654 have success rates near 15%, compared to roughly 20-25% in GMUs 652 and above 30% in GMUs 666 and 667. GMU 655 deer harvest continues to trend upward and is currently around 55% — the highest in the district. Public

property is very limited on Anderson Island, making access difficult and leading to higher deer numbers and deer that may be more vulnerable to harvest. Lack of access combined with the need to take a ferry to the island reduces the overall number of hunters, but those lucky enough to obtain access onto private lands on the island have a high success rate. GMU 655 has a much lower overall harvest than other GMUs in the district. GMU 667 consistently has the second-highest harvest success in District 11 (currently above 30%), suggesting that, while Weyerhaeuser’s access permit requirement limits hunters overall, those that obtain a permit are doing well. GMU 667, which includes Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm, hosted approximately 2,100 hunters in 2023 and is the district’s most heavily hunted deer area. GMUs 652 and 666 are comparable in number of hunters and hunting success, which is not surprising considering they are both urbanized.

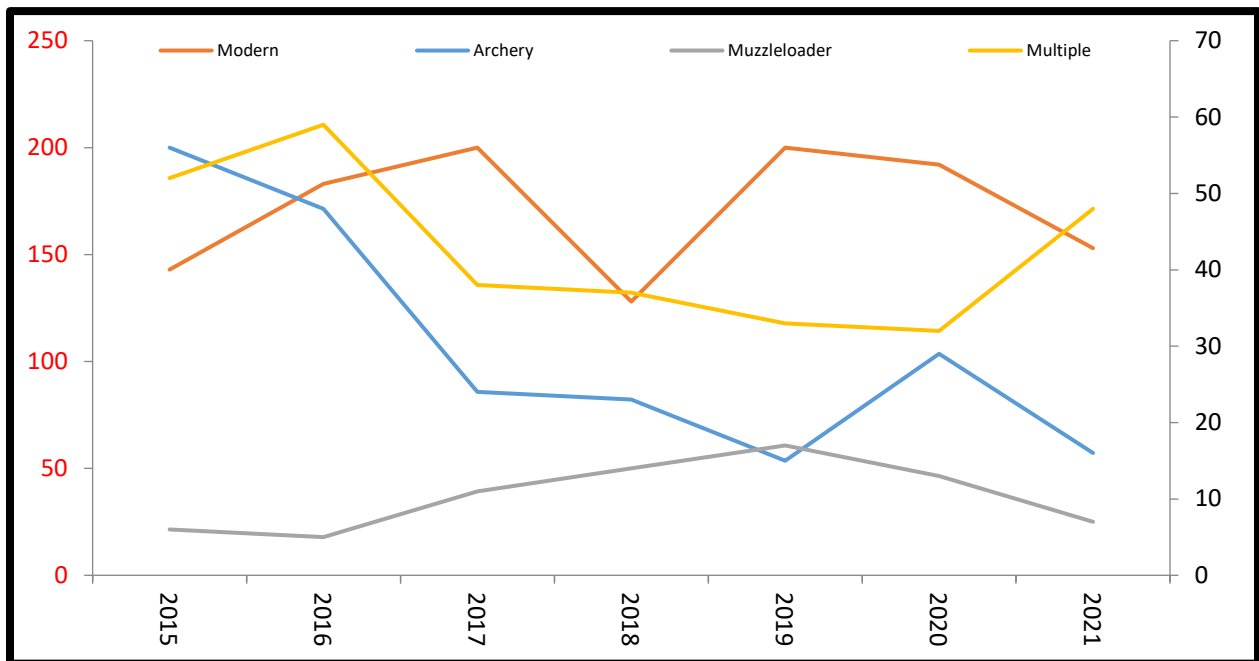
**Figure 32. General season deer harvest in District 11 (all weapons combined).**



**Figure 33. Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 62 (comprised of GMUs 652, 655, 666, and 667). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.**

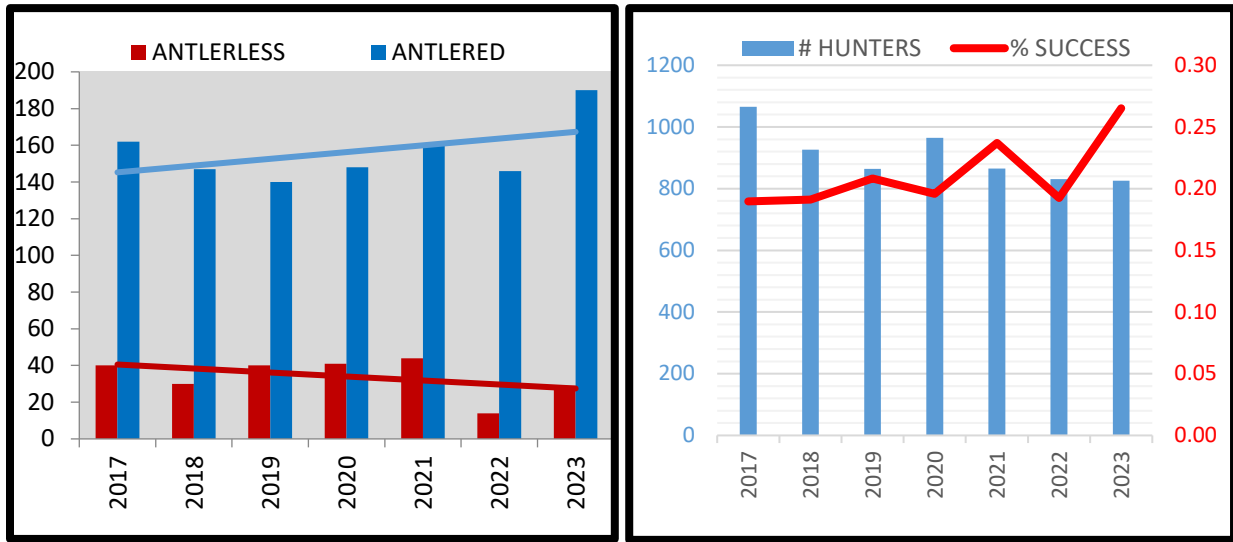


**Figure 34. Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 67 (comprised of GMUs 653 and 654). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.**

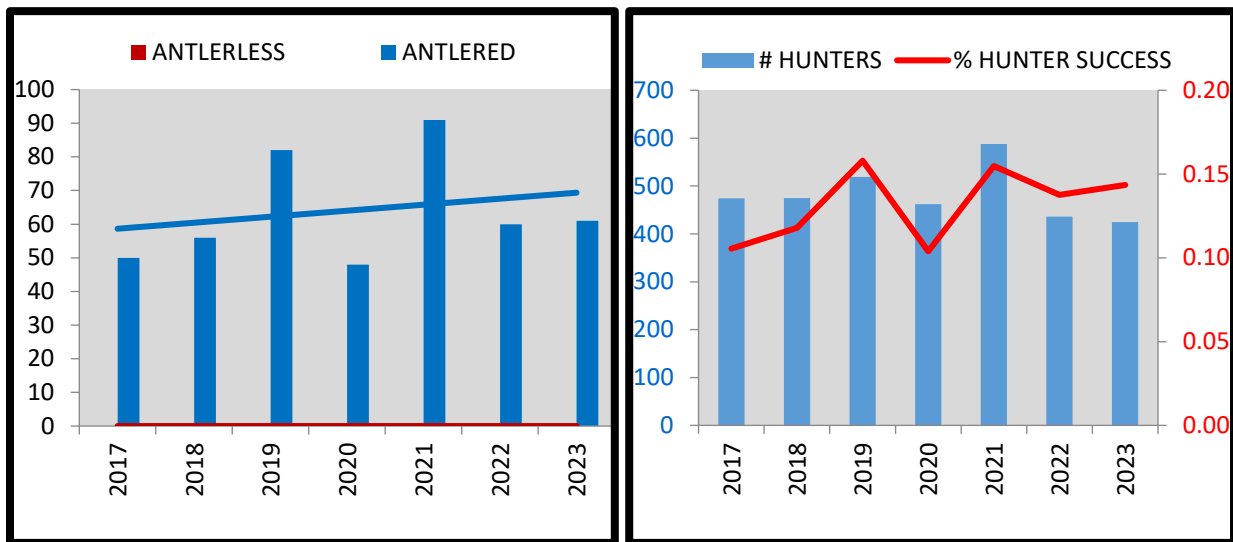




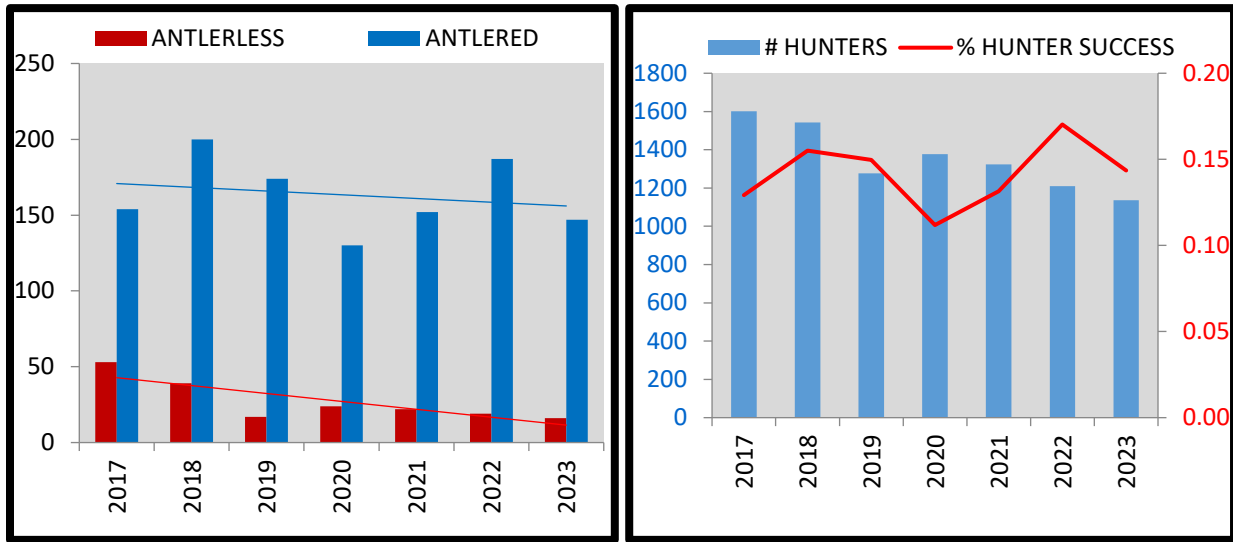
**Figure 35. GMU 652 (Puyallup) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).**



**Figure 36. GMU 653 (White River) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined). There is no antlerless hunting in 653.**



**Figure 37. GMU 654 (Mashel) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).**



**Figure 38. GMU 655 (Anderson Island) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).**

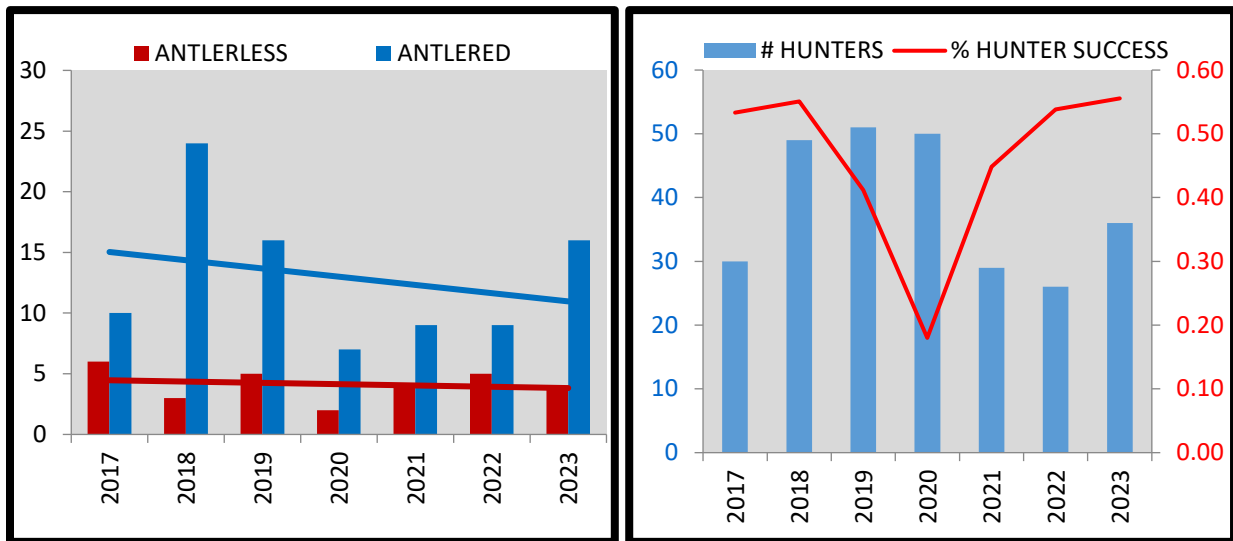


Figure 39. GMU 666 (Deschutes) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).

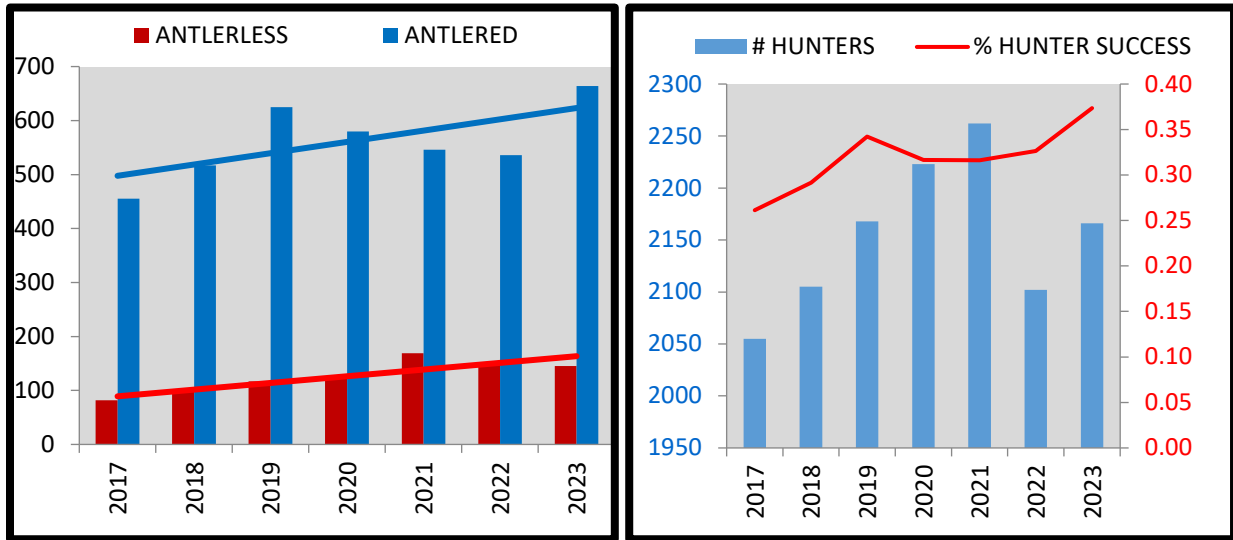
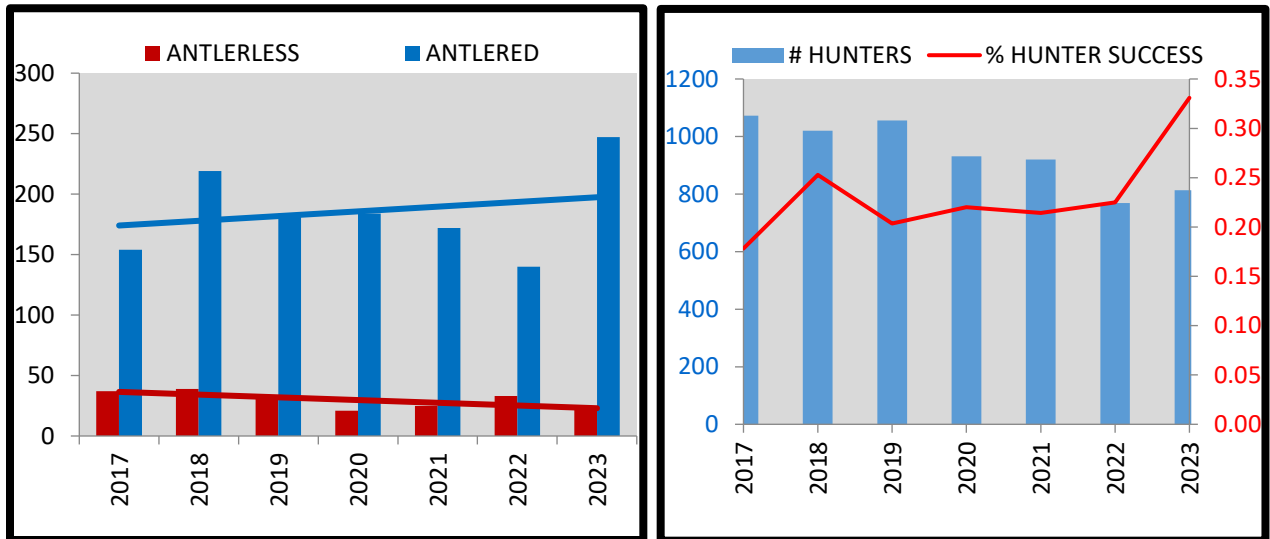


Figure 40. GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



# Black bear

WDFW's goals for black bear management are to:

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

WDFW does not conduct annual surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size and instead uses harvest data trends for population estimates or indices. Black bears inhabit all of District 11 except for urban centers and high alpine areas of Mount Rainer. The district's bear population is stable, with the highest number of bears found on commercial timberlands in GMUs 653 and 654.

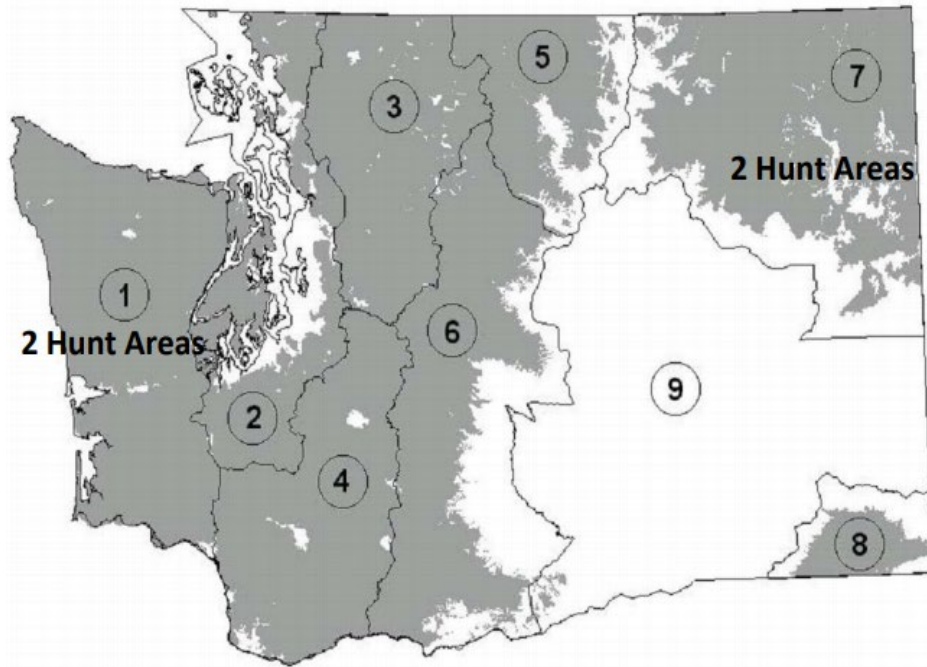
In 2019, WDFW developed a rigorous monitoring protocol to estimate black bear population densities on a large scale. Using the results of the North Cascades density analysis (Welfelt et al., 2019), WDFW developed a sampling design that relies on selecting two to three project areas annually across the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

As wildlife managers conduct more surveys, additional capture results will further inform the model, making density estimates more robust. In 2020, District 11 applied this protocol within GMU 654 to obtain a more accurate bear density estimate. The resulting density estimate was 16.9 bears per 100 square kilometers, and the estimated population obtained by extrapolating that density across available habitat in GMU 654 was 142 (with 114 older than 1 year). For GMU 654, the seven-year average harvest per year has been 20 bears, which equates to an average harvest rate of 14% of the estimated GMU population. Up to 15 bears are taken annually for timber damage removals for a combined mortality rate up to 25% of the estimated population in that unit. The district is eager to conduct the same project in its remaining five GMUs over time to aid bear management and harvest analysis.

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



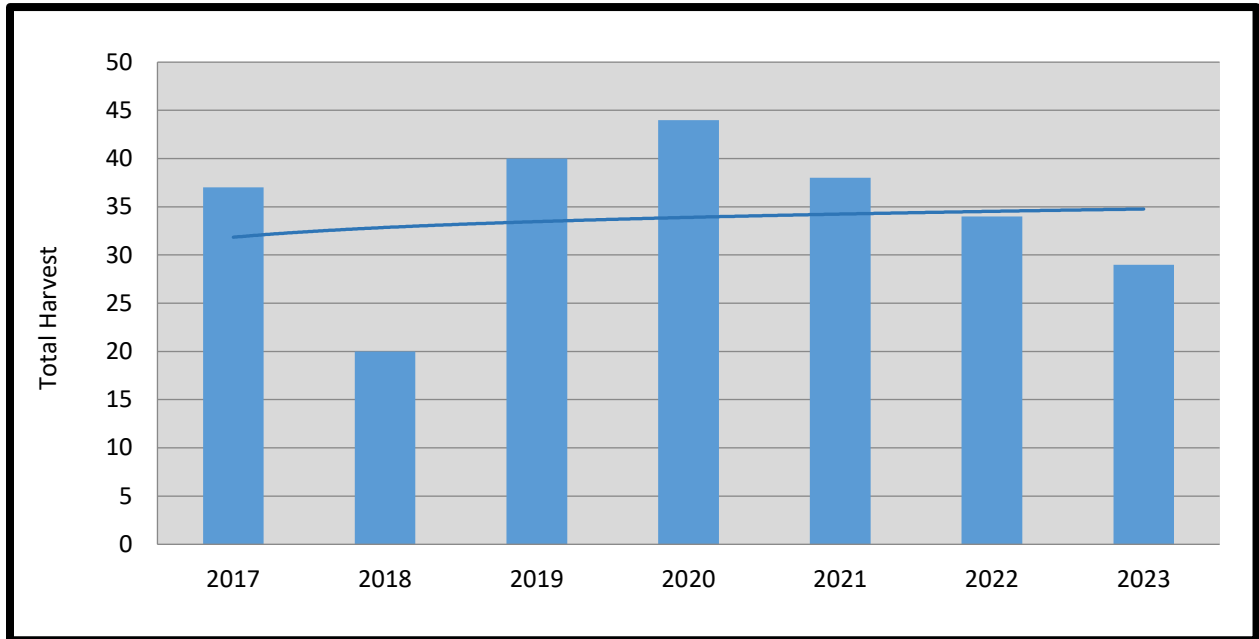
**Figure 41. Black bear management units (BBMUs) in Washington.**



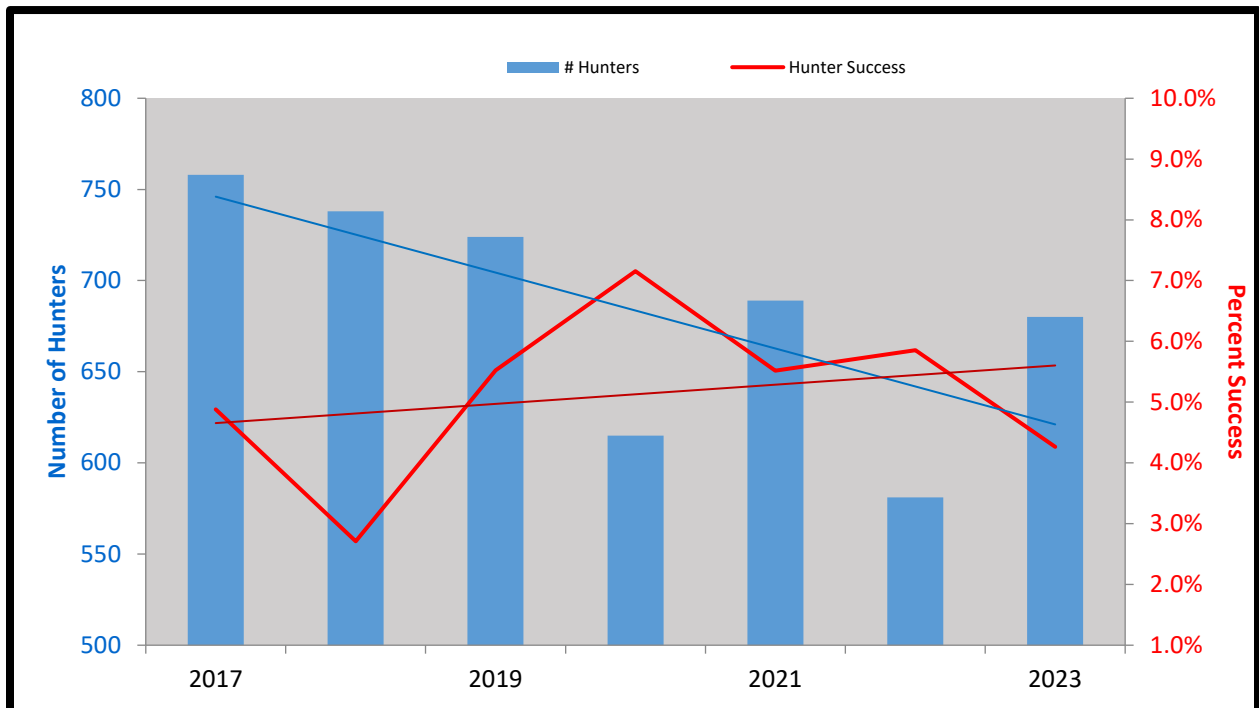
Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Manulife-managed lands (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, Buckley timberlands in GMU 653), Muckleshoot Indian Tribe’s White River Tree Farm in GMU 653, Elbe Hills and Tahoma state forests (GMU 654), and JBLM offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district.

General fall season bear harvest in the GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (652, 655, 666, and 667) has remained stable over the past seven years except for 2018, which saw a significant decline. Although bear hunting is legal in GMU 655 (Anderson Island), bears have never been reported harvested and only one hunter reported hunting the island for 10 days in 2014 with no success. The number of hunters using this BBMU has declined since 2017, which may have increased success rates for those that continue to hunt this BBMU. Success across District 11’s portion of this BBMU averaged 5% over the past seven years, primarily driven by success in GMU 652 (seven-year average 8%) and GMU 653 (seven-year average 9%). For the 2024 season, prospects are good for harvesting bears in GMUs 652, 653, and 654 but much less so in GMUs 666 (4%) and 667 (5%). Last winter’s snowpack and the resulting soil moisture levels should result in good berry and mast production this year.

**Figure 42. Puget Sound BBMU general fall bear harvest (GMUs 652, 666, and 667 combined).**



**Figure 43. Puget Sound BBMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMUs 652, 655, 666, and 667 combined).**



**Table 2. Black bear harvest statistics by GMU for the Coastal and South Cascades BBMUs, past seven-year averages.**

BBMU	GMU	Average fall male harvest	Average fall female harvest	Total Average harvest	Average number of hunters	Average hunter success	Average days/kill
Coastal #2	652	8	4	12	157	8%	135
Coastal #2	655	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coastal #2	666	2	2	4	117	4%	403
Coastal #2	667	14	5	18	410	5%	231
S. Cascades #4	653	11	6	17	189	9%	84
S. Cascades #4	654	13	6	20	361	6%	203

Bear harvest in District 11’s portion of the South Cascades BBMU (GMUs 653 and 654) increased threefold in 2019 in response to an earlier start date (Aug. 1) and a new two-bear bag limit statewide. Harvest declined in 2020 and has stabilized over the past three seasons. Spring bear season was eliminated in Kapowsin in 2020 (previously averaging six bears harvested per year) and statewide in 2022. Annual number of hunters declined in 2020 but has stabilized at around 550 hunters annually, while average success is holding steady at around 6.5% for the past three years.

**Figure 44. South Cascades BBMU bear harvest (GMUs 653 and 654 combined. Kapowsin spring bear permit season was eliminated in 2020).**

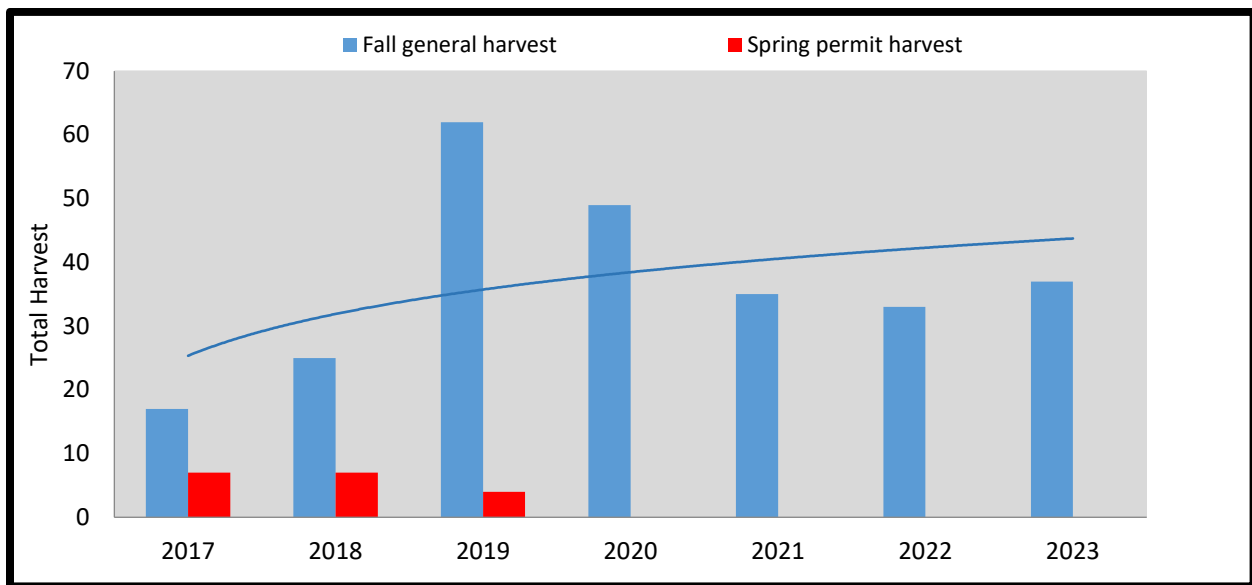
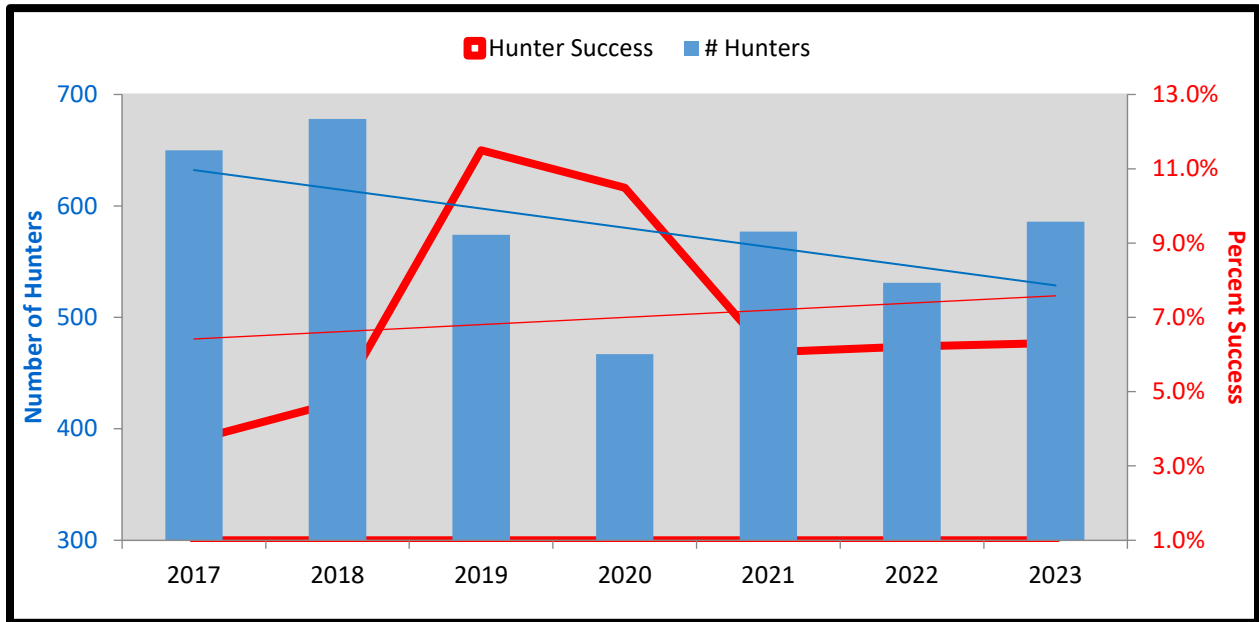


Figure 45. South Cascades BBMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMUs 653 and 654 combined).



### Important bear hunting considerations

WDFW strongly urges bear hunters not to shoot sows with cubs. Cubs tend to lag behind sows and may not be easily seen. Cubs may also be present in trees or hidden in dense vegetation in the vicinity.

Observe and be patient before shooting. The past few seasons, several orphaned cubs were reported in WDFW’s Coastal Region (Region 6). Some were captured and taken to rehabilitation facilities. However, space and funds are limited for rehabilitation, so hunters should avoid this by **NOT shooting sows with cubs**.

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

## Cougar



Youth hunter B. Sparkes with his cougar harvested with special cougar tag. Photo by permission of S. Sparkes.

Cougars are widespread in the forestlands of District 11. Areas that support a lot of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for harvesting cougar. The statewide goals for cougar are:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage cougar and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize human-cougar conflict.
3. Manage cougar for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography.
4. Manage statewide cougar populations for a sustained yield.
5. Improve our understanding of predator-prey relationships.



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

## **New for 2024**

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently adopted a new cougar harvest rule that replaces previous harvest guidelines. That rule includes the following changes:

1. Cougar hunting season will begin Sept. 1, 2024, and end March 31, 2025.
2. A cap on harvest will be included in all PMUs that currently have a harvest guideline. The cap will be based on the best available estimates of cougar density and growth rate; currently those parameters are estimated at 2.3 cougars per 100 square kilometers and a 13% intrinsic growth rate.
3. If the harvest cap of 13% is reached during the hunting season, that PMU will close.
4. In PMUs that reach the harvest cap of 13% prior to the recreational hunting season, the cap will be increased to 20% to provide hunting opportunity.
5. Mortalities will be counted starting April 1 and ending March 31 of the following year.
6. All human-related cougar mortalities of cougars 18 months old and older (including harvested cougars, cougars killed to resolve conflicts, and any other form of human-caused cougar mortality) shall count toward the 13% or 20% harvest cap.
7. Managers may close hunting in any PMU prior to the cap being reached, upon consideration of factors such as disease, suspected additional mortality, or any other issue affecting the cougar population.

Under this new system and beginning in 2024:

- GMUs 652 and 666 will have no cougar harvest cap.
- GMUs 653 and 654 will have a cap of five (at the 13% cap) or eight (at the 20% cap).
- GMU 667 will have a cap of four (at the 13% cap) or six (at the 20% cap).

WDFW advises anyone planning to hunt cougar to confirm the season is open in the desired hunting area by calling 1-866-364-4868 or visiting the [WDFW website](#).

Following a high year in 2018, cougar harvest has remained steady at three cougars harvested annually in District 11 since 2019 (all mortality combined). Annual harvest is often a reflection of hunter participation and winter conditions; a poor snow year can significantly affect cougar harvest. Downward trends may reflect the annual hunting pressure more than a reduction in the cougar population. Three

cougars were reported killed in the district in 2023, not including tribal harvest. The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the district. Prospects for hunting cougar in the district remain fair.

**Figure 46. Cougar harvest in District 11 general season and other mortality combined.**

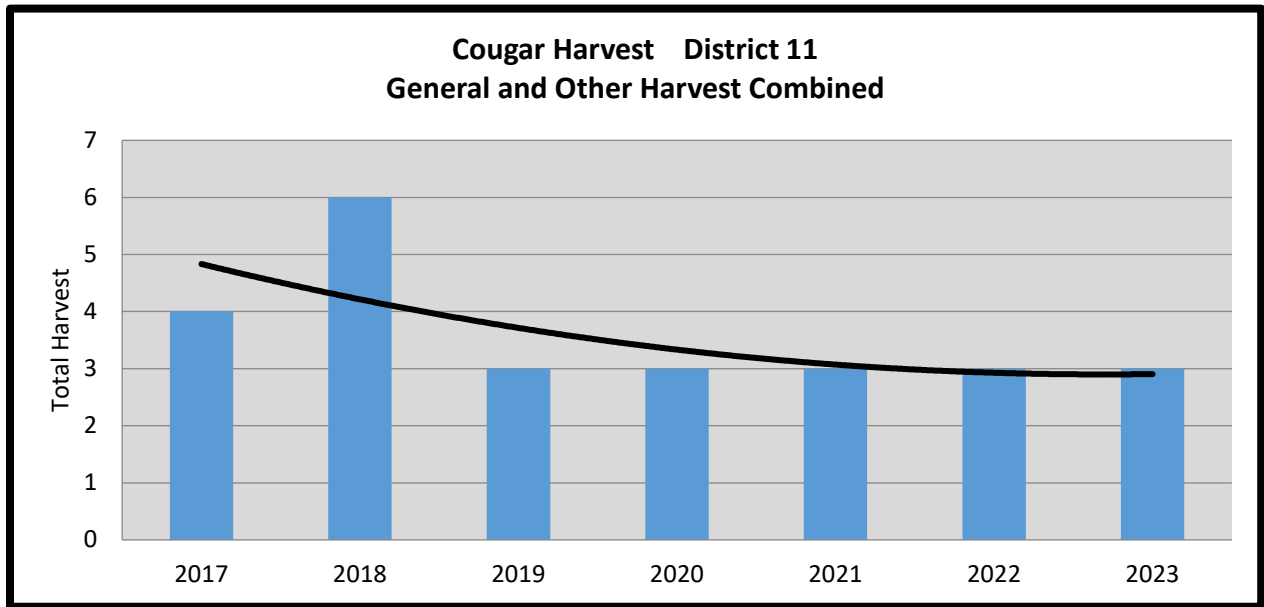
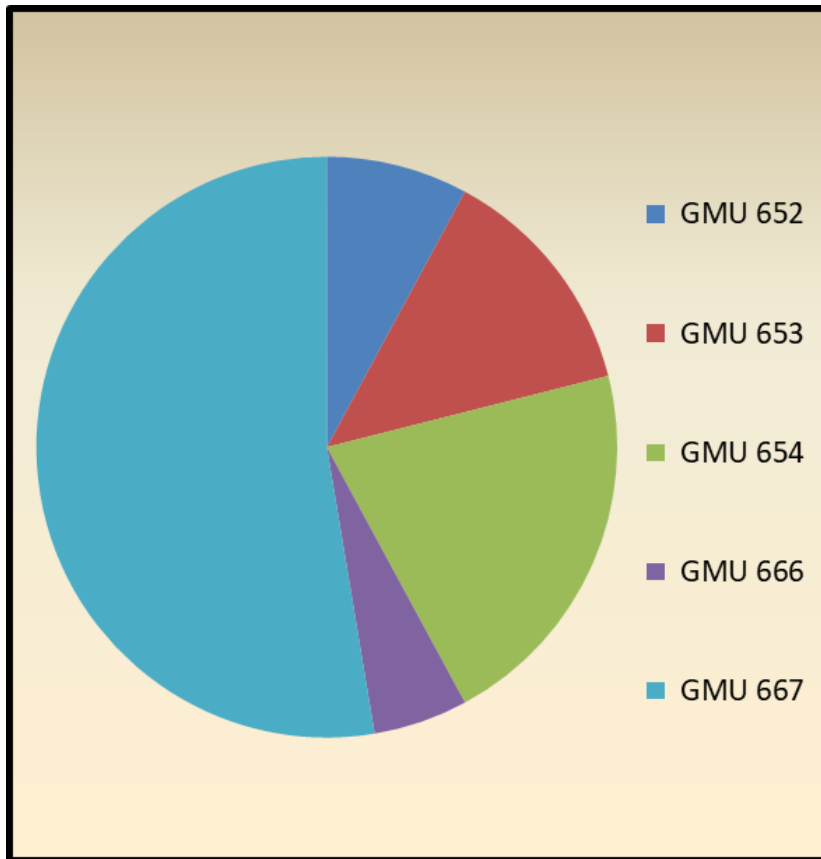


Figure 47. District 11 cougar harvest ratios by GMU, 2016 to present (all mortality).



## Important considerations

**It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually less than 80 pounds) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens.** WDFW strongly encourages cougar hunters to check for multiple sets of tracks when pursuing an animal. Female cougars may have kittens in trees or in dense vegetation nearby. Please be very observant and patient before shooting. During the 2015 – 2016 season, WDFW enforcement officers and biologists captured two orphaned cougar kittens near Joyce. One kitten later died, and the other will remain in captivity at a zoo. Remember, if you harvest a cougar, there are mandatory reporting and sealing requirements. Voter Initiative 655 banned the use of hounds to hunt cougars in the state in 1996. Hunting with hounds is only allowed during cougar management removals authorized by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

## Mandatory reporting/sealing

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

## Cougar outreach and education

Fatal cougar encounters are extremely rare. With increasing human populations, development patterns, and increasing human presence in rural areas, it is essential to raise public awareness and keep both people and cougars safe. Please reference [WDFW's Cougar website](#) including the section on Preventing Conflict to learn more about cougar-human interactions.

## Small game

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

### Bobcats

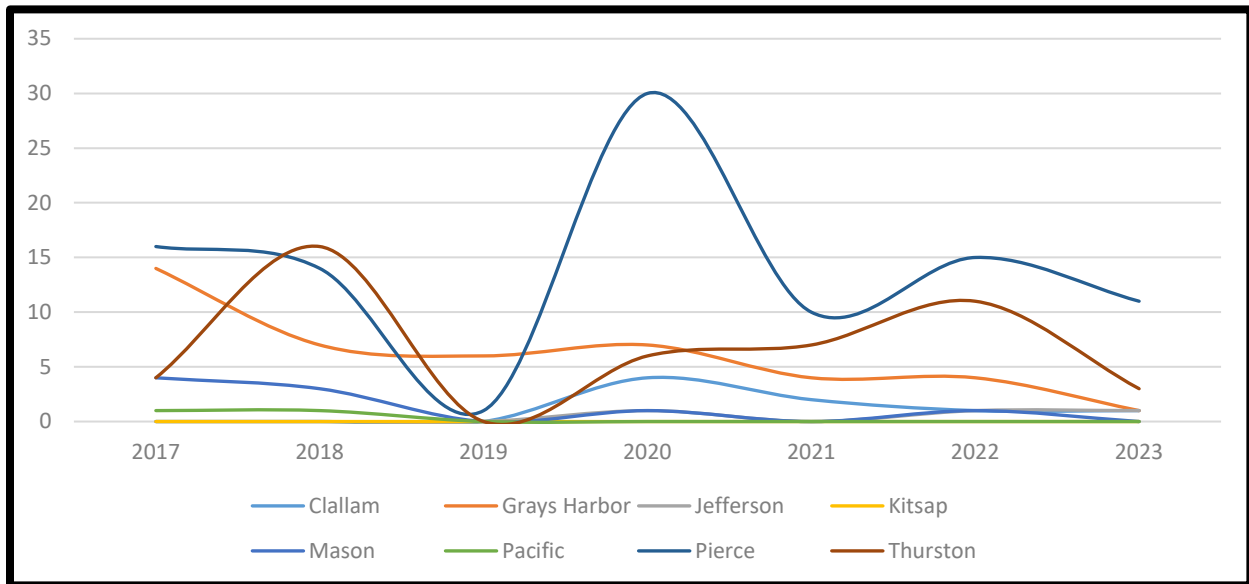


Local District 11 hunter J. Nash with his 2023 bobcat. Photo by M. Tirhi.

Bobcats are plentiful in the wooded lands across District 11, and many hunters harvest bobcat each season. Bobcat may be hunted statewide with no bag limit from Sept. 1 to March 15. A small game license is required to harvest a bobcat. Bobcats are exempt from hunting hour restrictions, except it is unlawful to hunt bobcat at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons in October and November. Hunting or pursuing bobcat with dogs is prohibited in Washington. **Successful bobcat hunters or trappers must contact a WDFW office to have the bobcat pelt sealed and submit the associated harvest report to WDFW by April 20 of each year.** The bobcat hide must not be frozen so a seal may be attached. No one may possess an open WDFW bobcat seal unless it has been cut by a licensed taxidermist or fur dealer who has received and invoiced the pelt for processing.

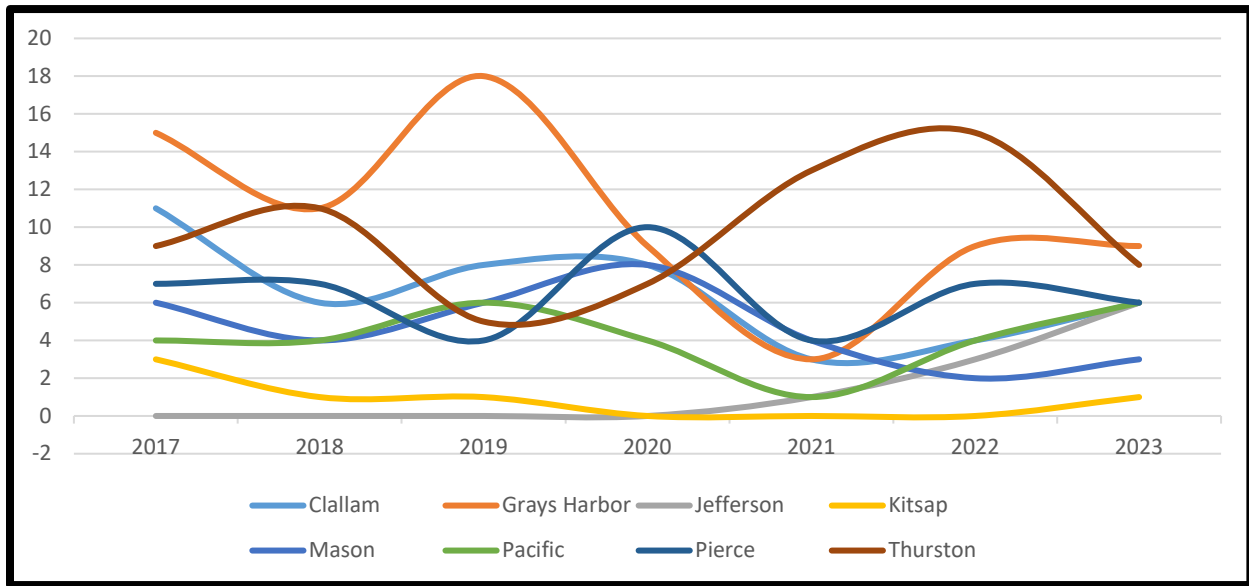
Generally, more bobcats are harvested through hunting than trapping in Region 6 (reference charts below). Pierce and Thurston counties provide great opportunity for harvesting bobcat and typically have the highest rates of harvest in the region. Bobcat harvest declined in 2023 in District 11, but prospects for hunting or trapping in 2024 remain good compared to other Western Washington counties. Public and private forests remain the best locations for locating and harvesting bobcat in the district and the region.

**Figure 48. WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by trapping by county.**





**Figure 49. WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by hunting by county.**



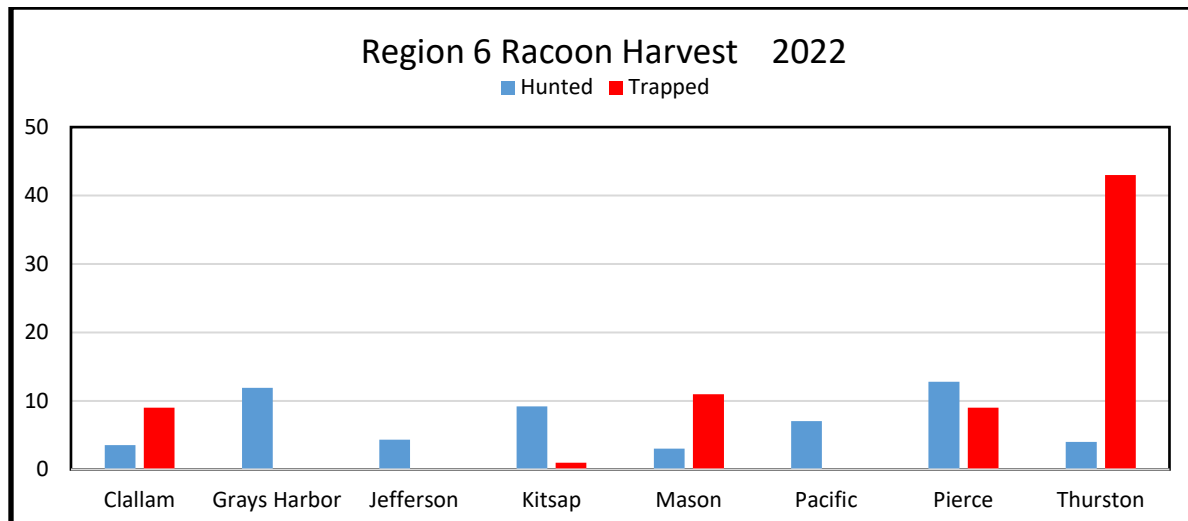
## Red fox

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

## Raccoons

Raccoons are also very plentiful across District 11, particularly around suburban neighborhoods where they feed on garbage, fallen fruit, pet food, pond fish, and other opportunistic food sources. They are helped by a lack of natural predators within these areas. Raccoons are also found in the less-developed forests of the eastern district. Raccoons can be hunted across the district with a small game license and no bag limit from Sept. 1 to March 15. Raccoons may be hunted at night and using dogs, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt with dogs or at night in October and November during dates established for modern firearm deer and elk general seasons. Raccoon harvest data prior to 2022 had low precision but a new analysis started in 2022 is more accurate and is provided below. In 2022, most raccoon harvest was via hunting, with only a few trapped as nuisance animals annually except for Thurston County. Raccoon harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

Figure 50. WDFW Region 6 racoon harvest by hunting by county, 2022.



## Coyotes

Coyotes are another small game animal abundant across District 11, both in urban and non-urban areas. They have also benefitted from a lack of large predators in urban and suburban areas. Coyote is an unclassified species and can be hunted or trapped without a bag limit year-round under a small game or big game hunting license. Coyote may be hunted at night with lights year-round, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt coyote at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons in October and November. The use of dogs to hunt coyote is prohibited.

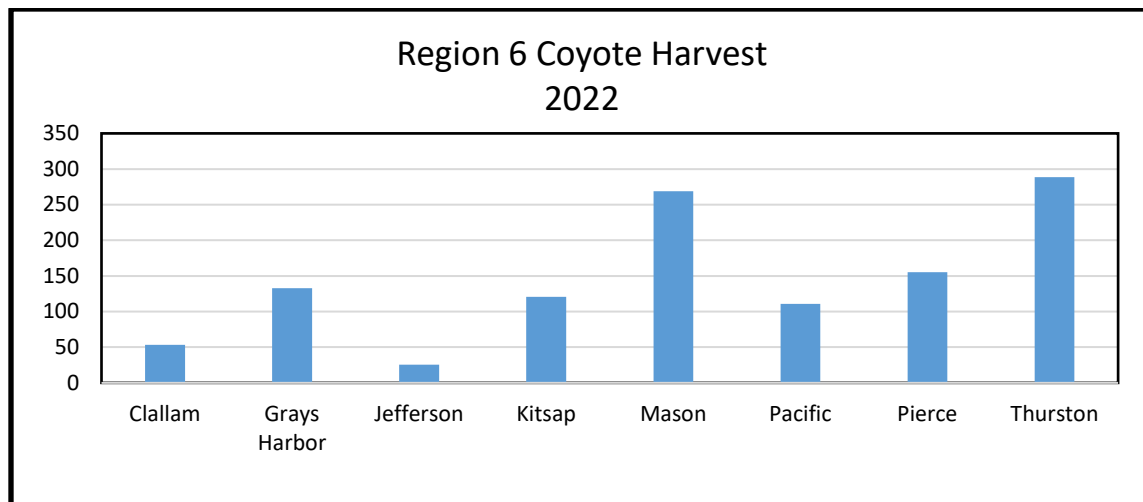
Hunters could mistake wolves, especially juveniles, as coyotes (Figure 51). Wolves are protected under federal and state law and MAY NOT be shot or killed. Be sure of identification if you are hunting coyote. Report all wolf observations.

Most coyote in the state are harvested via hunting, with very few killed via trapping as nuisance animals. Coyote harvest data prior to 2022 had low precision but a new small game analysis started in 2022 is more accurate and is provided below. Coyote harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication. Thurston County in District 11 provides some of the most coyote hunting opportunities.

Figure 51. Gray wolf vs coyote distinguishing characteristics.



Figure 52. WDFW Region 6 coyote harvest by hunting by county, 2022.

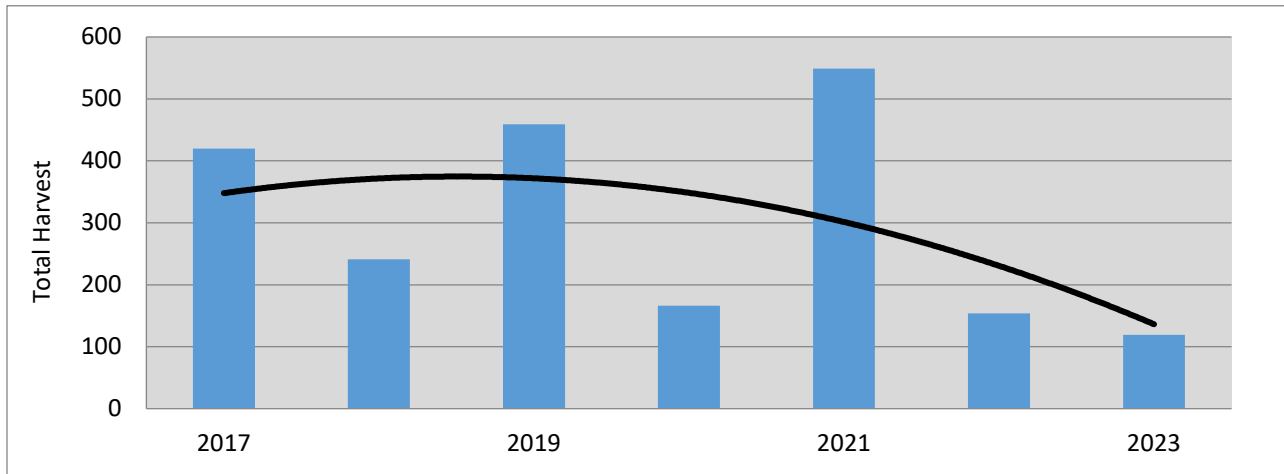


### Cottontail rabbits

District 11 provides the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in Region 6, and some of the best in Western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce, Thurston, and northcentral Lewis counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the district fluctuates depending on annual hunter participation. The average harvest in Pierce and Thurston counties combined over the past seven years was 300 annually. Harvest significantly declined in 2022 and 2023, possibly due to fewer hunters participating. Cottontail populations cycle from highs to lows, but normally on a seven- to 10-year basis and not annually; so, this

data reflects participation and success more than natural population cycles. Pierce and Thurston counties' success rates are comparable most years but do vary, as Pierce normally has more hunters than Thurston. Lewis County has much less harvest than Pierce or Thurston. Prospects for cottontail hunting in District 11 remain high.

**Figure 53. Cottontail rabbit harvest, Pierce and Thurston counties combined.**

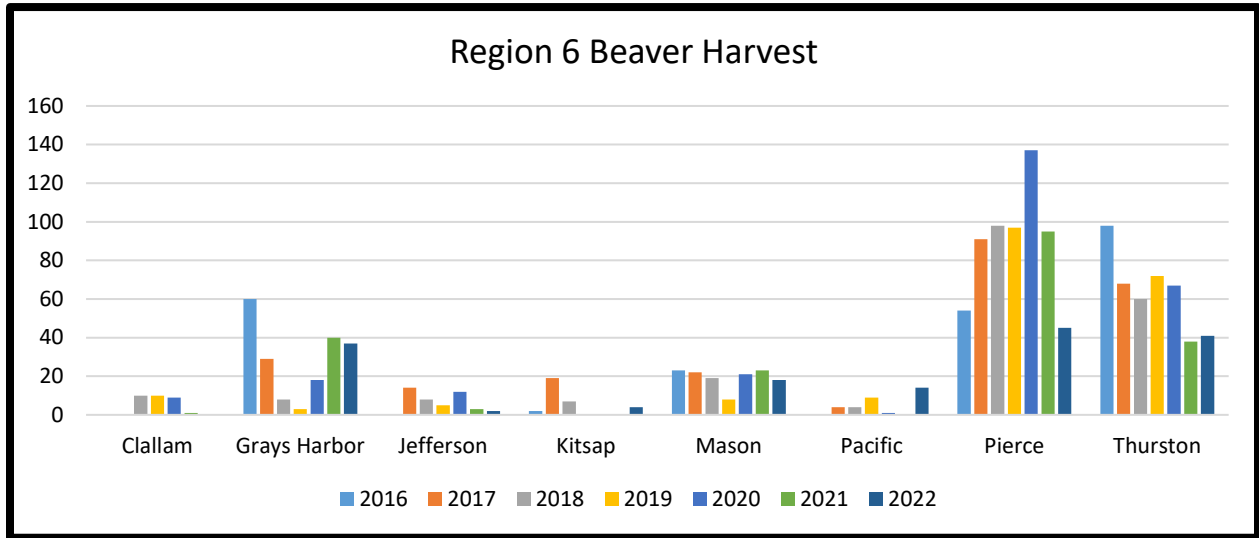


## Beaver, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk, and river otter

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

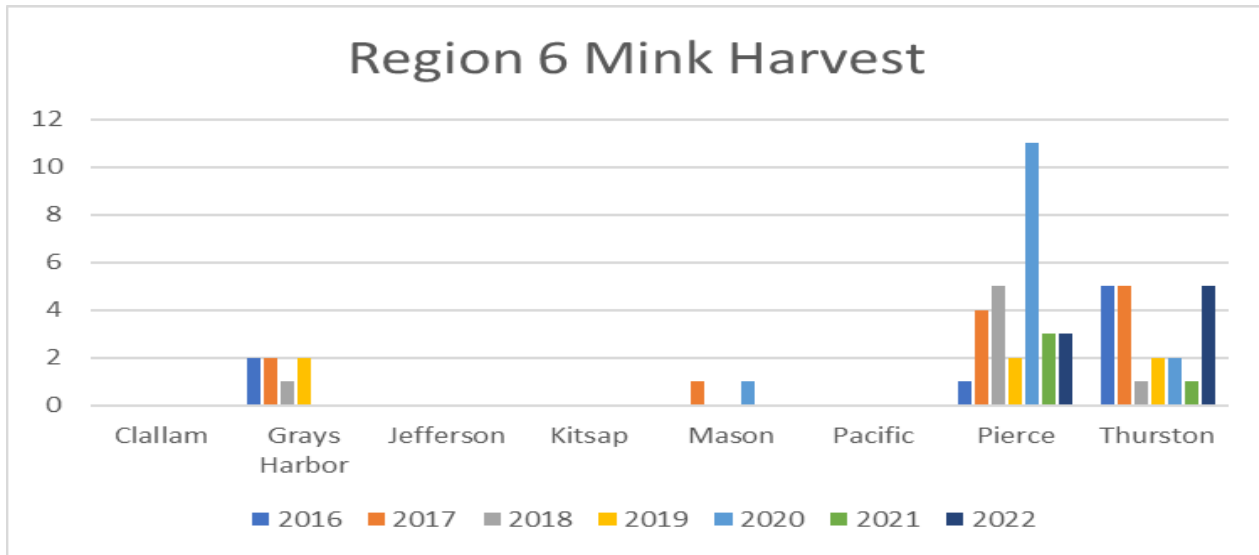
**Beaver** harvest in Thurston and Pierce counties (District 11) is the highest in Region 6 by a significant amount. Considering lakes, wetlands, and waterways exist across the region, the difference is likely due to more hunter participation and more removal of nuisance beaver in these highly urbanized counties. Beaver harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

**Figure 54. WDFW Region 6 beaver harvest by trapping by county.**



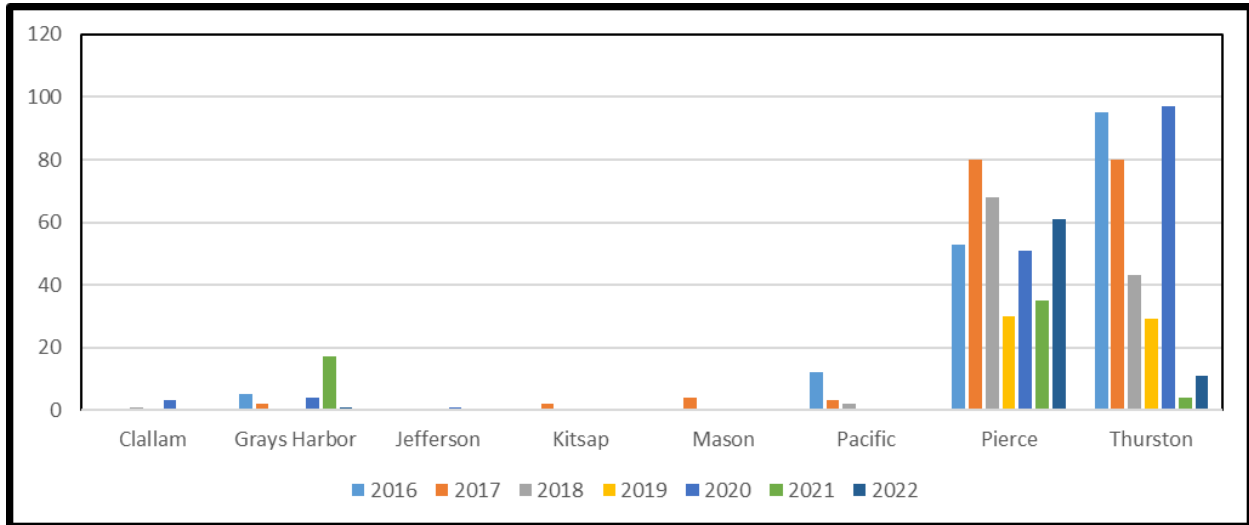
**Mink** is common across Region 6 but not plentiful. Regardless, District 11 typically provides the most, and sometimes only, annual harvest in the region. Mink harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

**Figure 55. WDFW Region 6 mink harvest by trapping by county.**



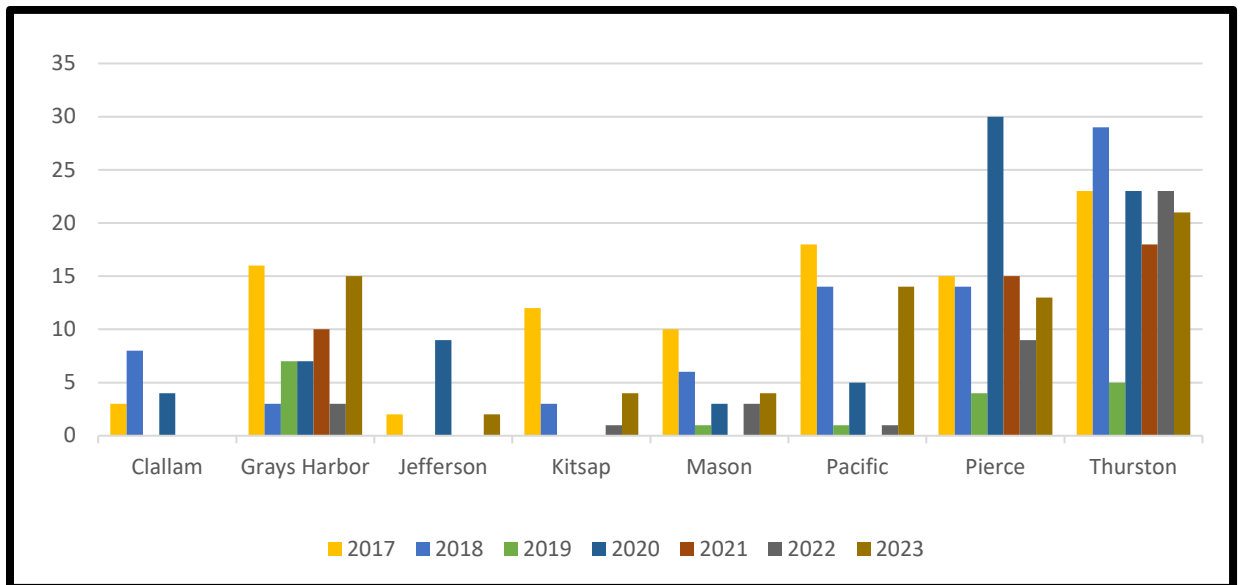
**Muskrats** are also common across Region 6, but few hunters specifically target them, and most are likely trapped incidentally to other species. District 11 typically provides the most annual harvest in the region. Muskrat harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

**Figure 56. WDFW Region 6 muskrat harvest by trapping by county.**



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

**Figure 57. WDFW Region 6 river otter harvest by trapping by county.**





## American marten

American martens inhabit eastern District 11 as part of the Cascades population, which is considered stable. American martens are difficult to trap; none were reported harvested from 2018 to 2022. Fishers may be misidentified as martens; fishers are protected under federal and state law and MAY NOT be trapped or killed. Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten. Report all fisher observations [through WDFW's online form](#) or [wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov).

**Figure 58. Identification of fisher and marten in Washington.**

### Identification of Fisher and Marten in Washington


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


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

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

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

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

**FISHER**  
  
Photo by Paul Bannick

**MARTEN**  
  
WDFW Staff

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

## Ducks

The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, primarily Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. According to the USFWS Waterfowl Population Status report for 2023, habitat conditions during the 2023 Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey declined relative to 2022. For the latest information regarding waterfowl species status, reference the USFWS' [2023 Waterfowl Status report](#).

Figure 59. Waterfowl flyways of North America.



Total duck breeding population estimates in Washington for 2023 declined by 7% compared to 2022 but were 4% higher than the long-term average (2010–2023). Prospects for waterfowl hunting in District 11 remain good.

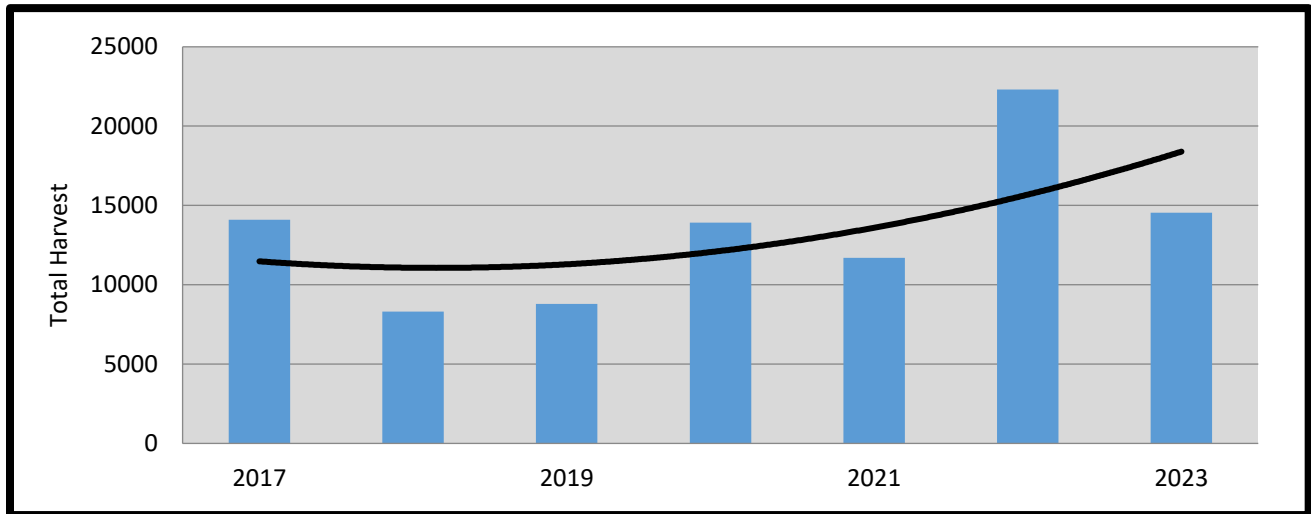
Information on the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Surveys and the Mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory can be found on the [USFWS website](#).

**Table 3. Breeding population estimates for ducks that occur in District 11 for 2023. Long-term average is 1955-2022. Mallard estimates provided only for Washington; all remaining species represent U.S. totals.**

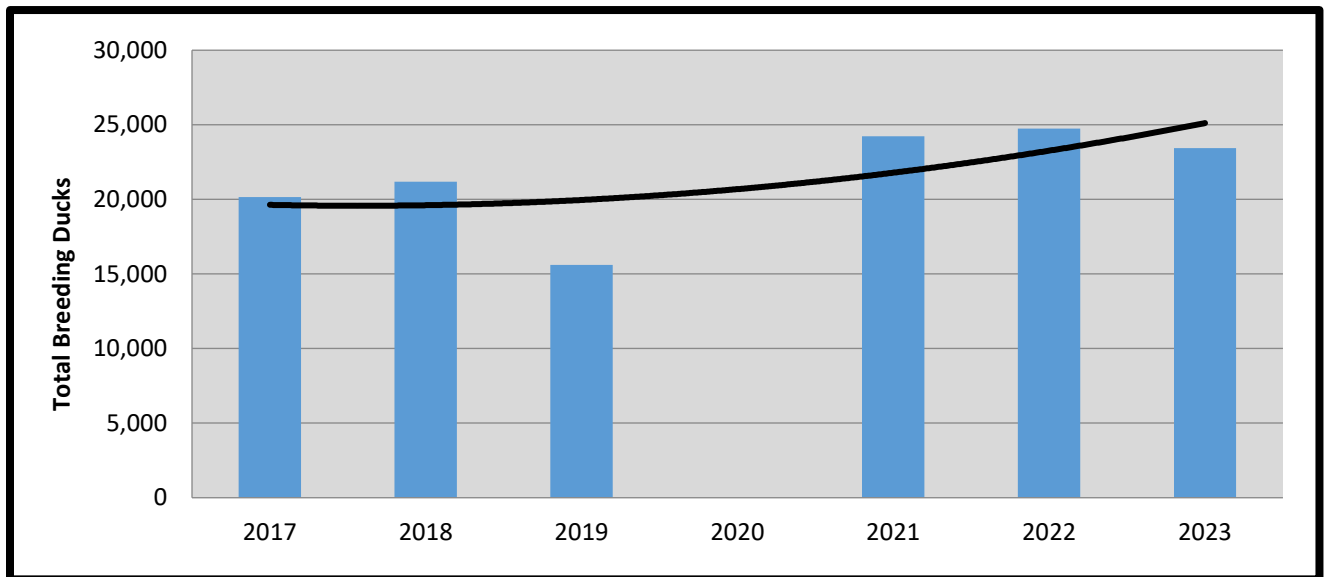
Species	Breeding population estimate
Mallard (Washington only)	102,000, which was 17% above the 2022 estimate and 12% above the long-term average
Green-winged teal	2,504,000, which was 16% above the 2022 estimate and 15% above the long-term average
Gadwall	2,562,000, which was 5% below the 2022 estimate and 25% above the long-term average
American widgeon	1,890,000, which was 14% below the 2022 estimate and 8% above the long-term average
Northern shoveler	2,859,000, which was 6% below the 2022 estimate and 28% below the long-term average
Northern pintail	2,219,000, which was 24% above the 2022 estimate and 43% below the long-term average
Scaup (combined)	3,519,000, which was 4% below the 2022 estimate and 29% below the long-term average
Canvasback	619,000, which was 6% above the 2022 estimate and 5% above the long-term average

Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, off Anderson Island (GMU 655), and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in South Puget Sound. Duck harvest in District 11 has increased over the last two years following a noticeable decline in 2018 and 2019.

**Figure 60. Duck harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties combined and all species included).**



**Figure 61. WDFW breeding duck survey, South Puget Sound.**



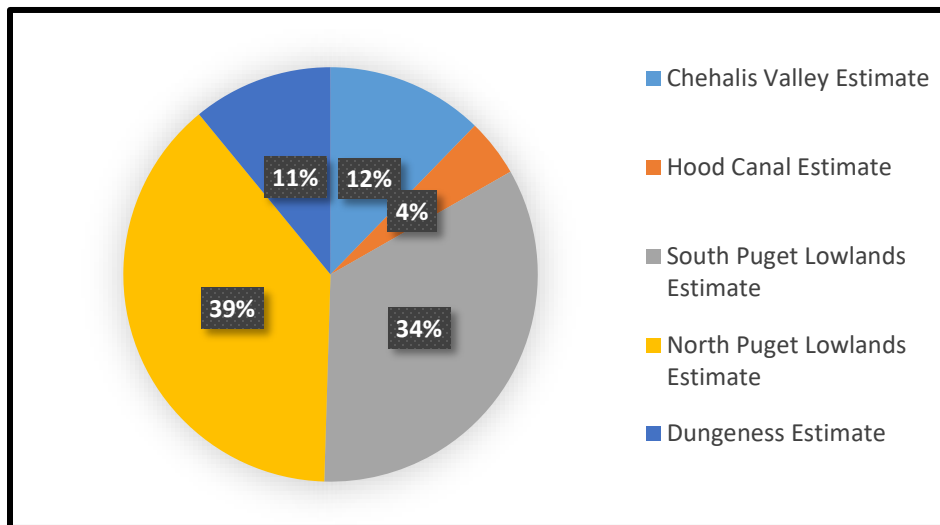
Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily because of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. Hunting prospects for waterfowl remain good in the district in 2024, with the best prospects being in Thurston County.

The Washington Duck Breeding Population Survey is the basis for tracking trends in breeding waterfowl and can be read in detail in the annual [WDFW Game Status and Trends reports](#). The Western Washington total breeding duck population estimate is 69,493 (SE 8,511) in 2024. Mallards were the highest for the 2024 survey at 43,225 (SE 7,815), followed by green-winged teal at 6,434 (SE 2,110), wood duck at 5,222 (SE 737), and Northern shoveler, gadwall, ring-necked duck, and bufflehead all around 2,000. The greatest factor influencing brood production in the district continues to be habitat

loss due to development and increasing human disturbance. Wildlife managers expect waterfowl numbers to remain stable in District 11.

The South Puget Sound lowlands have the second-highest percent of breeding ducks in Western Washington, according to WDFW's annual breeding duck surveys. Typically, breeding season duck estimates are highest in North Puget Sound, with Hood Canal having the lowest. District 11 — being within the South Puget Sound lowlands — normally supports the next-highest concentrations of breeding ducks, making the district a great place to hunt for waterfowl.

**Figure 62. WDFW breeding duck survey results for Western Washington, 2024.**

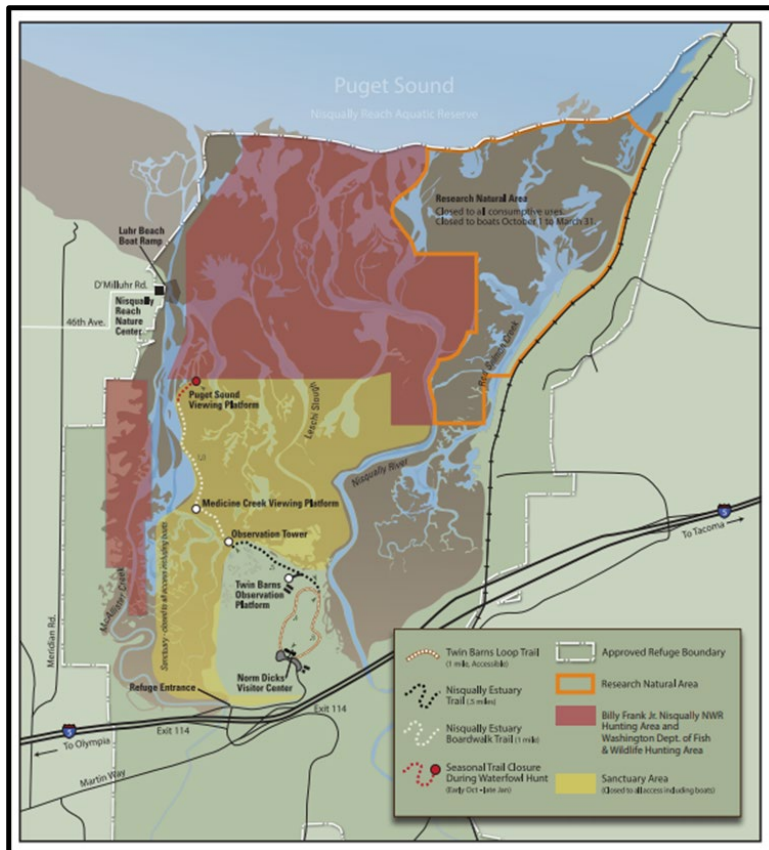


## Where to hunt waterfowl in District 11

### Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

One of the best waterfowl hunting areas in District 11 is the [Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge](#), located on the border between Pierce and Thurston counties. USFWS has 570 acres of refuge waters and tidelands open to waterfowl hunting at the refuge. This includes an expanded area in 2020 that extends north of and adjacent to the previous hunt area. This provides a total of 1,197 acres of USFWS- and WDFW-managed lands within the refuge boundary that are open to waterfowl hunting. Hunting access is by boat only. The estuary restoration area (sanctuary) and research natural area remain closed to hunting and boating to provide adequate wildlife sanctuary. Full regulations and the refuge hunting brochure can be downloaded and printed on the [refuge hunting page](#).

Figure 63. Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge recreation map.



## Centralia Mine

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



**Figure 64. Centralia Mine waterfowl hunting area map (waterfowl hunt area outlined in bright green).**



## Lakes and flooded agricultural fields

The following lakes and agricultural fields have the highest mid-winter waterfowl counts in District 11 and may be good sites to scout. Be advised of those in **firearm restriction areas**—review Introduction section.

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

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

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

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

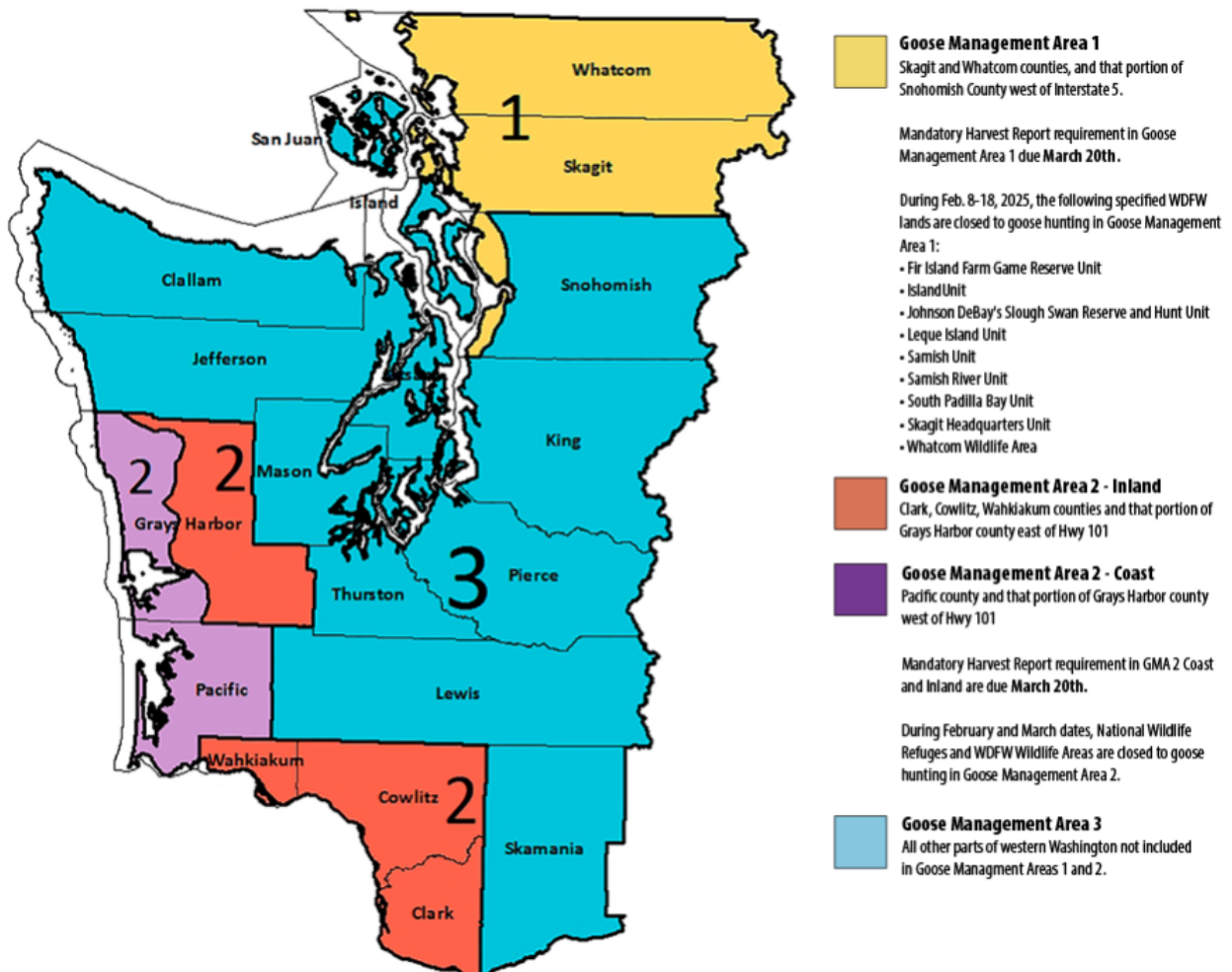
## New for 2024 – 2025: Harlequin duck hunting permit

Thirty-eight permits were made available to eligible applicants through an August drawing; the application period was July 1 to Aug. 14. To apply for a Harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington small game hunting license, migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. For more information, visit the WDFW [Harlequin duck hunting permit page](#).

## Geese

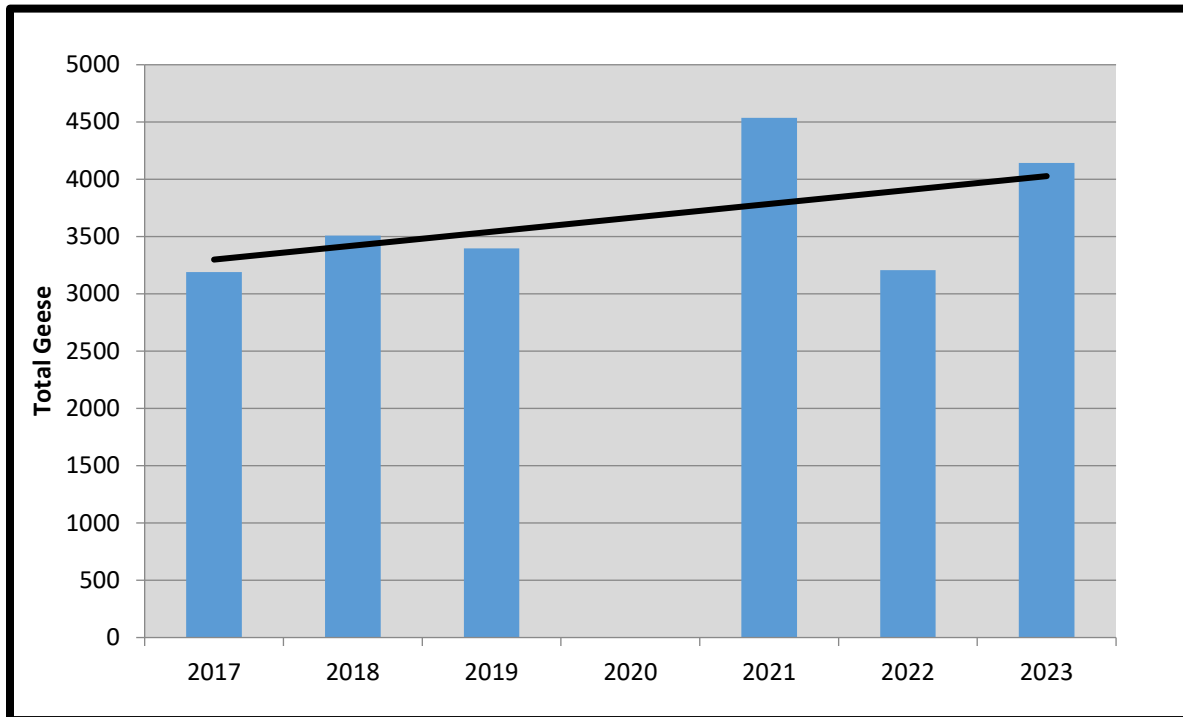
Most goose hunting opportunity in District 11 is for Canada geese. All of District 11 is within Goose Management Area 3. The season is open Oct. 12-24 and Nov. 2 to – Jan. 26 with a daily bag limit of four Canada geese, 10 white-fronted geese, and 10 white geese and a season possession limit for the same of 12, 30, and 30, respectively. Canada geese include cackling, Taverner's and Aleutian geese. White geese include snow and Ross' geese.

Figure 65. Western Washington goose management areas.



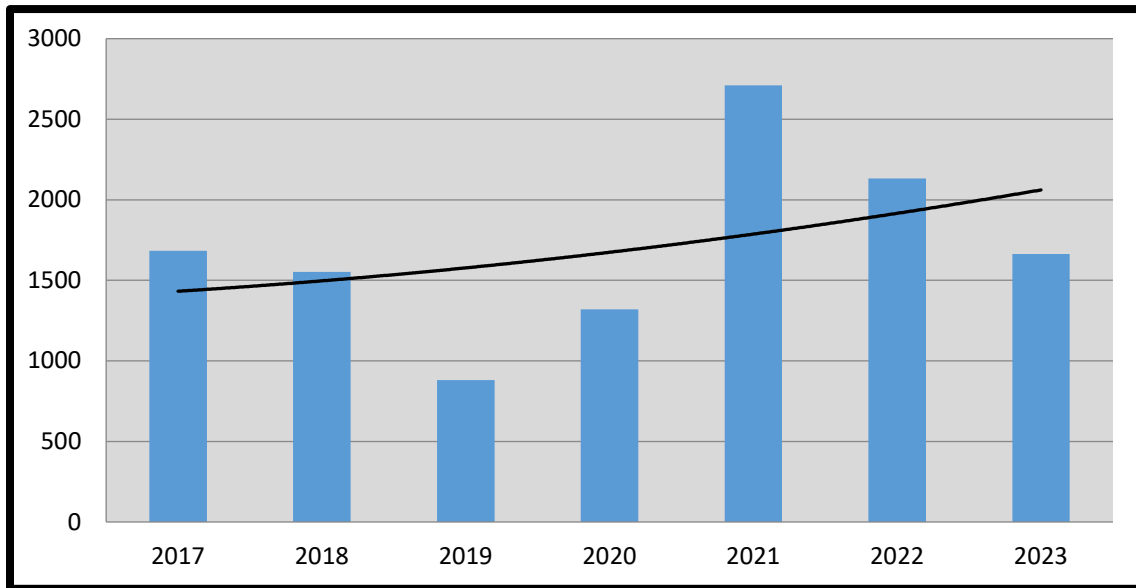
Resident geese are increasing in distribution, especially within urban and rural areas. Goose breeding survey trends have increased in South Puget Sound since 2017 (note: surveys not conducted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic). Prospects for goose hunters in District 11 are good for 2024.

**Figure 66. Breeding goose survey, South Puget Sound.**



Areas reported earlier for good waterfowl hunting include good goose hunting, particularly the inland (western) agricultural fields of Pierce, Thurston, and Lewis counties. Goose harvest in the district rose sharply in 2021 but declined in 2022 and 2023. Regardless, prospects for goose hunters are higher than in the past.

**Figure 67. Canada goose harvest in District 11.**



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

**Figure 68. Swan identification.**



## Mourning dove

For general information regarding upland bird hunting, please visit:

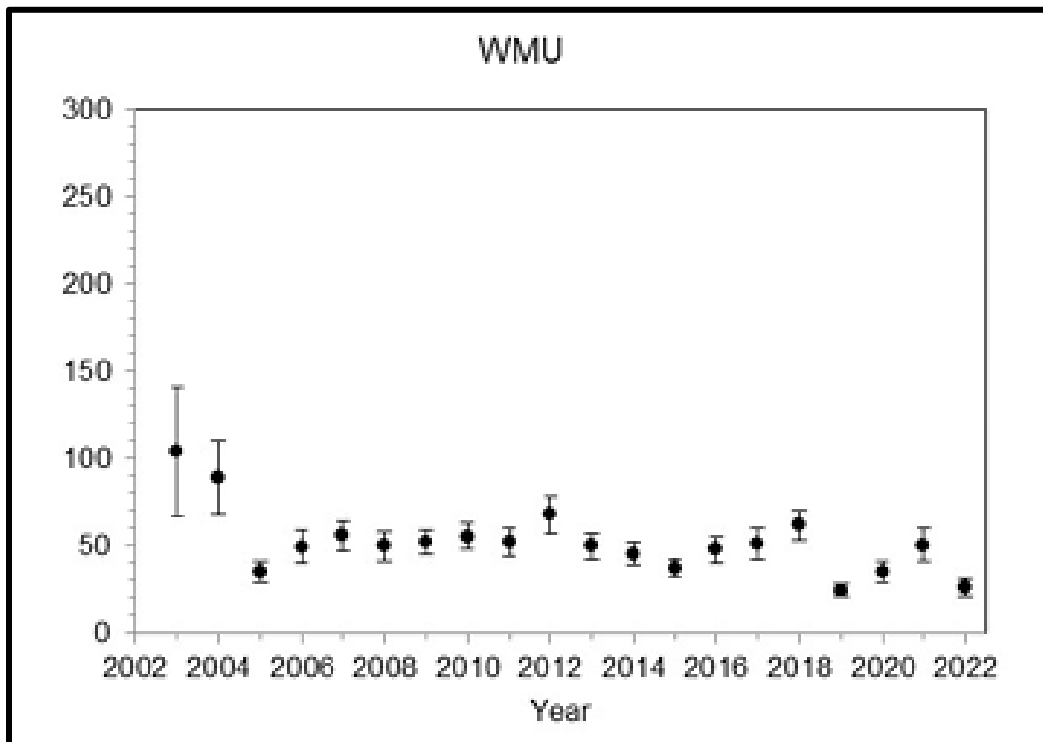
- [Upland bird hunting](#)
- [The Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)
- [Where to go upland bird hunting](#)

WDFW uses the annual USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status Report to analyze trends in mourning dove populations. The report summarizes trends in the number of doves heard and seen per route from the all-species Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and provides absolute abundance estimates based on band

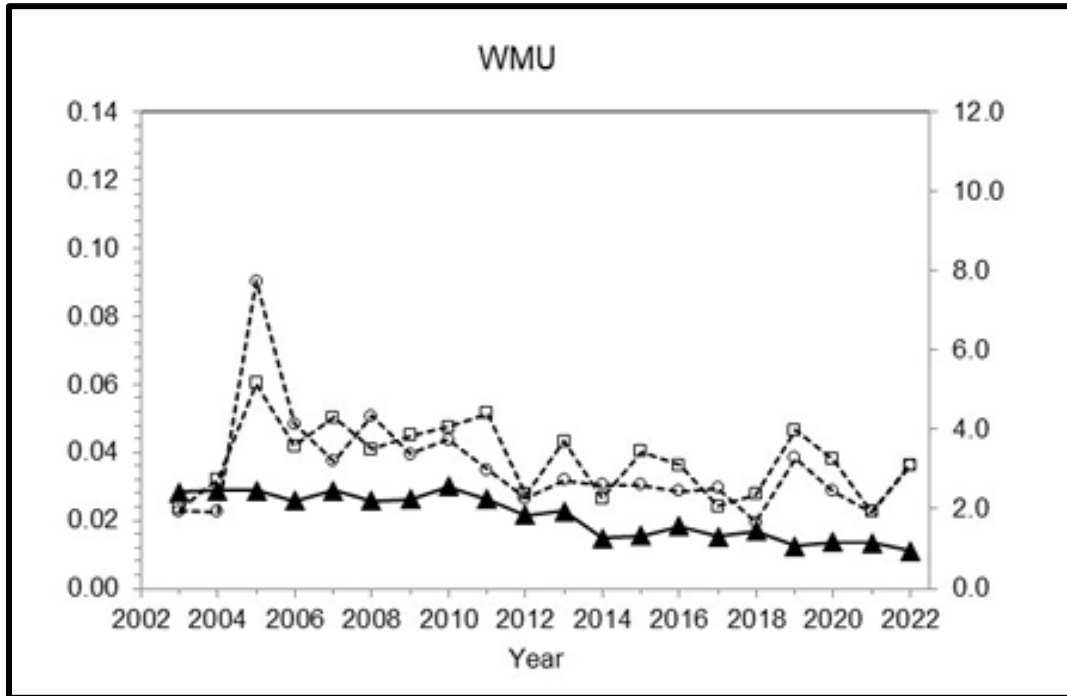
recovery and harvest data. Harvest and hunter participation are estimated from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP). The 2024 report, which will include data for 2023, was not yet available at the time of this publication.

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

**Figure 69. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the western management units combined, 2003–2022. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data.**



**Figure 70. Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove in the western management units combined, 2002–2022. Harvest rates presented separately for hatch-year and after-hatch-year (USFWS, 2022).**

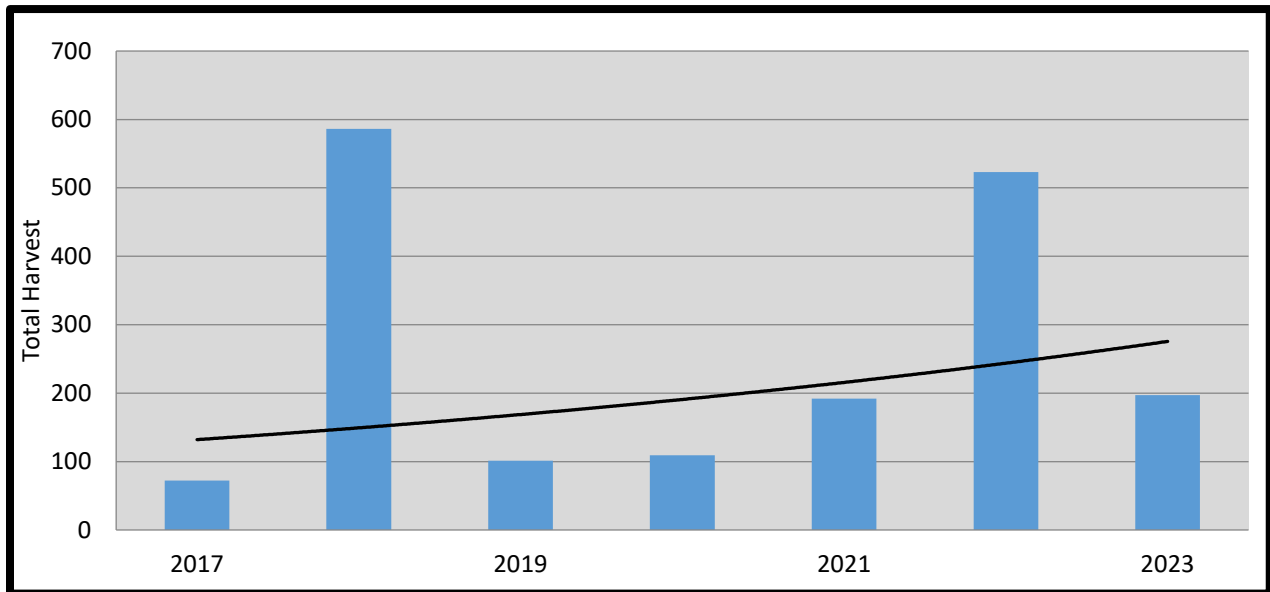


Approximately  $3,400 \pm 500$  active hunters harvested  $31,100 \pm 5,000$  mourning doves in the 2021-22 season in Washington, for an average of  $9.1 \pm 1.9$  doves per hunter according to the USFWS report. This is a slight decrease over 2021-22 estimates. More information on mourning dove and other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

District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area, averaging 254 doves harvested per year over the past seven years. The chart below includes only Pierce and Thurston counties, since GMU 667 of Lewis County cannot be separated from the remainder of that county. Mourning dove harvest exponentially increased in 2018 and 2022 in District 11 and declined again in 2023. Lewis and Thurston counties traditionally provide higher harvest than Pierce County. Harvest depends greatly on hunter participation, which fluctuates year to year. Using the new WDFW harvest data collection and analysis methodology (review explanation provided under Small Game section), the harvest estimates for 2023 were 90, 111, and 86 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties, respectively. A total of 73 hunters reported hunting dove in District 11 in 2023, compared to 81 in 2022 (Lewis County included). The best locations for dove hunting in the district are agricultural areas, especially orchards.



Figure 71. Mourning dove harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).



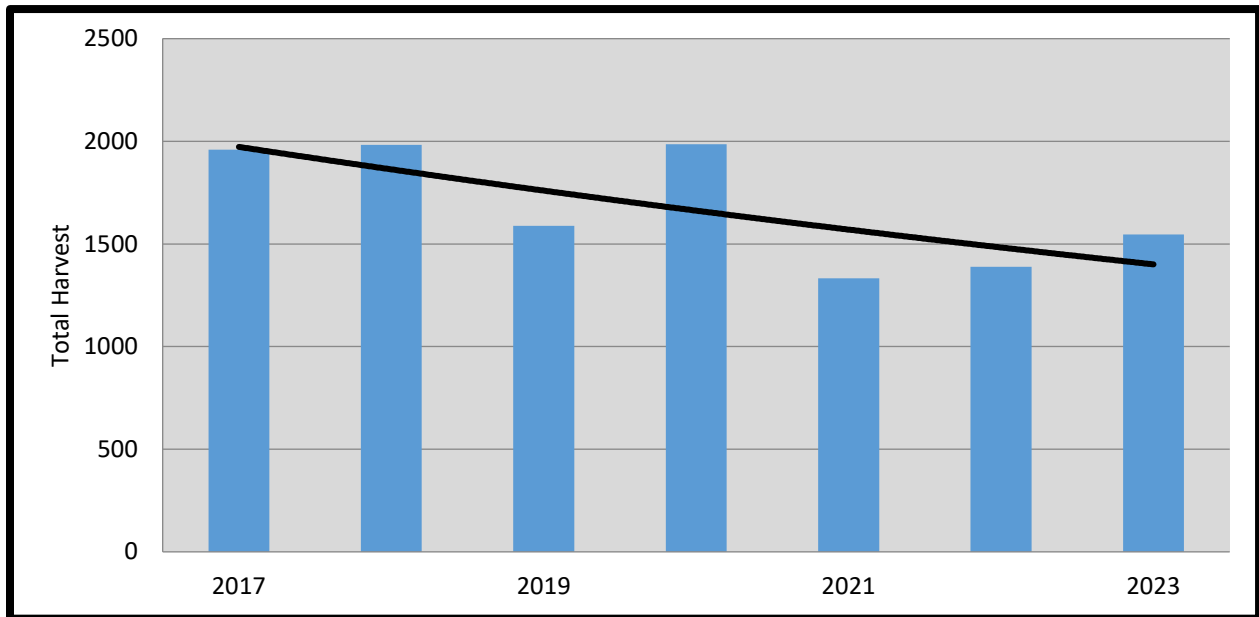
## Forest grouse

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

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

Forest grouse harvest has trended downward in District 11, especially since 2021, but increased slightly in 2023. Harvest averaged 1,683 grouse annually over the past seven years. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and then Thurston counties.

**Figure 72. Forest grouse harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).**



A hunter must buy either a big game or small game license to hunt grouse. Forest grouse season runs Sept. 15 through Jan. 15 statewide, with a daily bag limit of four of any species [to include not more than three dusky or sooty grouse (combined), three spruce grouse, and three ruffed grouse] and a possession limit of 12 [to include not more than nine dusky or sooty grouse (combined), nine spruce grouse, and nine ruffed grouse].

WDFW collects wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse (spruce, ruffed, dusky, and sooty) during the Sept. 1 to Jan. 15 hunting season. The goal is to build estimated population trend datasets for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse harvested into wing collection barrels placed around the state or by bringing them to the closest WDFW district or regional office. Wing and tail collection locations and instructions can be found on [WDFW's website](#). Hunter participation in wing submission remained stable 2023 and has averaged 58 wings submitted annually. The annual analysis and results of wing monitoring can be found in the [game status and trend reports](#).



WDFW grouse wing barrel collection station. Photo by E. Butler.



WDFW grouse wing barrel collection instructions. Photo by WDFW.

**Table 4. Number of wing bags collected by month in 2023 at District 11 barrels.**

Barrel Name	Collection Month					
	September*	October	November	December	January	Total
North Vail	0	23	3	5	5	36
Skookumchuck	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Vail	0	20	1	3	0	24
Total	0	43	4	8	5	60

\*Sites not checked in September 2023.

## Pheasant



Youth pheasant hunt. Photo by Nick Eisenmann.

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

Game farm-produced pheasants will be released this fall; sites are described and mapped on the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) and [upland bird hunting](#) webpages. The release program uses state- (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federally (JBLM) managed lands in District 11.

**To protect wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is now required for all upland bird, dove, and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide.** Hunters visiting any of these release sites may possess and use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Some sites have further restrictions. Reference the [Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) for more information.

**Table 5. 2024 pheasant seasons in Western Washington.**

Season	Dates	Notes
Youth	Sept. 14-15, 2024	
65 and older and disabled	Sept. 16-20, 2024	
General	Sept. 21-30, 2024	Last pheasants released Thanksgiving morning.
Extended	Dec. 1-15, 2024	Includes both Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck wildlife areas. No pheasants released.

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

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

Pheasant release in Western Washington will be similar to last year, with an estimated 37,000 pheasants to be released at 25 pheasant release areas in 2024, compared to 35,741 in 2023. These are estimates only; seasonal temperature fluctuations and other mortalities could affect total production. Approximately 1,800 pheasants (5% of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays from Sept. 14 through Thanksgiving morning. Approximately 3,600 pheasants (10% of total production) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 120-135 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays.

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

Approximately 4,800 pheasants (13% of total production) will be released on JBLM training areas as those areas become available. Military training and listed species management dictate which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. During the 2022 season, 4,782 pheasants were released on JBLM. The Department anticipates the number of birds released to increase by 3% in 2024, but it will depend on military, recreation, and environmental scheduling.

**NOTICE:** JBLM changed its recreational access management system in 2023 and is now implementing a computer- and smartphone-based platform called iSportsman. To learn about hunting, fishing, and other recreation on JBLM, visit the [JBLM hunting and fishing webpage](#). JBLM recreation managers stress the following for 2024:

- Access for pheasant release events is now managed by JBLM Fish and Wildlife. MWR is no longer a part of the process besides being available for basic in-person account assistance.
- All users must create accounts and purchase permits at [jblm.isportsman.net/Default.aspx](http://jblm.isportsman.net/Default.aspx).
- Account validation is required for all new users, and an email with instructions is sent immediately after account registration. Permits will not display prior to completing the validation step.
- Watching a safety brief video is still required, but proof of vehicle registration or insurance is no longer required.
- Firearms must be registered with the Provost Marshal's office ([home.army.mil/lewis-mcchord/index.php/my-Joint-Base-Lewis-Mcchord/all-services/weapons-registration](http://home.army.mil/lewis-mcchord/index.php/my-Joint-Base-Lewis-Mcchord/all-services/weapons-registration)).
- During the season, hunting dates and locations are posted to [jblm.isportsman.net/Alerts.aspx](http://jblm.isportsman.net/Alerts.aspx).
- Reservations are required for all pheasant releases and can be made through each user's account the day before each hunt. Instructions are posted on the Alerts/News page during the season.
- After making a reservation, hunters must check in to their reserved area on the day of the hunt. This is also covered in the posted instructions.



## JBLM pheasant release

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

## JBLM youth and senior pheasant hunt

Youth hunt (under 16); senior hunt (65 and older): Check state regulations for September dates. A state hunting license and successful completion of the Washington Hunter Education Program are required. Youth must be accompanied by an adult. Volunteers will be assigned to assist all youth, and hunting dogs will be available. Normal sign-up/reservations are required as well as a JBLM registration permit. A special pheasant area will be set aside for senior hunters, in accordance with state regulations, if enough sites are available to the public.

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

## Quail

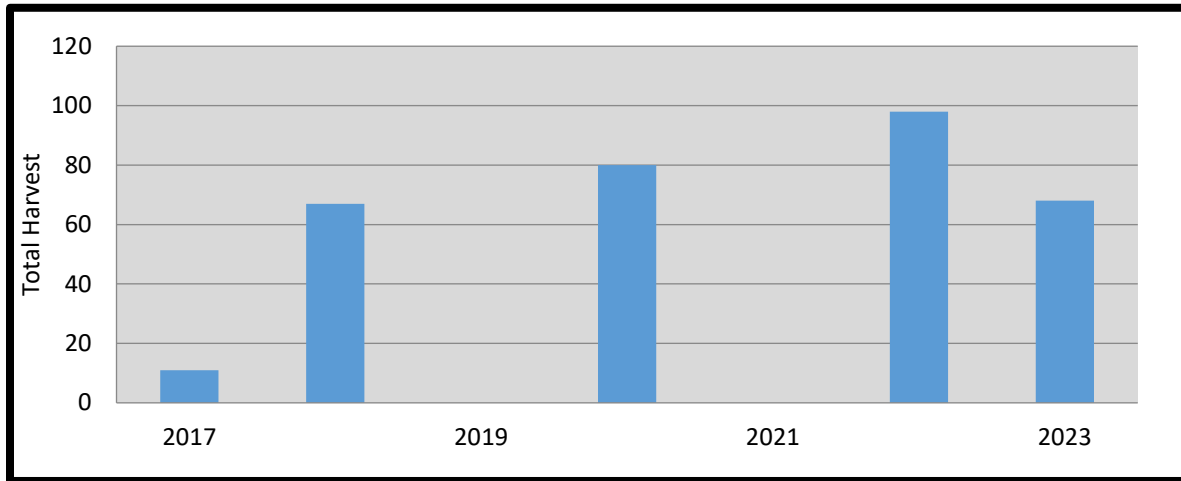
For general information on hunting quail, please visit WDFW's [quail hunting webpage](#).

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

Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout Western Washington. Quail harvest in the district fluctuates annually, depending on the number of hunters participating and often reaching zero (as in 2019 and 2021). As an example, only eight people hunted quail in the district in 2017 and the harvest reflects that effort. Regardless, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in Western Washington where people hunt quail. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of the Key Peninsula, Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. Where

private property access is limited, seek out state (DNR) and county forestland. The Western Washington California (valley) quail season runs end of September through end of November, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs the same dates, with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four (either sex).

**Figure 73. Quail harvest in District 11.**



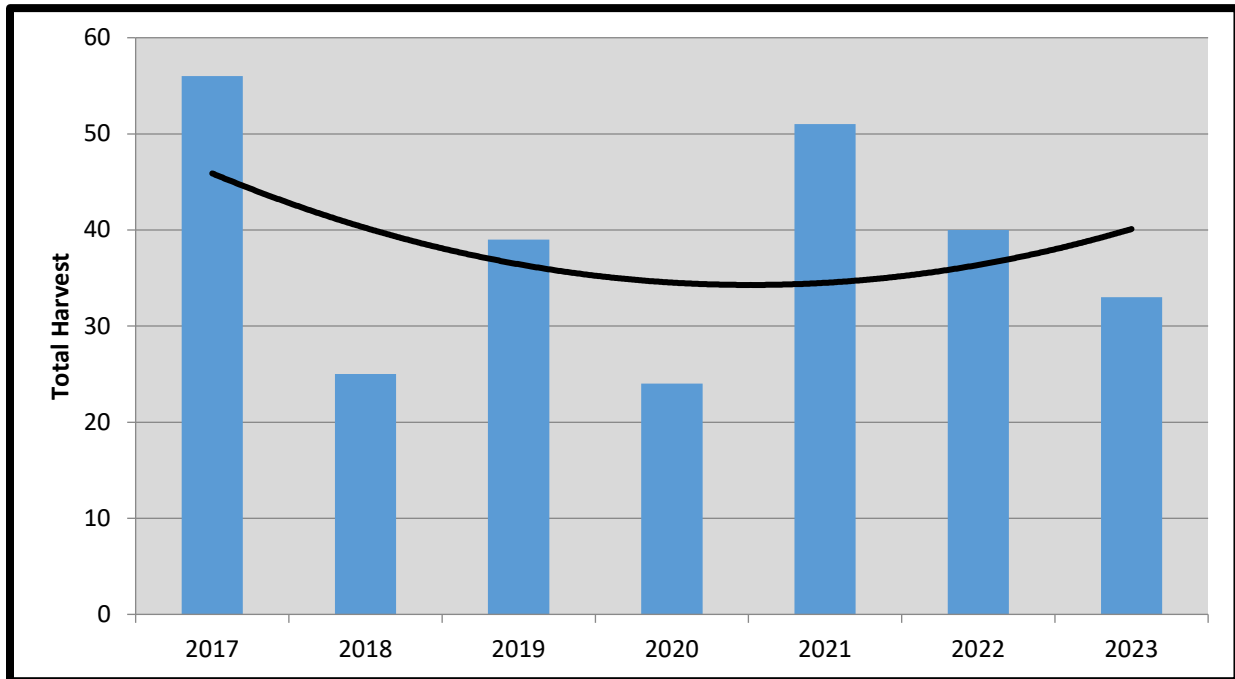
## Turkeys

General information on hunting turkey can be found in the [2024-25 Washington Game Bird Hunting Regulations](#) and WDFW's [Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) booklet.

Turkeys are rare, dispersed in District 11, and not managed specifically for hunting opportunity in this district. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern subspecies of wild turkey in the district, and harvest reflects hunter participation year to year. Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Unit 50, which includes District 11, has fluctuated since 2017, averaging 38 turkeys annually over the past seven years.

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

Figure 74. Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Management Unit 50, which includes District 11.



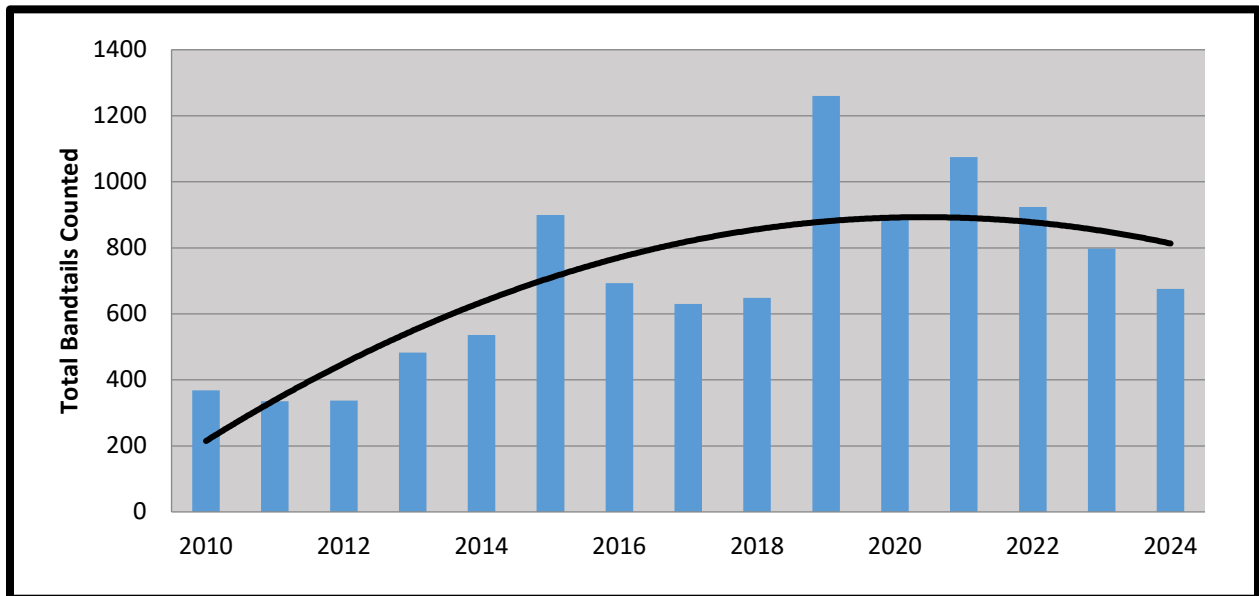
## Band-tailed pigeons

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

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

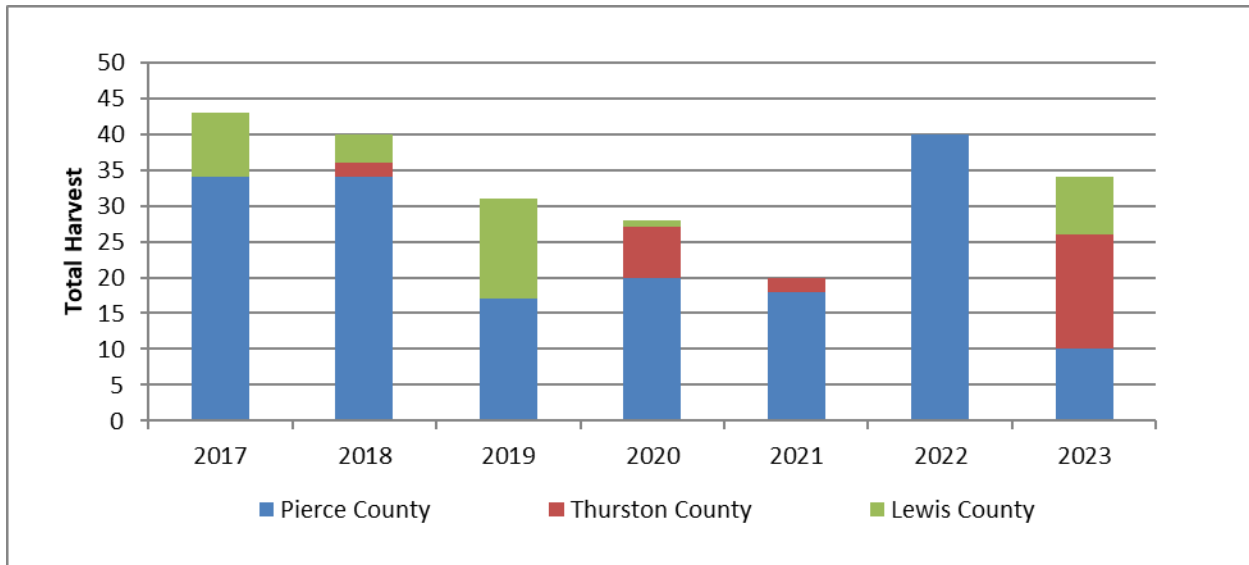
WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at the 16 mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities. Band-tailed pigeon estimates based on mineral site surveys have trended downward over the last three years in District 11, after reaching a 10-year high in 2019 and 2021. The prospect for harvesting band-tails in District 11 in 2024 remains decent but not outstanding.

**Figure 75. Annual band-tailed pigeon mineral site survey results, Pierce and Thurston counties only.**

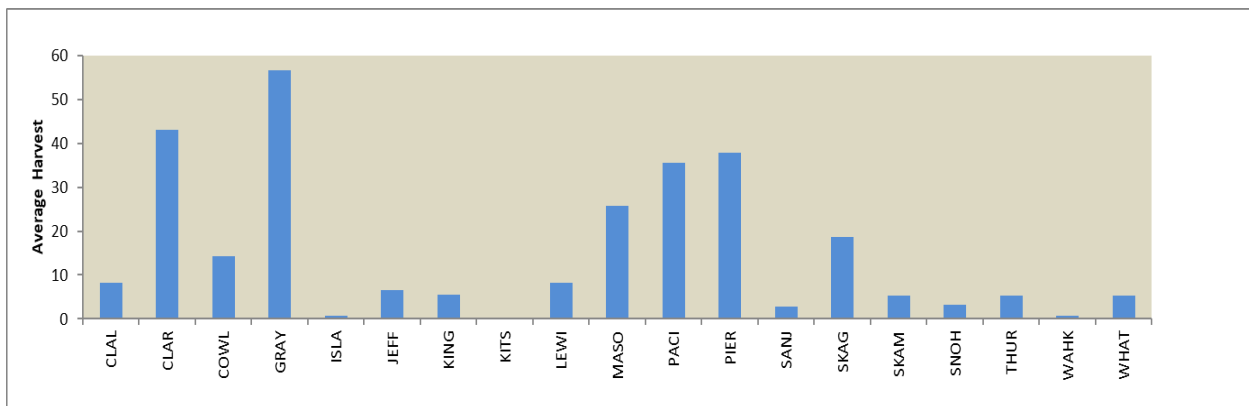


The total band-tailed pigeon harvest in Western Washington in 2023 was 169 birds, which is much lower than estimated population size, so hunters have plenty of opportunity to harvest band-tails. Pierce County harvest is traditionally much higher than Lewis or Thurston counties. The best hunting locations for band-tailed pigeons in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines.

**Figure 76. Band-tailed pigeon harvest comparison by county for District 11.**



**Figure 77. Average annual band-tailed pigeon harvest for each Washington county from 2004-2023.**



## Special regulations

Since band-tail seasons re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization. Harvest cards must be submitted to WDFW after the season has closed. Hunters should review the 2024 Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

## Research

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

The goal is to conduct research on band-tailed pigeons in areas without identified mineral sites, which could allow WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

1. Identify new mineral sites to allow the agency to more accurately index our statewide population via mineral site surveys.
2. More expertly manage our band-tailed pigeons harvest seasons to potentially allow expanded hunting opportunity.
3. Provide detailed information on resource selection to inform managing habitat that would increase the statewide population.

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