

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

June 16 to 30, 2022

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Posting: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley replaced and/or posted additional signs at Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife contracted access locations in Walla Walla County. Thorne Hadley picked up garbage at the access sites and removed overgrown vegetation from around some signs for better visibility.

Access Area Adventures: Northeast Washington Access Manager Dziekan and Wildlife Area Manager Anderson recently dealt with a series of unhappy customers. Complaints include rutted roads at Deep Lake, sharp ramp edge blowing out a vehicle tire at Waitts Lake, and a tar-spattered truck after resurfacing at Liberty Lake. We are probably stuck with the old ruts for some time to come at lightly used Deep Lake, the ramp edges at Waitts Lake will be re-covered with gravel, and tar at Liberty Lake may require more warning signs posted, until it cures hard.

Reardan Audubon Kiosk: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch and Natural Resource Technician Wagner spent time picking up trash along Bisson Road, at the south edge of the newest portion of Reardan Audubon Wildlife Area. They snapped a photo of the kiosk built at the new parking lot this spring by the Reardan High School Shop class. The kiosk will soon get a Plexiglas facing, to protect the reader board signs.



Newest kiosk at Reardan Audubon Wildlife Area

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Spokane Valley Moose: A moose was located on the Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations property. Law Enforcement Officer Langbein took lead and coordinated with other officers and conflict specialists to dart and relocate due to risk with troubled youth on property. It took 23-24 attempts at capturing the moose unsuccessfully. The final plan was to bring in a drone on June 27 for a last attempt.

Problem Bear: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb conducted a site visit to a summer camp location in Columbia County that is having issues with bears around garbage cans. Advice was provided and resources were offered to assist with fortifying the camp's garbage area. Kolb also reached out to the servicing refuse service in the county to see if he could assist with pending requests for metal/lockable dumpsters. The supervisor at the refuse service stated they would take another look at the request and see if they could deliver some better containers to the site for the storage of garbage. In the absence of better containers, one of the camp's caretakers was actively working on concreting anchor points into the ground to secure containers to the ground and prevent bears from knocking them over.



Anchor points set in concrete to secure garbage containers at a remote summer camp location in Columbia County

Grouse Flats and United States Forest Service (USFS) Allotment Check: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spent one day this week checking private pastures, WDFW allotments, and USFS allotments for signs of wolf activity and cattle movements. Wade observed wolf tracks and scat in the area, as well as a small black bear. All cattle observed appeared to be healthy and calmly grazing.

Garfield County Bear Issue: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade responded to multiple reports of a black bear raiding trash cans and frequenting an area around multiple homes. Wade worked with homeowners to secure trash in the area. All of the homeowners Wade spoke with expressed concern for the safety of small children in the area. The bear continued to come near the homes in the area and was ultimately euthanized by WDFW Enforcement and Garfield County Sheriff's Office due to the continued risk to public safety.



Picture of the bear provided by one of the homeowners

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Habitat Projects: Private Lands Supervisor Earl checked on habitat improvement sites. With the warmer weather things are really starting to grow.



Food Plot seeded this spring



Elk utilizing a habitat improvement project seeded this spring

Forest Fuel Management: Northeast Wildlife Access Area Manager Anderson had a good discussion with WDFW Forest Management Scientist Tveten, concerning adding sites to Tveten's spreadsheet of WDFW properties that could be improved with prescription burning or thinning. They reviewed a few additional sites in northeast Washington that might benefit from selective timber removal, and Anderson further discussed this with Sherman Creek Wildlife Access Area Manager Palmer. Anderson recommended Tveten email or Teams message all WDFW land managers with this request, to include any access site locations as well as spots on wildlife areas.

Vetch at Revere Wildlife Area: Wildlife Access Area Manager Finch and Natural Resources Technician Wagner found that hairy vetch, a nitrogen-fixing legume, has bloomed wildly this year at Revere Wildlife Area.



Purple vetch covers the brown hills at Revere Wildlife Area

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Security Camera Snafu: After receiving approval from WDFW IT Services, Purchasing, and installing Ring security cameras at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area headquarters, Wildlife Access Area Manager Finch was notified that IT made a mistake, and the cameras needed to be returned to the vendor. Between data storage needs and concerns over potential public document requests, the Ring app and cameras aren't acceptable for WDFW facilities. Now, instead of using \$200 cameras, staff members will have to use a specialty security service and cameras that cost up to \$2,000 each.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Wildlife Surveys: Biologists Cook and Morris used private lands equipment to mow two access roads to enclosures for pygmy rabbit crew members to reduce fire risk from department vehicles while doing rabbit surveys and trapping later in the season.

Pygmy Rabbit Release Effort: We began kit capture efforts this period and productivity is looking good within the enclosures. We captured 65 kits (compared to 70 last summer). After more than a year of planning, coordination, and permits, we are finally utilized two new release areas, Rimrock Meadows and Palisades, which now have pygmy rabbits on the ground for the first time in 30-40 years. Thus far, 35 juvenile rabbits were released into the new areas, 11 have been retained as future breeding stock, and 19 were too young to relocate and kept in enclosure sites. Each juvenile is vaccinated against rabbit hemorrhagic fever (RHDV2). With above average spring precipitation and unusually cool temperatures, we are hoping this results in a sustained breeding effort.

As usual, many WDFW staff members assisted this effort along with volunteers and staff members from partner organization Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Nature Conservancy, and Conservation Northwest. We also hosted a film crew from TVW Olympia station to highlight our project efforts on Legislative Review and Field Report.



Basecamp during capture and release effort at pygmy rabbit breeding enclosure



A recently released young pygmy rabbit blends into its surroundings – Photo by Morris



Coordinator Gallie turning the tables on the TVW Olympia film crew by pulling out a selfie during the interview

Black Bear Management: Biologist Fitkin assisted specialists Beausoleil and Welfelt with the release of two yearling bear cubs. The siblings were orphaned during their first fall and were captured in November when it became apparent that they would not attempt denning on their own. The pair spent the winter at a rehabilitation facility in Idaho. After being outfitted with expandable radio-collars, the bears were released in the Upper Methow (the watershed of their capture), and their progress will be monitored.



Black bear yearlings being released back into the wild – Photo by S. Fitkin

Little Brown Myotis and Yuma Myotis Bats: District 7 Science Technician Pavelchek joined WDFW's White-nose Syndrome (WNS) Coordinator Tobin and researchers from Wildlife Conservation Society Canada (WCSC) at Lake Chelan State Park to assist with a project designed to evaluate the efficacy of two cutting-edge white-nose syndrome prophylaxis techniques on Washington's bats. This spring marks the beginning of a multi-year study that includes Chelan County and 10 other counties in Washington in which bat colonies with WNS have been detected.

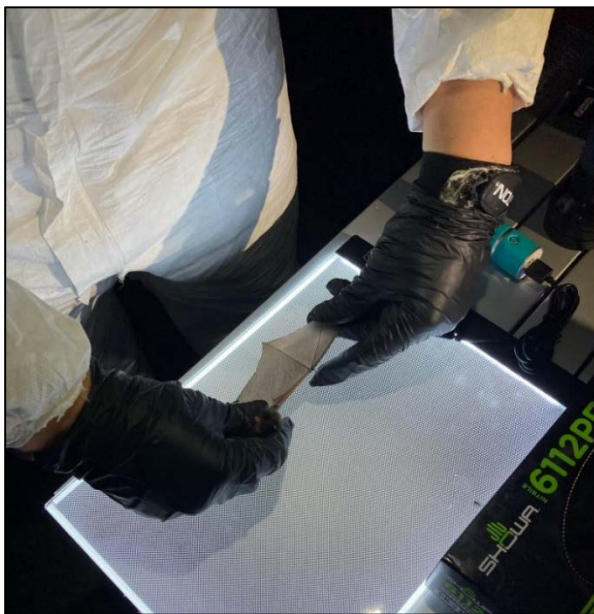
The Lake Chelan colony, a maternity roost occupied annually by two species of bat, little brown myotis and Yuma myotis, will be one of the sites trialling a newly developed probiotic cocktail researchers hope will provide bats protection from the deadly disease. *Pseudogymnaascus destructans* (Pd), the fungus that causes WNS in bats, typically attacks bats when they are most vulnerable- during hibernation, when bats remain largely inactive to conserve energy and survive the cold months of winter when no insect prey is available. There is increasing evidence that wing microbiomes can play a substantial role in WNS susceptibility, so the goal of WCSC's work is to enhance the wing microflora of bats during the summer by applying anti-Pd bacteria to surfaces within roosts (e.g., walls, wooden beams) that may reduce the impact of WNS. As prolific groomers, bats will brush up against these surfaces and then naturally work the probiotics throughout their wings and fur during grooming sessions.

During this initial visit, biologists worked to accomplish Task Two of the project: Establish baseline data at a roost used by susceptible/vulnerable species, including gathering information regarding alternate/satellite roosts, emergence and roost use patterns, WNS/Pd status, and estimated colony size. Biologists examined the inside of the attic in which the bats roost, observed the nightly emergence of the bats, and captured bats using mist nets to assess each bat for signs of WNS.

Future visits will involve application of the probiotic cocktail, installation of a pit tag reader at the main emergence point used by the bats, and capturing bats via mist nets to outfit them with pit tags allowing individual identification over the several years that monitoring will be conducted at this colony.



Little brown myotis and Yuma myotis roosting together in an attic within a Lake Chelan State Park property – Photo by Pavelchek



A biologist examines the wing of a little brown myotis for tissue damage caused by WNS
– Photo by Pavelchek



Science Technician Amy Pavelchek in attic maternity roost – Photo by Tobin

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunter Access Program: Biologist Morris checked Hunter Access properties to determine what fields need signs re-posted. Morris also scouted for corn fields that could potentially be enrolled in the Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program (WHAP) for the waterfowl season this fall.

Sinlahekin Campground Renovations: Sinlahekin staff members have been placing barrier rock at various campgrounds on the Sinlahekin unit. The barrier rock has been placed in areas to minimize off road and better define improved campsites. In many of these areas, there was old barb wire fence used as a barrier; that has been removed. Twenty Aspen were planted last fall in various sites within the campground to provide future shade. Staff members also planted more Aspen this spring at those sites. This has been part of the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Campground Renovations grant that will be due at the end of June. Staff members have a few more sites to install barrier rock and gravel, they will continue this work through the upcoming weeks when sites are not occupied with campers.



Sinlahekin Wildlife Area's Ian Riley placing barrier rock and campers using the newly renovated area

– Photo by Wehmeyer



A dumped vehicle finds an appropriate final resting place



Discing Cell B at the WRAA

– Photo by R. Walker



Harrowing Cell F at the WRAA

– Photo by R. Walker



Planting wild millet in Cell B at the Winchester Restricted Access Area – Photo by R. Walker

Lind Coulee Boat Ramp Redevelopment: Water Access Manager Harmon and Assistant Manager Steele completed welding solid the handrail on an ADA loading ramp the Lind Coulee west boat launch and access site. This water access site is the most recent completed Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) project for water access. It received a new boat launch, new Precast Concrete Buildings (CXT) restrooms, an ADA loading ramp with a new parking stall, and a striped asphalt parking lot.

Vernita Bridge: Lands Operations Manager Finger, with assistance from archaeologist Kelly, continued to work with the Department of Energy (DOE) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to problem solve sustainability of the Vernita Bridge Boat Launch site. Finger shared RCO grant information for the Boating Facilities Program Water Access Planning Grants, and the group agreed that pursuing the grant was the best path forward. DOE is engaging with Tribes to give them a heads up and seek their support.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Wildlife Conflict Cost-Share Fencing: Specialist Heilhecker coordinated a consolidated order of fencing materials for five landowners. The wood post order appears to be moving forward in a timely manner. However, the rest of the materials ordered under a state contract are delayed. Communication from the company has been poor and they are having difficulty fulfilling the quantity of materials ordered.

Interagency Wolf Coordination: Specialist Heilhecker met with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services staff members regarding wolf conservation measures. A grazing allotment in the Methow Range District is undergoing a scheduled 10-year review. Since the wolves are federally protect, the U.S. Forest Service is required to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. They discussed nonlethal deterrence measures and different grazing scenarios.

Nuisance Bear Response: Specialist Heilhecker responded to several calls regarding nuisance bears including one call from a man north of Colville. With each caller, she discussed removing attractants, their right to kill a dangerous bear if the bear becomes dangerous and to call law enforcement if they kill the bear. None of the callers wanted the bear killed but wanted to know the guidelines for trapping and relocating bears. Specialist Heilhecker explained why the bears would not be relocated. She also reminded the callers that bears are common in Okanogan County. If attractants are removed, the bear is likely to move on. After answering his questions, she referred the caller from northeast Washington to the Colville office for additional help.

Unauthorized Bee Boxes: While in the Frenchman Hills, Biologist McPherson noticed a high amount of activity in one of the parking areas. All the activity led to bee boxes that are not authorized to be on the wildlife area. Enforcement was contacted and they will find out who is responsible for placing these boxes.



Unauthorized bee boxes on wildlife area – Photo by C. McPherson

Conserving Natural Landscapes

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement – Conservation Reserve Program (SAFE-CRP): Biologist Cook visited two landowners’ potential SAFE fields to conduct a review of current conditions and compare to standards for SAFE. These reviews are used to create initial recommendations for what work will be required to meet SAFE CRP standards. These fields, if enrolled in SAFE, will add approximately 1,500 acres to SAFE acres. Cook found several elk and deer groups at one site during visits. Biologists Morris and Cook met with Supervisor Rickel to discuss two possible SAFE-CRP re-enrollments in Grant County.

Habitat Plots: Biologist Cook applied fertilizer to supplemental food plots to improve growing conditions. Most of the food plots now have peas and corn sprouted. Biologist Cook has also been checking on a habitat site that will be planted in native grasses this fall. The consistent rain so far this year has made new weeds sprout longer than expected in this plot. Another herbicide application is needed but wind and rain conditions and other workload needs have delayed this. It should still be successful. Depending on conditions, even more herbicide applications may be needed as the year progresses. Biologist Morris visited two potential residential type development sites with Habitat Biologist Pentico to help evaluate the existing habitat and make recommendations for habitat improvements to the land that could help mitigate the effects of development on the sagebrush steppe habitat.

Douglas County Biocontrol Dalmatian Toadflax Releases: Private Lands Biologist Braaten spent several days collecting, ordering, and releasing biocontrol agents for Dalmatian toadflax infestations on private lands within the Pearl Hill Wildfire boundary. Private Lands Biologists Braaten and Hughes provided over 2300 weevils to private landowners for release who had the worst infestations. When the Pearl Hill wildfire burned the landscape, this allowed the Dalmatian toadflax to bolt and grow efficiently across the burn. The worse areas seem to be CRP grass stands. The biocontrol agents used have been used in the past here and are very effective once established. Timing of these releases will benefit landowners and habitat.



Mecinus jathinformis stem boring weevils released to assist in controlling noxious weed Dalmatian toadflax which has bolted after Pearl Hill Wildfire in Douglas County

– Photo by Braaten, WDFW

McLoughlin Falls Acquisition Tour with Colville Confederated Tribes: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug and Acquisition Specialist Woodruff met with members of the Colville Confederated Tribes at the McLoughlin Falls – West acquisition project. Haug applied for Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) funding through Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program’s the Critical Habitat category to purchase the roughly 740-acre property within the last undeveloped portion of the Okanogan River south of Tonasket. The conservation group Western Rivers Conservancy is working closely with the landowner following appraisal of the property and moving forward with acquisition. WDFW’s funding is less than the appraised value which brought the Colville Tribe and Conservation Northwest into the project and their interest to purchase what WDFW cannot purchase this round. The proposal from the tribe to purchase the remainder will go in front of their council later next week.



Members of the Colville Tribe, Conservation Northwest, and Western Rivers Conservancy overlooking the project site at McLoughlin Falls – Photo by J Haug



Stormy overlook of the project area – Photo by J Haug

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers: The Methow Wildlife Area (MWA) teamed up with 13 Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) volunteers for the 4th annual fence removal project and campout on the MWA. Assistant Manager Repp and BHA's Carmen Vanbianchi led a group of 10 volunteers who wrecked out nearly two miles of four-strand, four-barbed fencing along Bear Creek Road. This fence is probably 80 years old and was constructed with very aggressive barbed wire, probably purchased from a military surplus cache around the 1940s. This fence was no longer serving any meaningful purpose and it was predominantly located on a steep hillside, which is even more inhibitive to wildlife trying to cross. This fence was strategically selected for removal due to the high density of migratory mule deer and other wildlife that cross the area with regularity, particularly in the late fall, winter, and early spring.

Manager Troyer led a smaller group of three BHA members on a special fence removal mission at the Big Valley Unit. Each person quietly approached a wetland that currently has two adult sandhill cranes and two colts (juveniles cranes) within its interior. To give these State endangered cranes the best odds at successfully raising their young and hopefully establishing a breeding population in the Methow, the crew members split up and quietly started removing barbed wire fences adjacent to the wetland. Cranes are vulnerable to collisions with fences, so as an extra precautionary step, approximately ¾ mile of four-strand barbed wire fencing was removed from the area.

A huge thanks goes out to our conservation partners from Backcountry Hunters and Anglers! On a dreary, rainy, Saturday afternoon, approximately three miles of four-strand barbed wire fencing was removed from the MWA to improve wildlife habitat and migratory corridors. If you string out all of that fencing in a straight line, that's nearly 12 miles worth of barbed wire removed by 13 BHA members and two MWA employees in four hours! After the hard work was done, everyone is rewarded with a well-attended barbeque and campout – BHA brought the food and Old School Brewery donated the beverages! Thanks again! We can't wait for next year!



Volunteers from Backcountry Hunters and Anglers on the Methow Wildlife Area. A few volunteers had to leave before the group photo. There were 13 volunteers from BHA at this event – Photo by B. Troyer

Methow Wildlife Area Noxious Weeds: A contractor sprayed over 100 acres at Lewis Butte and the Golden Doe Unit as part of a shrubsteppe restoration grant. Also, to reduce the spread of weeds and to reduce the odds of a vehicle caused wildfire, staff members bare grounded over 20 miles of roads on the wildlife area and an additional five acres of parking areas as well as the shooting range. An additional thirty-nine acres were spot treated for scotch thistle primarily on the Golden Doe Unit. Twenty-seven acres were spot treated for.

Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Noxious Weeds: Staff members treated houndstongue, leafy spurge, common tansy, and kochia on the Chopaka Unit. Diffuse knapweed, kochia, whitetop, and Scotch thistle on the Scotch Creek Unit and Scotch thistle, Dalmatian toadflax, and St. John's wort on the Pogue Unit.

Scotch Creek Riparian Restoration Project: Staff members cut and collected a dump trailer load of limbs and branches on the Chopaka Unit and hauled them back to the project area at Scotch Creek to use as weave. The weave was added to three of the existing Beaver Dam Analogs. Staff members also weed wacked around some of the water birch seedlings to keep them from being shaded out by the reed canary grass.



Staff member White thinning on the Limebelt – Photo by Dupont

Scotch Creek Unit Thinning and Fuels Treatments: Staff members started thinning the forested portions of the ‘Limebelt’ on the Scotch Creek Unit. The goals of the thinning are to eliminate conifer encroachment into Aspen stands, a WDFW priority habitat, restore historic stand densities, and lessen or reconfigure fuels along the Limebelt and Albright Lake roads in an attempt create suitable fuels break.



Conifer removal, in and around an Aspen stand to eliminate encroachment – Photo by Dupont

Mid-Season Grazing Evaluations: Biologist McPherson conducted mid-season evaluations for grazing leases on the wildlife area. Evaluations help to ensure that goals and objectives of grazing permits are being met. During these evaluations, growing season conditions, degree of landscape utilization, weed problems, and recommendations are recorded and help direct future decisions on how grazing can be used as a tool.



Mid-season grazing evaluation – Photo by C. McPherson

Frenchman Hills Scotch Thistle: During mid-season grazing evaluation, Biologist McPherson found large patches of Scotch thistle. Biologist McPherson coordinated with the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew members to clip seed heads and treat patches with herbicide. This should help control current patches and slow the spread of Scotch thistle.



Large patch of Scotch thistle – Photo by C. McPherson

Yellow Flag Iris: Biologists Cole and McPherson treated yellow flag iris on the Winchester Wasteway. Typically, treatments occur earlier in June, but with the current weather patterns, flowering was later than expected. It is noticeable that yearly treatments are helping keep yellow flag iris from spreading along the wasteway corridor.



Yellow flag iris in bloom on Winchester wasteway – Photo by C. McPherson



Yellow flag iris with a new stand of phragmites in the foreground – Photo by Cole



Wild millet sprouting in the Winchester Regulated Access Area – Photo by R. Walker

Planting Wetland Basins: Having wrapped up the spring planting and harrowing at the Winchester Regulated Access Area, Specialist Walker has now moved all tractors and implements to the Frenchman Regulated Access Area (FRAA) to prepare wetland basins for tillage and planting to support migrating waterfowl in the upcoming seasons. Specialist Walker is planting approximately 12 acres of wild millet at the FRAA. Biologist McPherson has selectively picked the areas to be planted that will be conducive to millet growth along with locations that will provide hunters an opportunity to pursue birds over this food source.



Cinnamon teal drake seen in the Frenchman Regulated Access Area

– Photo By R. Walker



Young bear in Barker Canyon – Photo by C. McPherson

Providing Education and Outreach

Snake Day 2022: WDFW Biologist Fitkin and U.S. Forest Service Biologist Rohrer conducted our annual snake survey on a portion of the Methow Wildlife Area as an adult (and some kids) education class for the North Cascades Institute (NCI). Despite the cooler-than-average temperatures, we managed to find four different species and give approximately 20 participants a hands-on experience with our legless friends. The data is an indicator of abundance and species diversity over time and gives us an opportunity to monitor for snake fungal disease. The proceeds from the course support NCI's Mountain School program for kids.



Participants enjoy the beautiful markings of common garter snakes up close, “snake kisses” from a gopher snake – Photo by S. Fitkin



Snake Day bonus find (Northern scorpion) – Photo by S. Fitkin

Oden Road Post-wildfire Monitoring Day with Okanogan High School: Lands Operations Manager Haug participated in his 12th Oden Road post-wildfire monitoring day with Ms. Trout's advanced ecology class from Okanogan High School. The slimmed down version of the event started with an introduction to the area, the specifics of the 2009 wildfire and a discussion about fire ecology from Lands Operations Manager Haug. Haug also performed photo monitoring on the site. The students then took vegetation and fuels data along four 100m transects, performed aquatic invertebrate surveys, and bird survey. The project site is hosted on private property above and around Loop Creek and brings together the Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Forest Service Okanogan Conservation District, and Okanogan Land Trust staff members.



Okanogan Conservation District representative Kogler helping students identify aquatic invertebrates – Photo by Haug



Okanogan High School students and staff members with event representatives at the Oden Road Fire Study Site – Photo by Haug

Sinlahekin – Chiliwist Unit Local School District(s) Outreach: Okanogan High School students came out to the Chiliwist Unit to help with various projects on the wildlife area. Some of the students placed fence markers on some of the boundary fence. The markers help to reduce the potential of sharp-tailed grouse collision with fencing. Historically, sharp-tailed grouse were found throughout this unit. Other students surveyed areas for noxious weeds specifically Scotch thistle. Identified areas will be treated by staff members later this spring.



Okanogan High School students placing fence tags to better protect birds from striking area fences at Chiliwist Unit – Photo by Wehmeyer



Okanogan High School students survey for noxious weeds – Photo by Wehmeyer

Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom: The Methow Beaver Project spent time touring the Wild Kingdom film crew around the Methow Valley with several stops throughout the wildlife area. On one of those tours, Manager Troyer was unexpectedly invited out to talk with the show's host, Peter Gros. The *Wild Kingdom* host and film crew were in the Methow to film a series on beavers and all the amazing benefits they bring to our landscapes in the west.



Methow Wildlife Area Manager talking with Peter Gros, the host of Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom – Photo by J. Nelson, Methow Beaver Project

Washington Waterfowl Association Meeting: Wildlife area staff members attended a Washington Waterfowl Association (WWA) meeting to update the group on current and future wetland projects on the wildlife area. Staff members also fielded a wide array of questions from the group ranging from hunting, habitat, weed control, and possible volunteer opportunities.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Sand Dunes Road WATVs Meeting: Lands Operations Manager Finger participated in a meeting with Grant County Commissioner Carter, Deputy Haring of Grant County Sheriff's Office, Engineer Dart with Grant County Public Works, Field Operations Manager Maynard with Reclamation, and Regional Director Hoenes to discuss future WATV use on Sand Dunes Road coming from both Potato Hill and South Frontage Road and I-90 Exit 174. WATV activity along Sand Dunes Road is concerning because of the amount of illegal ORV use on the south end of the Red Zone (closed area).

The group discussed ways to ensure that users of the Moses Lake ORV Park are aware of the zones and restrictions to improve our ability to enforce rules and regulations. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Reclamation, and the county will partner on an effort to establish three new kiosks and make fence line improvements as needed. Finger produced a draft map based on comments from the group that will be shared with the Sand Scorpions user group for comments before taking the draft to the county for final approval.



Bachelor group of bull elk leaving bedding area in potential SAFE field, southeast Adams County – Photo by Nathan Cook



Mule deer doe with fawn stand in SAFE CRP field that burned in Pearl Hill Wildfire last summer. As you can see, recovery has been good! – Photo by E. Braaten, WDFW



Spring wildflowers bloom in an area recovering from wildfire – Photo by Jesse Morris



Morel mushroom on the Methow Wildlife Area – Photo by B. Troyer



Lineleaf fleabane (desert yellow daisy) at sunset near Tonasket

– Photo by J Haug

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Wandering Bighorn Sheep: Staff members at Hanford reported four young bighorn rams on Central Hanford near the Tank Farm. There were also two large flocks of domestics nearby. Wandering bighorns seek other sheep. The probability that the wandering rams would contact the domestics or would in the future was high. It was also very possible the rams were already carrying *Mycoplasma Ovipneumoniae* (MOVI) as all local herds are infected with different MOVI strains. There is no known resistance to new strains of MOVI, so if the sheep originated in Quilomene and eventually ended up in the Yakima Canyon, a new outbreak of pneumonia was likely. Hanford staff members were very cooperative and the next day Conflict Specialists Hand, Leuck, and Wetzel arrived on site with Hanford staff members and Biologist Fidorra. All four bighorns were located and euthanized. This is the second time bighorns have wandered into the area. In 2020, a wandering juvenile ram was found intermixed with 1,000 plus domestics just west of Hanford.

Mule Deer Studies: The seasonal blip of high doe mortality from cougars hitting pregnant does has begun. Three radio-collared deer died in one week from cougar predation west of Ellensburg. Conflict Specialist Wetzel located a one mortality and found a standard “Cracker Jack” where the cat removed the fawn fetuses and left the main carcass intact. There was one mortality north of Ellensburg, but high water prohibited accessing the site.

Ground Squirrels: Biologist Bernatowicz visited most historic ground squirrel colonies in the district. The data needs to be entered, but 10% of colonies found prior to 2015 still exist. Sites found in the past few years have higher occupancy, but many appeared to have been vacated. The main cause of the population crash is likely disease. Other factors might include weather (snow into April 2017, drought 2019/2002), invasion by California ground squirrels, and conversion of orchards to high density/dwarf trees.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Wenas Hardy Canyon Trail Clearing: Manager Hughes, Biologist Daling, and Technicians Stoltenow and Rodriguez worked with volunteers from the Backcountry Horseman to clear the Hardy Canyon trail of brush and trees from the base of the canyon to the top of Mount Cleman. The three miles of trail is now accessible by both horseman and those on foot.



Before and after photos from the clearing of Hardy Canyon

New Private Lands Access Site Enrolled: Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett enrolled a new property into the Hunt by Written Permission program. The 1500-acre property in South Yakima County will be available starting Fall of 2022.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Kittitas County: Conflict Technician Leuck has been hazing elk in the Parke and Caribou Creek areas daily. Conflict Specialist Wetzel discussed elk damage with a landowner near Parke Creek about elk damage to his irrigated field. There appears to be no way to keep elk out of this area due to the nocturnal habits adopted by the elk.

Yakima Training Center for Fence Construction: Conflict Specialist Wetzel worked on access to the Yakima Training Center (YTC) for fence construction. Archeological surveys and other access issues has stalled the fencing project.

Rattlesnake Hills Elk Summer Bull Permits: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand monitored hunting activity on damage prevention permits (DPP) in Elk Area 3721. Permit holders have not harvested any animals to date, as foraging conditions on Hanford continues to be beneficial and elk activity off the Hanford site is occurring during nocturnal hours. These permits assist with pressuring elk away from valuable wheat crops during critical plant development.

West Richland Cougar: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand responded to a cougar sighting call near Horn Rapids Dam on the Yakima River. The reporting party provided a video of the animal, which likely is a large house cat, but because the video was of poor quality no determination could be made. The reporting party has numerous trail cameras active on his property and is advised to call if any cougar detections are made.

Paterson Deer Complaint: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand completed follow-up to a deer damage complaint from a large wine grape operation in Paterson near the Columbia River. Deer damage to grape plants, especially new buds, have declined recently. Continued hazing and limited use of kill permits will be used to minimize future damage.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Funding to Reseed Failed Greenstrip Projects: Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett was allocated funding for greenstrips that failed due to the severe drought conditions of 2020-2021. Seventy acres of greenstrip seed was purchased and will be used to reseed the failed portions of the Blackrock Greenstrip Pilot Project.

Wenas Umtanum and Observatory Thinning: A field visit was conducted for the District 8 Team to review two areas planned for thinning on the Wenas Wildlife Area to occur next year. Roughly 400 acres is proposed to be thinned within the two areas combined. The project will lower the severity of future wildfires, restore the area to its historic habitat of a ponderosa pine savannah and provide greater habitat for wildlife. Currently the area is overgrown and extremely dense with ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and Grand fir. In addition to the thinning, Umtanum stream was assessed in a section where it goes through one of the units to be thinned. Manager Hughes, Assistant Manager Taylor, Habitat Biologist Bartrand, and Statewide Foresters developed a plan to increase habitat and prevent flooding over the county road which occurs every spring and has been an ongoing issue in the area.



District Team discussing the Umtanum thinning unit

Wenas Mellergaard Wire Rolling: Technicians Stoltenow and Rodriguez loaded the barbwire roles and T-posts for transportation out of the Mellergaard Unit. In total, over eight thousand pounds of barbwire was removed from the wildlife area and transported to Pacific Steel and Recycling.



Over 8,000 lbs. of wire loaded to be disposed of from Mellergaard

Colockum Weed Control: Colockum Wildlife Area staff members arranged for a helicopter to apply herbicides to 80 acres in the Tarpiscan Fields area to prepare an old agricultural field for a fall planting. The helicopter can carry 20-acre loads, making quick work of an 80-acre field. This work would take Colockum staff members a week to accomplish with ground equipment, especially considering the remote location and lack of water sources.



Helicopter loading water and herbicide for aerial weed control, Colockum Wildlife Area

Sunnyside/Snake River Weed Control: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber and Assistant Manager Rodgers continue to treat invasive weeds in the Windmill Ranch unit, including upland restoration areas, access sites, and roadways. They also met with local landowners regarding the spread of phragmites in the Clark Pond area adjacent to their property. They discussed a treatment plan which includes mowing existing vegetation and returning later in the summer to treat new growth with herbicide.

Providing Education and Outreach

Educational Outreach Events: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Rodgers and Ringold Springs Hatchery Specialist Manderbach attended two different local educational outreach events. The first was Ecology Day at Mesa Elementary School. They set up an aquatic macroinvertebrate lab with water collected from Ringold Springs and wetlands in the Mesa Lake unit. The kids loved using magnifying glasses to identify the different invertebrates! The second event was a fish lecture for a special education class in Othello. Assistant Manager Rodgers and Hatchery Specialist Manderbach organized a small presentation about different fish species in the Columbia River and dissected a rainbow trout for the class. The students were very enthusiastic about the dissection.



Mesa Elementary students enjoying the aquatic macroinvertebrate lab



The students loved learning about the internal anatomy of the rainbow trout!