Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

July 16 to 31, 2021

DIVERSITY DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Grizzly Bear Hair Corrals: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock checked several hair corrals they had placed earlier in the summer as part of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Grizzly Bear Monitoring Program in Washington. Many species visit these corrals and species observed so far this summer include elk, deer, moose, snowshoe hare, turkey vulture, cougar, coyote, wolf, black bear, and grizzly bear.

Remote camera photos captured at grizzly bear hair corrals and a photo of suspected grizzly bear hair captured on a rub tree

Bog Lemming Sampling: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock set out 140 scatboards throughout a wet meadow in northeastern Washington to non-invasively sample for bog lemming presence. This survey work has been implemented to inform a USFWS request for information before a listing decision. Bog lemmings are small mammals that most closely look like meadow voles. They are relicts that were left in isolated wet meadow habitats when glaciers receded from the continental United States. They are closely associated with Sphagnum moss and have been documented sporadically in Washington over the last several decades.

Biologist Prince demonstrates proper bog lemming scat board sampling and placement in a wet meadow

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunting Questions: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock fielded many phone calls and questions from hunters as seasons are quickly approaching. Private Lands Biologist Gaston also received multiple questions about the Hunting by Reservation Program, such as, when all the reservations will be uploaded and when they can be reserved. Gaston explained that reservations are currently being uploaded to the website as each landowner works with their respective biologist and then they can be reserved as early as two weeks prior to the start of the reservation hunt. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade also continued to coordinate with hunters regarding hunting opportunities and private lands access in Asotin and Garfield counties.

Private Lands Access Program Maintenance: Natural Resource Worker Rumiser posted signs along roadways for lands enrolled in the various Private Lands Access Programs. Boundary signs and other signs along the back edges of fields will wait to be posted until after harvest and fire danger is minimized.

Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett worked with three landowner having issues with deer and elk to agricultural crops in Stevens and Pend Oreille counties. Information on the drought, deterrents, general season hunting, and a damage contract were covered.

Hunting by Reservation Only: Private Lands Biologist Gaston worked with landowners to setup reservation dates for the upcoming hunting seasons. Reservations will be uploaded to the website once submitted to and approved by Private Lands Access Program Manager Strickland. Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley also scheduled and started entering available hunt dates to reserve on Hunt By Reservation properties in Walla Walla County.

Access Contracts: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley received two signed access contracts and forwarded them on to Contracts Specialist Lontonuu for review and approval. Thorne Hadley entered three new access contracts for review and approval. Private Lands Supervisor Earl finalized access agreements and payments and removed signs from a property in Garfield County that is no longer in the access program due to family ownership changes.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Confirmed Wolf Depredations in Stevens County: WDFW staff members responded to a report of a calf with injuries in the Leadpoint pack territory. Two calves were located and examined in a coral. One calf's injuries were so severe it had to be euthanized. Deterrents and next steps were covered with the producer.

Two calves examined in Stevens County after injuries were reported

Orphaned Twin Moose: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman responded to calls about a pair of moose twins that have been orphaned. Westerman explained that making the twins dependent on people is the worst scenario for them and gave advice about how to deal with the twins.

Aggressive River Otters: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman responded to a complaint from Bunkers Resort on Williams Lake about river otters trying to take fish from people fishing on the dock, even getting up on the dock and chasing people for their fish. Westerman provided advice and information for hiring a wildlife control operator to help with removing the aggressive river otters.

Unusual Deer Behavior: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb received a report of a deer exhibiting unusual behavior along the Washington and Oregon border area. The mule deer doe staggered as she tried to walk, was emaciated, and exhibited labored breathing with an open mouth. Kolb consulted with District Biologist Wik, Assistant District Biologist Vekasy, Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade, and WDFW Wildlife Veterinarian Mansfield about the observed behavior. Kolb made the determination to euthanize the deer. DFW Wildlife Veterinarian Mansfield coordinated with the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab (WADDL) at Washington State University for a possible examination. Upon examining the carcass in the field, Kolb noticed what appeared to be recent trauma to the upper neck area. Shaving the carcass revealed heavy bilateral scaring, scraping, and lacerations on both sides of the neck. The injuries were consistent with a wire fence entanglement. An examination by WADDL was not necessary.

A mule deer doe with significant bilateral neck injuries likely sustained from a wire fence entanglement

Cattle Producer Contact: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade continued to conduct weekly check-ins with producers in Asotin and Garfield counties. Some of the producers reported that they had temporally moved cattle due to current fire danger, but plan to bring them back as soon as they can do so safely. Wade gave all producers that he spoke with updates on known wolf activity and reports of sightings and observed sign. Wade was contacted by a producer to report that they had observed tracks and heard vocalizations from wolves on a United States Forest Service Allotment. Wade also discussed sensitive sharing agreement with several producers who currently have the needed paperwork but have yet to sign and return it.

Pullman Moose: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman assisted WDFW Enforcement with darting and relocating a moose that was in the city of Pullman for several days. The cow was relocated to northern Spokane County.

Cougar Concerns in Pend Oreille County: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett provided guidance to a landowner with two reports of trail camera photos of a cougar in the last two months. Information on reducing depredations and negative interactions were provided. Bennett also worked with another landowner with concerns of cougar near Newport. Information on biology, ecology, and non-lethal deterrents were provided.

Black Bear Concerns in Pend Oreille County: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett fielded five complaints about black bears. Information on securing trash, chicken feed, and bird feeders were also covered during site visits. Bennett also provided bear proof garbage cans.

Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement – Livestock: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb met with a new producer to the area. The new producer is buying stock and property from an existing producer that runs livestock in a known wolf territory. Kolb and the new producer discussed non-lethal deterrents, data sharing, and Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement – Livestock (DPCA-L) cost sharing agreements.

Damage Permits: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spoke with two producers regarding elk damage permits this week. Wade produced two damage permits for one Anatone area producer and answered questions regarding the use of permits for a Grouse Flats area producer. Kolb also met with multiple landowners in Columbia and Walla Walla counties to discuss damage and/or kill permits. Kolb discussed how a landowner would qualify to be considered for a permit being issued, including discussions about public hunting access requirements.

Goose with Neck Collar: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman responded to a call about a goose with something stuck on its neck at the Riverfront Park. The same goose had been trapped and collared at Gonzaga over 14 years ago!

Ponies Attacked: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman responded to a call about a pair of ponies that were attacked by a possible bear. The report was made after it happened the previous week. The reporting party sent pictures of the injuries that did not line up with a typical bear attack. However, the animal they described chasing off at 1:00 am with flashlights, lined up with what a bear looks like. The cause of injuries is undetermined.

Alpaca Depredation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman assisted WDFW Officer Beauchene with a depredation investigation on an alpaca that was killed by a cougar at roughly 9:30 am. The owners have had issues in the past and been doing all the right things to mitigate depredations. They feed their animals in the morning and then released them into the larger pasture and went to the store and when they came back, they found the dead alpaca. Westerman completed the depredation form.

Pasture Checks: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb conducted pasture checks in areas of Columbia County where increased wolf activity has been documented. Non-lethal deterrents where adjusted accordingly and check-ins with neighboring producers were conducted. Kolb recommended daily or near daily range riding, specifically during the dawn and dusk high activity periods.

Margo Zon Guns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb checked on the serviceability of currently deployed zon guns to deter on-going elk damage; propane canisters were also changed out. Kolb also coordinated with Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade to secure an additional Margo Zon Gun for deployment in a corn field experience damage from deer as a non-lethal deterrent.

Injured Redtail Hawk: Private Lands Supervisor Earl received a call about an injured redtail hawk that a planting crew with the conservation district found along Alpowa Creek. Earl and Conflict Specialist Wade picked up the hawk and transferred it to Washington State University.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Wednesdays in the Woods: Wildlife Biologist Prince gave her annual bears, cougars, and moose presentation at the Bowl and Pitcher campground in Riverside State Park. During the talk she covered biology and safety for each animal. She also brought four cans of bear spray for participants that could answer trivia questions.

Wolf Rule Development Stakeholder Outreach: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett participated in two conference calls with interested parties about the draft wolf rulemaking. Questions associated with wolf conflict were shared during the calls. Bennett also listened to the Attorney General's Office provide recommendations on the draft rule.

Hunter Education: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb submitted WDFW hunter education instructor application material. If accepted, Kolb will assist or lead future hunter education courses in the Touchet Valley.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Draft Wolf Rule Meetings: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna participated on two stakeholder meetings discussing the draft wolf rule. On another wolf-related note, McCanna assisted with the second round of interviews for the Wolf Policy position.

Hunting Access Contracts: Private Lands Biologist Gaston worked all Wednesday with Contracts Specialist Lotonuu, Program Manager Strickland, and Fiscal Analyst Fieldson to fix one contract which had historical payment issues.

7) Other

District Weekly Wolf Coordination Conference Calls: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett facilitated three calls with a local sheriff's office, USFS, range riders, and WDFW staff members associated with wolves. Information on population and monitoring, conflict, Special Focus Area Togo Plan, Leadpoint next steps, and similar topics were covered.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Common Loon Management: This year WDFW is undertaking a common loon emphasis survey with the goal to determine nesting and productivity of common loons across the state. Biologist Heinlen conducted productivity surveys for common loons in District 6 to determine chick survival past six weeks, the time at which they are considered fledged. Of seven known nests in the district, six hatched eggs and four successfully fledged a total of seven chicks (less than six weeks of age). The final status of one chick that is yet to reach six weeks of age is yet to be determined.

Adult common loon (Gavia immer) and chick on Crawfish Lake – Photo by J. Heinlen

Biologist Heinlen and USFS biologists assisted Biodiversity Research Institute staff members with banding common loons on Lost and Beth lakes in Eastern Okanogan County. One chick on each lake was successfully captured, banded, and released. Plastic color bands are used in unique combinations and include a metal band engraved with an identification number. Metal bands are placed on the left leg of loons banded as chicks and on the right leg of loons banded as adults. Banding provides individual identification which helps to determine demographics, migration, mate and site fidelity, local territory movements, age at first breeding, longevity, and other life history information.

Common loon chick with color coded bands at Lost Lake – Photo by J. Heinlen

Black Bear Surveys: Biologists Fitkin and Heinlen in coordination with Biologists Beausoleil and Welfelt and a handful of volunteers successfully completed the bear hair-snag survey work for the central portion of District 6 this year. To date we have collected over 1000 bear hair DNA samples and bear visitation videos for analysis. The product of this effort will be a scientifically rigorous black bear density estimate for the study area and surrounding landscape that will help inform and shape black bear harvest management. In addition to bears of all colors and sizes, remote cameras at the sites documented visitation by a variety of other species as well.

Four different black bear color phases from just one survey site – Photo from WDFW remote camera

Twin moose calves with mom at a bear-hair snag site – Photo from WDFW remote camera

Bumblebee Surveys: Biologist Heinlen conducted bumblebee surveys under the Graves bumblebee survey effort. This survey effort was designed by United States Geological Survey (USGS) Spatial Ecologist Tabitha Graves, and colleagues to collect information on the current distribution and habitat use of the western bumble bee. They have been using standardized monitoring methods located in under or unsurveyed areas across the entire species range. The need for current information on western bumble bee distribution and habitat is pressing due to recently observed significant reductions in the bee's range, distribution, and abundance. Data collected will contribute to an Endangered Species Act (ESA) status assessment presently underway.

A western bumble bee foraging on snowberry near Lost Lake on 7-21-2021 – Photo by E. Heinlen

Pygmy Rabbit Heat Wave and Project Impacts: The sustained heat wave being experienced in Central Washington has had major impacts on our recovery activities this summer. Since having daily temperatures in the upper 90s-100s for nearly six weeks, now we have had to suspend all capture and release efforts. Early-to-mid summer is when we capture and release the majority of our kits into the wild. The temperatures are too hot to safely capture and handle the rabbits, even when starting in early morning hours. Additionally, the heat wave corresponding with record breaking drought has us being conservative with not relocating any rabbits, given they would be taken to new areas and would have to acclimate to the new area without its burrow system to mitigate the heat. Given these factors, we have also postponed all RHDV-2 vaccination efforts in enclosures and the wild. We are hopeful to resume these efforts when temperatures approach normal conditions.

Pygmy Rabbit Release Site Monitoring: Technicians Clements, Kroeger, and Intern Snaadt have made weekly checks on the three acclimation/release pens to monitor released kits. The three release pens (ten kits released in each) are located in a new portion of the Beezley Hills Recovery Area this year, to the north of the Sutherland Fire area as rabbits have yet to disperse there yet. So far, results are encouraging, with at least nine burrows having been established within them and two out of three showing high level of rabbit activity. This is very encouraging given the drought conditions that are present. This release areas is about two miles from the former Beezley Hills release area on the Lancaster Property.

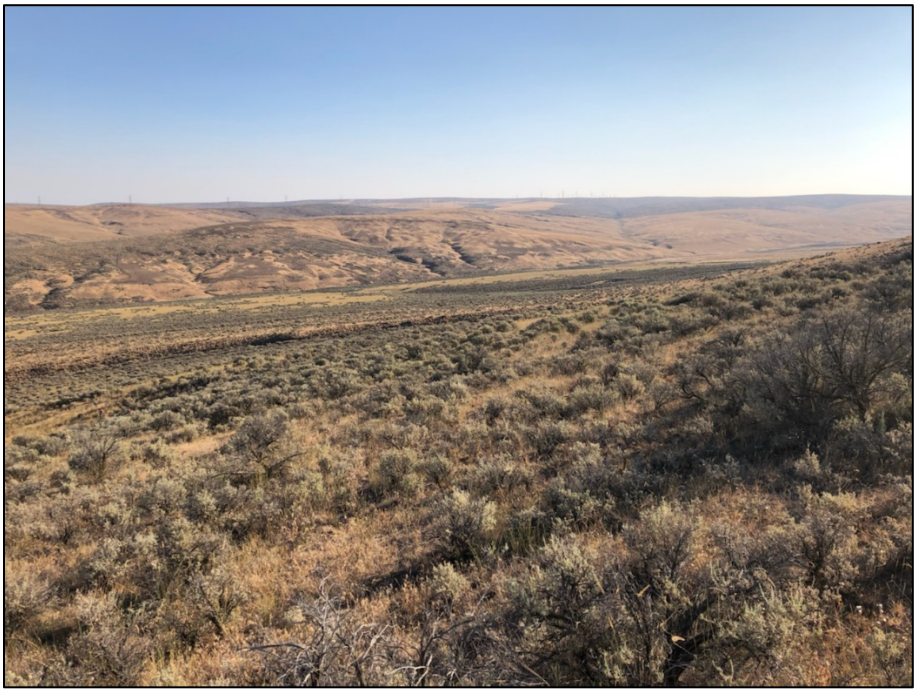
A released kit peering out of a burrow system on the Beezley Hills release site

Pygmy Rabbit Population Monitoring: The pygmy rabbit crew with the assistance of many good volunteers completed the summer monitoring on Beezley Hills wild population. The Lancaster property served as the primary release sites from 2018-2020. Given what we observed during Winter Surveys, we felt this area was mostly occupied and that augmentation in this area was no longer needed. The summer monitoring focuses on both kit dispersal and burrow establishment and this year was of heightened importance since we did not release rabbits at this site this year.

We have been very excited at the activity we have observed, with detections increasing 48% from last year. Wild kit production has been very high with numerous kits observed and multiple litters observed (based on very small kit pellets found in both April and June). We conduct standardized grid transects mapping all active burrow systems and areas of high activity. Their range continues to expand into new areas adjacent to this release area and optimistic about the future here. The increase in observations is even more impressive given the drought conditions that are present.

	Kits Released	# of Summer detections	Acres occupied
2018	10	No surveys	52
2019	17	38	96
2020	30	98	475
2021	0	145	538

Summer pygmy rabbit monitoring results for southern Beezley Hills – this does not include the new release site in North Beezley



Southern portion of the Beezley Hills Recovery Area – most if not all of the shrubsteppe habitat is now occupied by pygmy rabbits as result of our release efforts from 2018-2020

Sandhill Cranes in Big Valley Unit: Right after the Fourth of July weekend, Manager Troyer returned to the wildlife area to some very exciting news – a pair of State Endangered sandhill cranes decided to take up residence at the Big Valley Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area. To top it off, at the time, they were rearing a four-week-old colt. Unfortunately, late last week, the colt went missing, likely due to natural predation. Although losing the colt is sad news, the fact that a breeding pair of sandhill cranes decided to nest and attempt to raise their young on the Methow Wildlife Area is still extremely exciting and promising for the future. As of today, the adults are still living in the wetland and foraging daily in a neighboring pasture and grain field, both on the wildlife area as well. Sandhill cranes haven't resided in the Methow in at least 30-40 years, so this is an extremely unique experience we have been witnessing, monitoring, and photographing (from a distance).

A special 'thanks' to Kent Woodruff, Victor and Libby Glick, and Kim and Steve Bondi for noticing these cranes back in June and notifying Manager Troyer and District Biologist Fitkin in early July. This group of local citizen scientists actually watched the cranes sitting on their nest and had the pleasure of viewing the colt from the time it was hatched. Thanks for your diligent observations and information gathering!

Another photo of the pair of sandhill cranes. They spent the majority of the day trying to locate their missing colt, but to no avail. Hopefully, this pair will return next year to give it another shot! – Photo by Troyer

One of the adult sandhill cranes currently residing on the Methow Wildlife Area's Big Valley Unit – Photo by Troyer

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Wildlife Area Facelift: The Swakane, Entiat, and Chelan Butte are the original units of Chelan Wildlife Area and still had 50+ year old signs at many of the main entry points. The durability of these signs is a testament to former manager Ken Kilgore's fabrication skills and use of 3/8" steel plate mounted on railroad iron. All the signs referred to the units as Department of Game Wildlife Recreation Areas. Needless to say, these signs were a bit out of date. Pittman-Robertson and Discover Pass funding was used to update the entry signs and complete much needed maintenance and upgrades to existing kiosks on the Swakane and Chelan Butte units.

Emergency Fire Restrictions: Lands Operations Manager Finger worked on exemptions to the new emergency rule to provide camping opportunities on strategic water access sites that provide water-based recreation, such as Banks Lake and Potholes Reservoir. Finger coordinated these efforts with managing partners at Bureau of Reclamation. Many Columbia Basin Water Access Sites occur within a fragmented landscape of irrigated agriculture, canals, and county roads and offer a relatively safe place for users to enjoy WDFW managed lands. Though wildfire risk is extremely high throughout most of the state, these sites have maintained gravel parking areas and adequate space for overnight use. Many of these users are fishing or enjoying water sports and spend little time in uplands where fire risk occurs. However, the stakes are high and with suppression resources spread thin we need to be vigilant and responsible to ensure no preventable wildfires occur. According to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) year-to-date fire statistics, 15% of identified causes are due to recreation, of wildfire starts are debris burn.

Waterfowl Management: Biologist Rowan spent time baiting a pond and gaining access permission for waterfowl trapping and banding efforts. WDFW attempts to trap and band 500 mallards every year, which provides limited information about production, age and sex composition of the local population, migration, dispersal, and eventual harvest. Biologist Rowan also transcribed and entered data collected during brood surveys earlier this month. Due to other work being assigned as a higher priority, only three historic brood survey routes were surveyed this year. Two sites had repeat-surveys performed, which demonstatrated higher numbers of broods in late-June than early-July; although, the extreme heat wave may have been a factor in reducing brood numbers by early-July. Overall, higher numbers of adult birds were present later in early July. Biologists Rowan and Dougherty, and technicians Pavelchek and Mullen also set up a duck trap and met with Speciailist Wilson to go over trapping for the season.

Mourning Dove Management: Biologists Rowan and Dougherty, and Technicians Pavelchek and Mullen spent most of the month attempting to capture and band mourning doves for population management. Rowan also gained access for a new site if time eventually allows for spreading out effort. WDFW bands mourning doves every year as a way to gain an understanding of harvest, distribution, age and sex composition, and to some extent population abundance locally.

3) <u>Providing Conflict Prevention and Education</u>

Depredation Investigation: Specialist Heilhecker met with a landowner to sign a DPCA for range riding on his private property. The landowner believes four adult cows were chased to death by wolves. No calves were harmed or missing. Even though the four carcasses were too old to determine a cause of death, Specialist Heilhecker examined one of the carcasses. There were no marks on the hide and the skeleton was intact. The landowner agreed the wolves did not feed on the cows. He believes the cows were chased and dropped dead from heat exhaustion, subsequently the wolves left. The landowner is interested in moving forward and preventing future livestock losses. Specialist Heilhecker gave him a copy of the “wolf-livestock interaction protocol” along with the definitions of “confirmed” and “probable” wolf depredations and photos of confirmed wolf depredations as reference material. They also discussed nonlethal deterrence measures.

Injured Bull Investigation: Specialist Heilhecker and Officer McCormick investigated an injured, two-year-old bull. The bull was fine the last time it was observed by the producers "a couple of weeks ago." The bull was removed from the pasture and placed in a corral next to the house. The following day, a veterinarian treated the bull. His opinion that the injury was caused by wolves led the livestock producers to call for an investigation. Both front legs were swollen, and his back end was lame. There was an infected wound on the left front leg, just above the hoof. The livestock producer believes only carnivores can cause such a severe infection. Unfortunately, when the injury occurred is unknown. Untreated wounds can quickly become infected, especially in hot weather and unsanitary conditions. The severity of the infection is no indication as to whether a carnivore caused the injury. The livestock producer also believes the bull pinned the wolf down and subsequently, the wolf scratched the bull in defense as the wolf tried to get away. However, the parallel scratches on the side of the bull were likely caused by vegetation, barbed-wire fence, or another structural object. Specialist Heilhecker sent photos to other experienced WDFW staff members for their opinions since the livestock producer did not believe her. WDFW staff members agree this is not a confirmed wolf injury.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Vegetation Management and Noxious Weed Control: An exceptionally dry spring reduced the effectiveness of early spring residual work along some roadsides and parking areas, as precipitation is required to bind and activate herbicides in the soil before photodegradation occurs. This, along with extended periods of high temperatures, has resulted in vigorous kochia and Russian thistle breakthrough growth in some areas that must be addressed. Sites requiring additional treatments are prioritized due to the relatively narrow treatment window. Though these larger breakthrough weeds remain physically present, the treatment effectively reduces or eliminates seed production, which is beneficial going into the following year.

The wildlife area has also made a number of biocontrol releases this season of Galerucella sp. on persistent infestations of purple loosestrife where herbicide treatments are not appropriate. Galerucella sp. are small beetles that feed exclusively on the leaves, stems, and buds of purple loosestrife. While they may eliminate some plants, their feeding action primarily puts the plant under a high level of stress that results in substantially reduced plant vigor and seed production. The wildlife area works cooperatively with the Washington State University (WSU) Extension program, who make a number of biocontrol agents available to agencies for a variety of weed species.

250 Galerucella sp. per container, they will crawl or fly up into the purple loosestrife plants where they feed and reproduce, overwinter under favorable conditions, and gradually build a population substantial enough to provide acceptable control of the weed – Cole

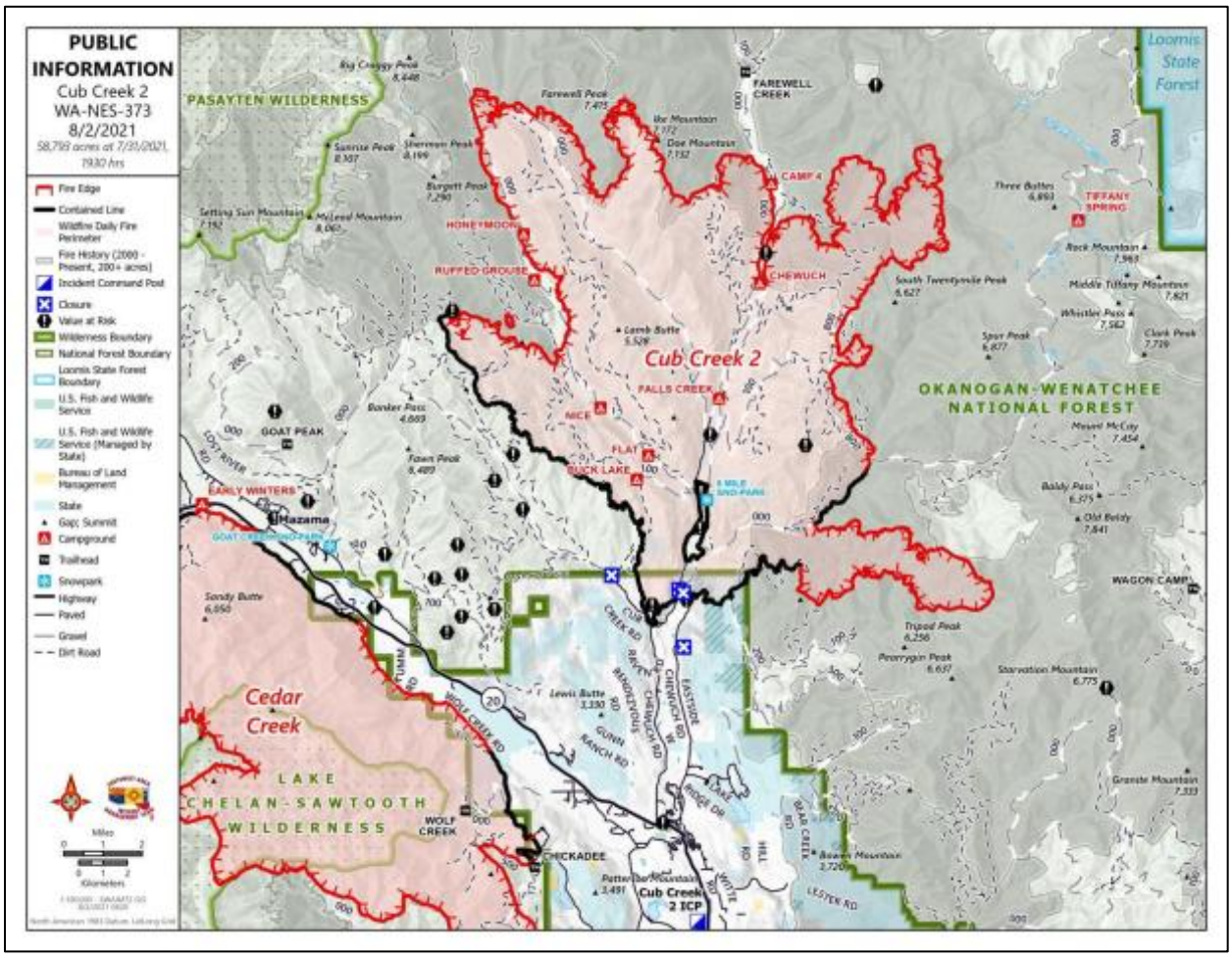
District 6 Wildfires: Both the Cedar Creek and Cub Creek fires continue to burn in the Methow Watershed, each having individually eclipsed 50,000 acres in size. Both fires have been burning largely in forested habitats from the valley floor all the way to the top of the sub-alpine zone. Both fires have slowed noticeably in the last couple of days, but additional growth is likely.

From top: The cub creek fire as it explodes into the lower Chewuch drainage, the Cedar Creek fire within ember distance of Sun Mountain Lodge, 'The Edge of Mordor' (Cedar Creek fire in the upper Methow drainage) – Photos by S. Fitkin

Nk Mip Fire Near Eder Unit: On July 19, a wildfire started between Oliver and Osoyoos in British Columbia near the Charles and Mary Eder Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. Acting Wildlife Area Manager Dupont, Technician Medina responded to the area along with Sinlahekin Wildlife Manager Wehmeyer to support the suppression efforts on the U.S. side.

They removed fuels from around structures and assisted the Type 3 Team assigned to the area. In addition, WDFW's prescribed burn crew was also activated and used as a resource to help with contingency line work on the wildlife area. The crew helped the team brushout line and remove fuels around structures in the Nine Mile Ranch area north of the wildlife area. Weather the last week has been beneficial and risk to the area diminished enough to recall the team to other priorities. Crews will continue to monitor the fire and react if the fire once again risks resources south of the border.

Cedar Creek and Cub Creek 2 Fires Near Winthrop: Currently, the Cedar Creek Fire is estimated at 48,871 acres and is 23% contained. The Cub Creek 2 Fire is 58,793 acres and is 24% contained. A Type I Teams has taken over command of these fires with the highest priority currently being issued. Control lines on the south end of the Cub Creek 2 Fire has kept it from impacting additional WDFW lands. Approximately 995 Acres of WDFW owned or managed lands have been burned by the Cub Creek 2 Fire. This includes northern portions of the Methow Unit, Rendezvous Unit, Boulder Creek CG and Bobcat CG. The Cedar Creek Fire is pushing south and east; prompting the closure of the Patterson Lake water access and anticipating the closure of the Big Buck with suppression crews working to shore up the area.



Map of current wildfire extent

Grant County Habitat Mitigation: Biologist Cook visited the site of a proposed small subdivision with WDFW Habitat Biologist Pentico and Grant County personnel to look at sagebrush steppe habitat conditions on the site. Cook specifically looked at levels of disturbance and varying levels of habitat function within the area. This was prior to future development and potential mitigation needs of the project were discussed.

Sinlahekin and Scotch Creek Noxious Weed Control Efforts: Sinlahekin Wildlife Area staff members were able to help Scotch Creek Wildlife Area staff members treat Musk thistle at the Chesaw Unit. Treatments occurred early in the morning before temperatures rose too high to treat. Staff members hope to help in the future on continuing to treat other areas of the Chesaw Unit. Staff members also continued to treat noxious weeds by hand pulling and clipping seed heads on Scotch thistle at the Chiliwist Unit. They treated patches of puncturevine as well on other units, with the tedious and hot method of hand pulling. Many of the puncturevine patches are along access roads and parking areas so collecting seeds is critical to help prevent the spread by vehicles and recreation traffic.

View from the Chesaw Units while treating Musk Thistle in early July – Photo by Wehmeyer

Methow WLA Wildfire Preparedness: In the face of widespread drought, record setting heat waves, and prime conditions for aggressive fire behavior, Methow Wildlife Area staff members have ramped up their levels of preparedness to reduce the risk of wildfire. For example, staff members have installed fire suppression skids in the back of each staff member's truck. Additionally, staff members have installed 10-to-20-gallon water tanks with hand pumps on the back of UTVs and ATVs. The wildlife area was also able to acquire a bulldozer to aid in general road maintenance, but also to utilize during Rx burn and wildland fire suppression operations. Finally, staff members have prepped the headquarters for fire season by cutting back overhanging trees that could hit buildings, removing vegetation from the equipment yard, and installing a gravel buffer around the office.

Bulldozer available for if suppression warrants – Photo by Troyer

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Environmental Education – Rattlesnakes: The Wild Podcast featuring rattlesnake conservation with WDFW Biologist Fitkin and USFS Biologist Rohrer has now aired. The Wild, hosted by Chris Morgan is produced by station KUOW in Seattle and seeks to engage audiences with the wonder of the natural world and foster an appreciation of its wild critters. See the "Sitting on a Den of Rattlesnakes" article here.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Acrobatic chipmunk – Photo by S. Fitkin

Cryptic white-tailed ptarmigan (4) in the Pasayten Wilderness – Photo by J. Heinlen

Methow chic – S. Fitkin, sad selfie

Approaching Cedar Creek Fire from Bear Creek Road above Pearrygin Lake. Notice the water scooper plane on the lake – Photo by Haug

Post-fire effects in our Ramsey Creek timber sale/Rx Burn Unit. Notice many of the leave trees (ponderosa pine) are likely to survive. Other areas burned more intensely but overall a promising scene following the Cub Creek 2 Fire's advance through the wildlife area – Photo by Haug

Smokey sunset above the Lloyd Ranch on the Methow WLA – Photo by Haug

Mule deer buck on the Sinlahekin WLA – Photo by Wehmeyer

Forest grouse east of Tonasket. Courtesy of U.S. Forest Service – Photo by Parker Haug

Northern goshawk east of Tonasket. Courtesy of U.S. Forest Service – Photo by Parker Haug

Juvenile Great Gray Owl east of Tonasket. Courtesy of U.S. Forest Service – Photo by Parker Haug

Quincy Lakes: White pelicans near one of the Galerucella sp. release locations – Cole

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Yakima Training Center Elk Surveys: Wildlife Conflict Technician Leuck and District 8 Wildlife Biologists Bernatowicz an Oates flew elk surveys over most of the Yakima Training Center (YTC) in GMU 371. YTC was also flown in March. The purpose of the surveys was to try to determine resident (summer) versus wintering elk. Survey results are below.

Yakima Training Center Elk Surveys 2021

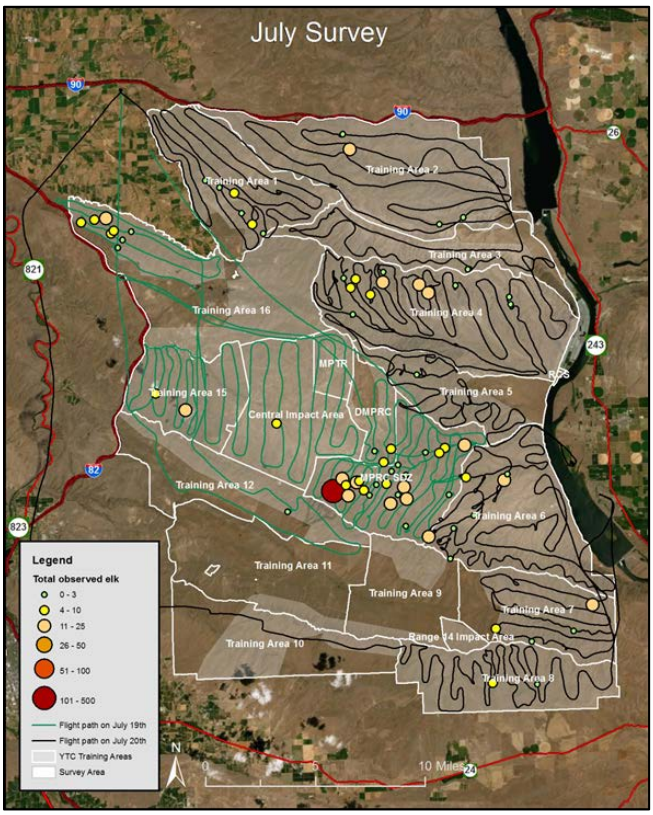
	Total	Cows	Calves	Spike Bulls	Adult Bulls	Total Bulls	B:100C	C:100C
March	852	589	117	62	84	145	25	20
July	650	354	120	57	120	177	50	34

This effort indicates that there are some elk likely wintering on YTC and moving back to the Colockum herd in spring. There are some questions about March versus July surveys. In March, elk were heavily concentrated in large groups in open habitat and running from the helicopter, making detectability high. In July, it was close to 100 degrees the day of the flight, and many elk were in small groups hiding in riparian vegetation. The visibility model corrects somewhat, but it is unknown if the model corrects enough for July conditions.

One thing that was obvious is that YTC has large numbers of mature bulls. The branched bull ratio in July was 34:100 cows. This ratio is one of the highest in the state. Access can be challenging for hunters, but the last three years, modern permit hunters have had more than 90% success.

Radiomarked Colockum elk, like this bull, had previously documented movements to YTC

Group of Adult bulls on YTC in July



Distribution of Elk Seen on YTC in July

Migratory Bird Banding: Dove banding continued in District 8 with high capture rates on hatch-year birds. If weather stays hot, opening day should be better than in the past. District 8 Biologist Bernatowicz installed waterfowl traps with help from technicians Merluccio and Martenson. As soon as ducks arrive at baited sites, trapping/banding will begin. The last few years, duck numbers have been low, making trapping difficult.

District 4 Waterfowl Banding: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber assisted technicians Byers, Merluccio, and Martenson prepare trapping sites and install traps at eastside locations. Water levels are good, and ducks have been observed. Capture and banding will begin in the coming week.

Yakima Canyon Bighorn Sheep: Idaho Fish and Game Project Technician Montgomery was having difficulty conducting field work in the Snake River Canyon due to fire and smoke, so they came over to the Yakima River Canyon in District 8 to survey bighorn sheep. Montgomery did a great job and found 129 bighorn sheep with 31 lambs per 100 ewes. It is still early in the year, but the ratio is much higher than in past years. High lamb recruitment might make ridding the population of Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae (Movi) more difficult.

Deer Study: Biologist Oates investigated a radio-collared deer that died in on private property. The deer had pneumonia. There have been reports from citizens of three deer and one elk this summer that suddenly died of unknown causes.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunting Prospects: Biologist Bernatowicz drafted District 8's Hunting Prospects for 2021. There often isn't a lot of information for predicting future hunter success, but most animals don't do well in drought conditions. Most upland bird populations are expected to be down. Elk recruitment was slightly higher last year, but still below average.

Pamphlet Review: District 8 Biologists Bernatowicz and Oates reviewed the 2021 Pheasant Release pamphlet and provided comments to Program Specialist White. The Cottonwoods Site will be removed from the pamphlet due to recent fires; it has not recovered and probably won't anytime soon. The Cottonwoods allotment will be split between Sunnyside and Whiskey Dick units.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

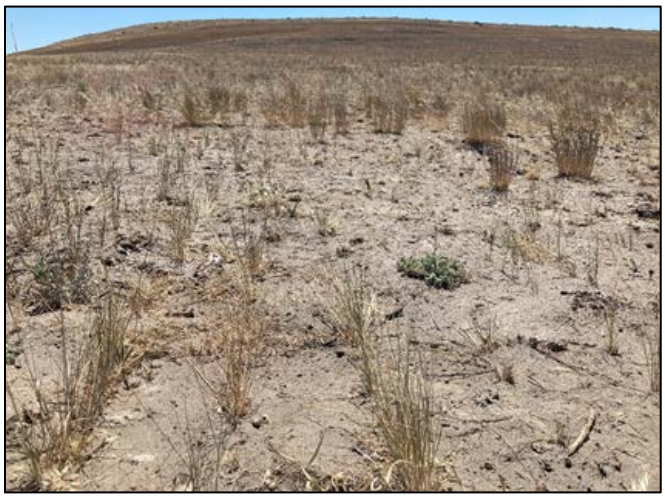
Kittitas and Yakima Fields: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel received ongoing complaints about elk in most problem areas of Kittitas and Yakima counties. Second cutting of timothy hay is late and light due the heat, and elk are highly motivated to get into crop fields. Alfalfa fields have been especially attactive to elk this summer. Several damage claims are in process.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Cleman Mountain Maintenance: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Assistant Manager Taylor met with Statewide Forester Pfeifle to assess the work done on Cleman Mountain. Thinning previously occurred on the unit along with areas of road maintenance tied to hauling out the logs. Areas of additional road maintenance were discussed and are being added to the project. Two log piles were set aside from the thinning to be placed into Wenas Creek to reestablish a flood plain. Hughes and Pfeifle coordinated with the Yakama Nation to have one of their staff members assist with placement of the log piles. The logs will be placed into the creek within the next couple of weeks.

Ford being created to help with run off

Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Technician Kass spent a day together looking at four areas that were seeded last fall after being burned in the Evans Canyon Fire. Management strategies for weed treatment and seeding were discussed. Russian thistle continued to be a problem at McCade. Plans for mowing and spraying the thistle were developed. Native grasses seeded last fall have largely survived and were developing at McCade. Other areas staff members looked at had sections that took well from the seeding and sections that will need additional work. Hughes is reviewing past areas targeted for habitat work to help determine where to prioritize future habitat enhancement projects.



Native grasses seeded in the Upper Bull Pasture fields after the Evans Canyon Fire

Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber and Assistant Manager Rodgers installed an 8-foot beaver deceiver at a location that has been problematic at the Mesa Unit. The deceiver is built as a box including a bottom and has been successful at other locations. Beaver activity at this site required daily maintenance and the deceiver will help keep water flowing without as much staff time cleaning debris.

New beaver deceiver at the Mesa Unit

Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin have been tending to the ten food/habitat plots throughout the irrigated uplands on the Sunnyside unit. Aside from a small mishap with the lessees spraying one of the food plots, they're all coming in pretty well.

4.5-acre entrance food plot filling in with a mixture of native grasses, sunflowers, short corn, buckwheat, millet, and native forbs

In addition to regular maintenance such as garbage pickup, pump repairs, and tractor maintenance, Ferguson and Wascisin have also begun the annual task of mowing wetlands for improved waterfowl habitat during hunting season.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 4

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Band-tailed Pigeon Surveys: District Biologists Waddell and C. Moore conducted annual surveys for band-tailed pigeons in Whatcom County. Biologists conduct these surveys statewide each July to monitor the number of pigeons visiting and leaving mineral sites between sunrise and noon. The surveys, conducted in Whatcom County and elsewhere in the state, serve as the management index for population status of band-tailed pigeons, which inform harvest regulations for this game bird.

Observation point for a band-tailed pigeon mineral site in Whatcom County

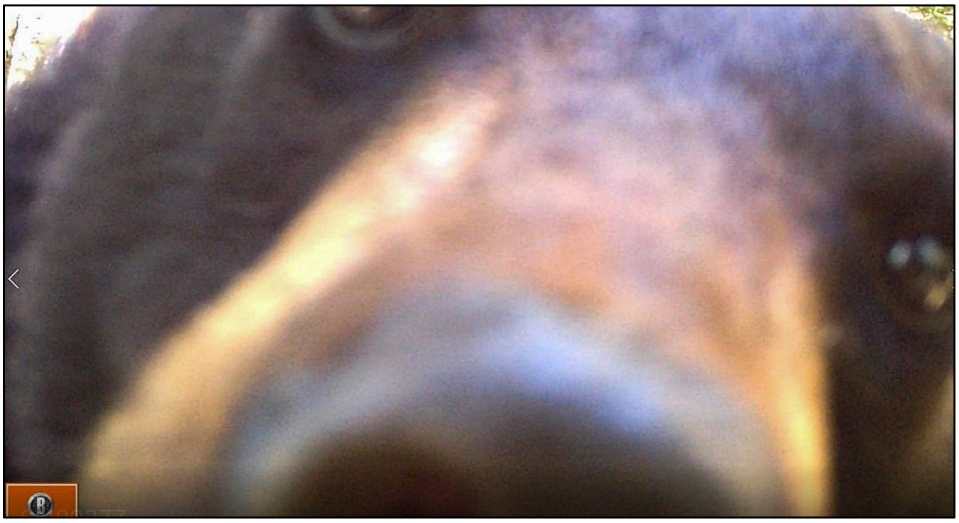
Banding Canada Geese: District Biologists C. Moore, M. Smith, R. Waddell, Zimmerman, Whatcom Wildlife Area Manager Kessler, and Natural Resources technicians Bellavance, Deyo, Noteboom, and Umble assisted Statewide waterfowl specialist Matt Wilson with annual Canada goose banding efforts. Over two days the team banded 230 new birds and processed a handful of recaptured birds at four sites in Skagit and Whatcom counties.

District Wildlife Biologist Moore (left) assesses a gaggle of Canada geese that have been captured for banding

Biologists and technicians prepping to band geese after corralling them into the catch pen – Photo by Callie Moore

Black Bear Monitoring Project: District Wildlife Biologists Waddell and C. Moore, working with Statewide Bear and Cougar Specialists Beausoleil and Welfelt and an extensive group of volunteers, established and monitored 36 bear hair corrals north and south of the Mt. Baker Highway during June and July. The impetus for this project was to collect black bear hair for DNA analysis to formulate a density estimate for black bears in Whatcom County. Each corral consisted of a pile of logs scented with a bear attractant and encircled by an upper and lower strand of barbed wire attached to three or more trees on the perimeter of the bait pile. The small barbs harmlessly captured a bit of hair as the bear passed over, under, or through the barbed wires to investigate the lure. In all, biologists collected approximately 1,300 to 1,400 samples. Samples will be sent to a lab for analysis, with lab results and the density estimate likely available in spring 2022.

Returning from a high-elevation bear hair corral, biologists got a great view of Mt. Baker and the North Fork Nooksack River in the distance – Photo by Robert Waddell



Who's watching who? A curious black bear eyes a trail camera that was monitoring a hair corral before biting the camera and removing it from the tree

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease: WDFW Region 4 staff members monitored and responded to reports of dead and sick deer on Fidalgo and Whidbey Islands. Two necropsies were conducted in Anacortes by Biologists Waddell and Wingard and two necropsies were conducted near Oak Harbor by Biologist Hamer. Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) was detected in tissue samples collected from Anacortes deer but the disease was not detected in samples collected from Oak Harbor.

Bumble Bee Survey: District Biologists Hamer, C. Moore, and Waddell conducted four bumble bee surveys within the region. Two were outside of Stanwood in Snohomish County and the others just west of Baker Lake in Skagit County in support of the statewide Graves grid cell project. The project was designed by a USGS researcher to better understand the current distribution of the western bumble bee (*Bombus occidentalis*). Biologists supporting the project sweep net bumble bees in target habitats, netted bumble bees are then chilled for several minutes before being photographed and released unharmed. Photographed bumble bees are then identified by expert entomologists. Biologist Hamer did not encounter *B. occidentalis* but he did document a suite of native bumble bee species using the targeted grassland habitat. Bees collected by Waddell and C. Moore are pending identification.

A yellow-faced bumble bee (Bombus vosnesenskii) – Photo by Matt Hamer

A bee warming up on Biologist C. Moore's hand. Biologists use small vials and ice in small coolers to calm the bumblebees so they can take the necessary pictures for identification – Photo by Callie Moore

North American Bat Survey: District Biologist Hamer deployed acoustic detectors at four sites near Arlington. The acoustic detectors record the ultrasonic frequencies generated by bats for echolocation. With the aid of computer programs, scientists are then able to determine the species of bats encountered at each location using the ultrasonic recordings to better understand the distribution of North American bat species.

Ebey Island Bat Survey: District Biologists Hamer and Smith conducted a bat emergence survey at a maternity roost site on Ebey Island. *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd), the fungus responsible for white-nose syndrome in bats, was detected at the site last year raising concern for the colony's health. The biologists were happy to count more than 900 bats still using the site.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Camano Island Roaming Artists: A group of local artists had an event at Leque Island where they painted the landscape, which highlighted how people use our public lands in so many different ways.

A "Camano Roaming Artist" at Leque Island – Photo by Christina Harvey

A finished product from the painting event at Leque Island – Photo by Christina Harvey

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Leque Island Fish Monitoring: Staff members from Skagit River Systems continued monitoring fish on the site. Projects Coordinator Brokaw brought a reporter and photographer from the Everett Herald to see the fish monitoring in anticipation of an article coming out this fall.

A juvenile Chinook salmon captured in the restored area at Leque Island

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Leque Island Pet Waste Campaign: Partners at Sound Salmon Solutions installed signs, marked pet waste piles, and talked to people at the Leque Island Unit to encourage everyone to clean up after their pets.

These are some of the new signs installed at the Leque Island Unit – Photo by Sound Salmon Solutions

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 6

Nothing for this installment.