

Wildlife Program –Bi-weekly Report

Feb. 1 to 15, 2020

DIVERSITY DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Bat Hibernacula Counts: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologists Tobin, Holman and Bergh along with U.S. Forest Service biologists, conducted hibernacula counts for bats in the Gifford-Pinchot National Forest. Townsend's big-eared bats were the main species counted, but *Myotis* species were also found hibernating. We collected skin swabs from hibernating bats to test for the bat disease, white-nose syndrome.



Townsend's big-eared bat hibernating (left) and a Myotis species hibernating (right) at one of the hibernacula in the Gifford-Pinchot National Forest

2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

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.

GAME DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Ungulate Specialist Garrison worked with WDFW Region 3 staff members to facilitate elk captures for Washington State University's (WSU) elk hoof disease research program. WDFW staff immobilized four elk, WSU and WDFW personnel sampled and processed each elk, then placed them into trailers for transport to WSU. Another capture effort is planned for later in February.



Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Mule Deer Working Group Winter Meeting: Deer Specialist Hansen attended the winter meeting of the Mule Deer Working Group in Salt Lake City, Utah. It was a very productive meeting with a lot of great discussions on a variety of deer-related topics including Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), radio collar performance, range-wide mule deer survival, and an update on potential grant funding for habitat conservation through the Department of the Interior.

2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

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.

HUNTER EDUCATION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Nothing for this installment.

2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

The Region 1 Hunter Education Coordinator conducted a pre-service training session for new hunter education applicant instructors in Spokane on February 13, 2020. Six applicants were in attendance with several from rural counties. The Region 1 hunter education coordinator also certified two new female instructors, both of which are in Stevens County, which has been underrepresented by female instructors.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Nothing for this installment.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Scatter Creek Wildlife Area: The Scatter Creek Wildlife Area Management Plan is drafted and is undergoing planning team review. After revision, it will be ready for public review which includes the advisory committee and tribal review. An advisory committee meeting has been scheduled for March 23, 2020, to collect comments on the draft plan. We anticipate the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) 30-day public review to occur in April or May. The plan also includes a draft restoration plan for the wildlife area. The plan's objectives tackle recreation uses and conflicts, new acquisitions, restoration, and species recovery.

Wildlife Area Plan 2017-2018 Updates: Wildlife area plan updates have been completed for 15 wildlife areas and posted on the WDFW website. The updates have been streamlined for the website and are focused on management highlights for the wildlife area during the 2017-2018 planning cycle.

South Puget Sound Wildlife Area: The South Puget Sound Wildlife Area planning process is starting up with a planning team meeting scheduled on Feb. 20. It was placed on hold for a few months due to regional capacity issues. We anticipate a draft management plan in May.

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.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Sage Grouse Survey: Fish and Wildlife Commissioner and Swanson Lakes Grouse Survey Coordinator Kim Thorburn conducted the first seasonal population survey, for the experimental sage grouse population near Swanson Lakes. She found grouse scat near the lek but counted zero birds.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area Flooding: Severe rain and rapid snowmelt caused significant flooding and damage along the Tucannon River on the Wooten Wildlife Area in early February. Two campgrounds were damaged with one being repairable (#4) while the other (#9) may be a total loss. The footbridge leading to Watson Lake was ripped off its abutments and was found 200 yards downstream in a log jam. Other damage includes scouring, flooded restrooms, damaged parking areas, damage to irrigation equipment and closure of the main U.S. Forest Service (USFS) road up the Tucannon valley at the entrance to the Tucannon Fish Hatchery. On Saturday, Feb. 8, Kari Dingman and Bob Dice assisted the Columbia County Sheriff's office

with the rescue of a woman, two children, and two dogs from the Tucannon USFS guard station. The woman is a Washington State Parks employee and became stranded between flood and washout events late Thursday evening while attempting to return to her assigned park housing. We utilized one of the wildlife area's 5-ton military trucks to cross flooded areas and slides across the main road.



The Watson Lake footbridge stuck in a logjam



Destruction at Campground 9



Kari Dingman and Bob Dice in 5-ton truck assisting the Columbia County Sheriff with Rescue on Feb 8



Group Photo of Rescue Team at Campground 4. WDFW Staff included Matt Sabo, Kari Dingman, and Bob Dice

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Mill Creek Floods: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Rasley assisted local rescue personnel with efforts up Mill Creek while the river was flooding way above flood stage.



Barn and horse trailer caught in Mill Creek flood



A road along Mill Creek

Sunset Flood: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Rasley's son took the photo below of Mill Creek in Walla Walla at sunset after the rain finally quit.



Sunset over Mill Creek flood

Wolf Depredation: Wildlife conflict and private lands personnel responded to a report of possible wolf depredation of a calf in Asotin County. Staff members conducted a full field investigation and determined that the calf had been killed and partially consumed by a wolf.



Calf carcass as it was found

Preventive Measures: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spent two days assisting the producer, affected by the wolf depredation earlier in the week by implementing nonlethal preventive measures. With the assistance of Private Lands Biologist Earl and Natural Resource Technician McGee, two pastures were encompassed with fladry as well as Fox Lights. The producer is also reducing the pasture size, increasing riding frequency and is night penning in response to the depredation. Wade spent time with the producer surveying the area the day after the depredation verifying that three wolves returned the night following the depredation.



Fladry around one of two pastures

4) Conserving Natural Areas

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE):

Private Lands Biologist Gaston met with Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff members to discuss the installation of spring shrubs as part of multiple landowners CRP SAFE contracts. Private Lands Biologist Gaston will continue to work with NRCS Specialist Johnson on some of the spring shrub work and be on-site for some of the plantings by planting crews.

State Acres for Wildlife: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley spoke with two landowners that had questions about the SAFE program through the CRP. The landowners have expiring CRP acres and are interested in the program. Hadley also spoke to one of the landowners about the pollinator habitat planting CP42 as he was interested in targeting pollinators within another CRP field that he had.

Chief Joseph Wildlife Area Trespass Livestock Issues: Wildlife area staff members continued working on trespass livestock issues in early February. Dave Meisner strengthened a fence that crosses Joseph Creek and ended up falling into the water while he worked. Bob Dice and David Woodall checked and made minor fence repairs up Green Gulch. Dice and Woodall later used ATV's to chase ten cows off the wildlife area and back to the private property where they came from.



Boundary stock fence check high above Joseph Creek



Damaged fence

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Bat Conservation: Biologist Lowe attended a Cub Scout meeting in Spokane Valley to talk about bats and receive eight bat houses the scouts built for WDFW. The four-chamber bat houses are designed to provide thermally stable roosting and nursery space for several different species of bats. Some of them will be placed where old buildings used by bats are slated to be taken down, including the former Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area office.



Cub Scout Pack 436 built and donated eight bat houses

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Irrigation Diversion Box: On Thursday, Feb. 6, a logging truck hit a water diversion box on Sherman Creek Wildlife Area. This box provides seasonal water to the leased hay fields on Sherman Creek Wildlife Area, generally starting each April. Wildlife area staff members are coordinating with the WFDW risk manager, WDFW Construction Shop, and a local construction company to arrange for repairs and cost reimbursement.



Damaged concrete wall, wooden lid, and dam boards

Office Upgrade: A 65-inch television was installed at the new Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area headquarters conference room. Staff members will use it to attend meetings remotely, provide educational presentations to visitors, and present information at wildlife area advisory group meetings.



Screen mount adjusts three ways for use with varying group sizes

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Sage Grouse Lek Surveys – Due to mild February weather conditions, Private Lands Biologist Braaten visited a North Douglas County Sage Grouse lek and found seven male sage grouse displaying. If the weather continues this trend lek surveys may start earlier than expected.



Sage Grouse in flight - Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW

Northern Leopard Frogs: Amphibians are beginning to emerge from brumation (hibernation) since the temperatures have been consistently warmer. Preliminary amphibian call surveys have resulted in a few observations of Pacific tree frogs, but no northern leopard frogs active in the Potholes Reservoir area. If the weather stays consistent and water temperatures continue to rise, frogs should begin breeding in the next few weeks. With egg mass surveys fast approaching, Biologist Grabowsky has been communicating with partners regarding egg collection and captive rearing strategies for 2020 and preparing for surveys by coordinating with volunteers and revising methodologies for this season.

The first year of the northern leopard frog recovery and reintroduction project will be showcased at the Othello Sandhill Crane Festival and the Washington Chapter of the Wildlife Society meeting (depending on abstract acceptance) later this spring.

Waterfowl: Biologist Rowan presented preliminary information on Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) data collected in the game reserves to Biologist Dougherty and Specialist Wilson. Rowan also began searching for supplies, funding, and volunteers to construct nest tubes. Biologist Rowan also performed desktop and field scouting for new tube locations and shared plans with wildlife area staff members.

Elk Capture: On Feb. 4, District 7 Wildlife Biologists Emily Jeffreys and Devon Comstock assisted WDFW personnel with an elk capture on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area in Region 3. This capture was performed by WDFW personnel to provide four elk calves to researchers at Washington State University (WSU) studying Treponeme-associated Hoof Disease (TAHD), or elk hoof disease, under the authority of Washington State Bill 5474. This bill mandates that the state initiate proactive steps to address elk hoof disease, a debilitating bacteria-borne illness affecting 20-90% of elk in some southwest Washington herds. To learn more about elk hoof disease and WSU's role in addressing it, go to <https://vmp.vetmed.wsu.edu/research/elk-hoof-disease>.



Region 3 Regional Program Manager Scott McCorquodale with one of the day's four captured elk calves - Photo by Emily Jeffreys

WDFW Region 3 staff members and Statewide Ungulate Specialist Kyle Garrison identified calves from within elk herds on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area and sedated them, then assisted WDFW veterinarian Dr. Kristen Mansfield, WSU veterinarian Dr. Margaret Wild, and WSU graduate student researchers to assess calf health and collect biological samples and measurements. District 7 Biologists Devon Comstock and Emily Jeffreys assisted as needed to transport the sedated elk calves short distances, position calves safely for the duration of the processing, and collect data.



Biologist Comstock (right) assists a Washington State University Ph.D. student in evaluating the health of an elk calf - Photo by Samantha Montgomery

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Youth, Active Military, and Veteran Waterfowl Day: Specialist McPherson saw that six hunters took the opportunity of the new hunt day at the Winchester Regulated Access Area. The average bird per hunter was 4.33 which is a very good harvest, surprisingly the other regulated access areas (Frenchman and North Potholes) did not see any participation.

Upcoming White Goose Season: Our first late white goose is approaching on Feb 22. Locally, Specialist McPherson has been witnessing a good amount of snow in the Moses Lake and Potholes area. Most birds are using large water bodies to roost and feeding in private agriculture fields. Hunters should focus on finding roosted birds and following them to feed fields and then trying to secure permission to hunt from landowners.



Snow geese using field off the road before sunset - Photo by C. McPherson

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Private Lands Habitat Restoration: Biologist Hughes met with a landowner to evaluate an area he is interested in improving habitat for mule deer and upland birds. Currently, the area is grazed but will be fenced to prevent cows from accessing the area. Hughes developed a habitat plan for the landowner that consists of seeding two native seed mixes for an upland section and the bottom alkali section of the draw. Five hundred trees and shrubs will be planted along a canyon wall that holds moisture. The landowner is beginning field prep now. After a few years of establishment, the area will be very lightly grazed during the dormant season only. Hughes will be seeding and planting shrubs fall of 2020. This area is in the hunting by written permission program.



Draw bottom that will be seeded to Great Basin Wildrye - Photo by Hughes

Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 49 Streamflow Restoration Project Proposal: Lands Operations Manager Haug, Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Manager Wehmeyer and District Habitat Biologist Iten met to discuss a grant opportunity in partnership with the Oroville-Tonasket Irrigation District (OTID). The projects look to offset future permit-exempt domestic use in WRIA 49. Staff members discussed and submitted to OTID a project that increases storage throughout the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and modernizes all the control structures at each impoundment in the valley. This will provide additional water for various fish species later in the year and make controlling water on the wildlife area safer for current and future staff members.

Dams, Lakes, and Fishing in Region 2: Lands Operations Manager Haug participated in a conference call with Capital Asset Management Program (CAMP) Engineer Kuykendall to discuss various impoundments throughout Region 2. The call laid out how these structures will be inspected and maintained in the future and what the Department of Ecology expects in terms of an annual inspection. Engineer Kuykendall expects to be in Region 2 next month and plans to visit high-risk dams in the Sinlahekin and Methow wildlife areas.

Fire Protection District Contracts: Lands Operations Manager Finger expanded contract review with Fire Protection Districts and generated new Exhibit A products, levy rates, market values, and assessment calculations to support updating the new contracts and entered a funding request into the budget priority needs spreadsheet. Finger also had a conversation with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Fire Management Officer Dimke where we discussed the potential to contract with BLM in areas where federal lands were intermixed with the state. More discussion is warranted on this topic, however, Finger budgeted this into his request to be conservative, in particular for Lower Crab Creek, Quincy Lakes, Sagebrush Flats, and Chester Butte Units. The goal is to have a draft product for review for the upcoming fire meeting this April that would eventually update all contracts in Region 2 South. Finger began coordinating with Real Estate Services for review of Exhibit A materials.

Quincy Lakes Trails Management: Lands Operations Manager Finger hosted the second and final Quincy Trails Designate and Decommission workshop, distributed meeting notes, developed supporting Geographic Information Systems (GIS) products, and began drafting the Designate and Decommission Plan. Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson meeting with the Quincy Port District to discuss their plans for the development of the Bishop property which they've recently acquired. The port will be developing an equestrian camp, tiny cabins, a campsite, picnic shelters, an interpretive center, and two multi-use platforms. Finger expressed interest in working with the port on an agreement for long-term operations and management funding associated with the impacts of increased use on adjacent lands. Finger later reached out to the port requesting regular meetings to ensure that our plans are well-coordinated and mesh appropriately.

Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) Crew, Moses Lake: Lands Operations Manager Finger developed a proposal to utilize revenue accounts on the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and minor staffing adjustments to establish a WCC crew in Moses Lake specifically for the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and South Region 2 Water Access Program. Finger will continue coordination with the Department of Ecology and the Fiscal Office and will loop in the contracts office soon, to try to get this established. Budget projections suggest we could support the crew

of 5-11 years depending on our success in acquiring federal funding to assist with managing Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) lands.

Billy Clapp Lake Boat Launch Proposal: Lands Operations Manager Finger and Water Access Manager Harmon met with Deputy Field Office Manager Lay, Natural Resources Supervisor Doolittle, Recreation Planner McPherson, and Civil Engineer Spencer, with Bureau of Reclamation, as well as Assistant Manager and Hydro Supervisor Thomas with Columbia Basin Hydropower, and Project Engineer Knetchel with CAMP to plan for an 8,000 CFS test release at Summer Falls Park to determine feasibility of a boat launch at the north end of the lake. The meeting was very helpful in explaining roles and responsibilities and getting our heads wrapped around what information we needed to collect and how we would do it. Of particular interest is with the Bureau of Reclamation's ability to do an ultrasonic flow sampling which will provide flow rates across a cross-section of the area of interest. BOR will also monitor wave heights while WDFW personnel collect flow rates in a couple of strategic locations associated with the launch.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Coordinated Weed Management Area Meeting: Lands Operations Manager Haug met with the Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board members and representatives from various agencies including the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), USFS Tonasket, and Methow ranger districts, Colville Confederated Tribe and the Bureau of Reclamation to discuss noxious weed issues and plans on a regional scale. Haug discussed plans for the upcoming application season, personnel changes and willingness to participate with Okanogan County in their efforts.



Wintering Waterfowl at Banks Lake - Photo by Eric Braaten WDFW



From top to bottom – American kestrel on Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, Cooper’s hawk on Scotch Creek and bald eagle above Forde Lake on Sinlahekin Wildlife Area – Photos by Justin Haug



Snow quickly melting away in the Okanogan Valley east of Tonasket – Photo by Justin Haug



White-fronted geese on Cell A of the Winchester Regulated Access Area - Photo by C. McPherson

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Oak Creek Wildlife Area staff members continued feeding at the Cowiche feed site. Currently, wildlife area personnel are feeding over 1500 elk. The entire area continues to be snow-free and high temps are in the 50s. Animals are ranging out significant distances, but they continue to return to the feed site daily. The amount of hay has been reduced by about 40 percent due to the observed hay left unconsumed. Numbers of elk being fed at Oak Creek headquarters continue to hover around 500. Currently, there is no snow on the ground given the past several weeks of above-normal temperatures. Feeding will likely continue at all Oak Creek sites until temperatures begin to rise above freezing at night producing significant green-up. Elk feeding continues on the Wenas Wildlife Area, with over 700 animals at the Mellotte feed site, even with the unseasonably warm temperatures.

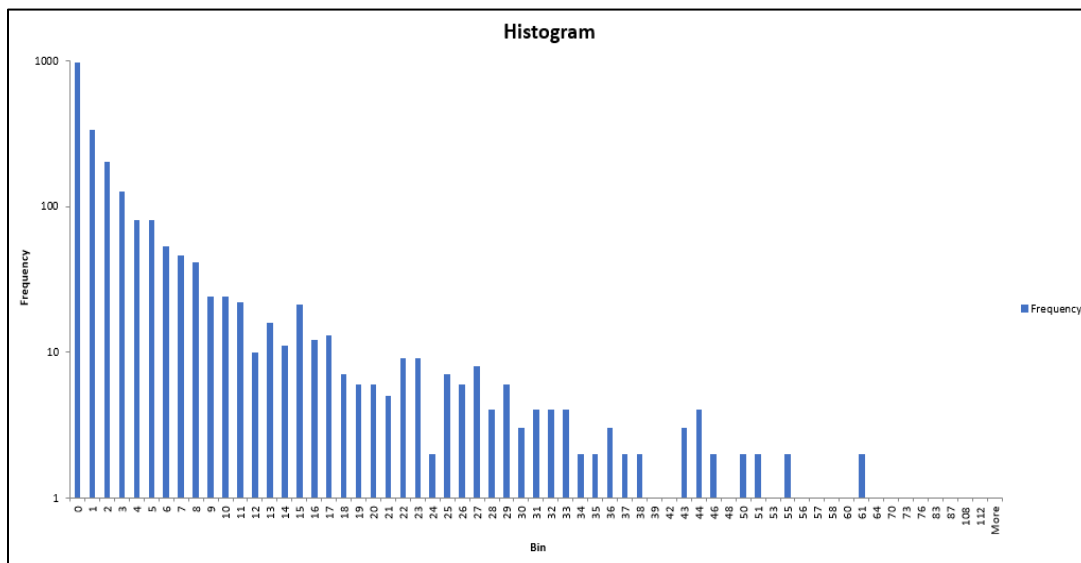


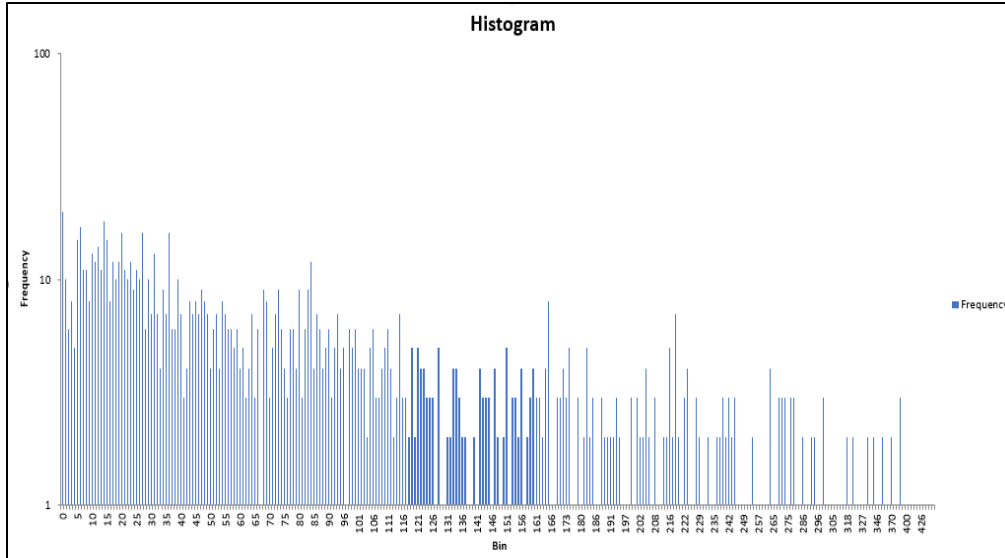
Elk at Mellotte feed site



Loading hay into feed truck

District 8 Biologist Moore has been working with Biometrician, Keren and GIS Analyst Whelan to evaluate the proper home range option and circular sample unit radius to generate count data from the GPS observations of collared bull and cow elk from the Colockum research projects. These counts will be used in the Resource Selection Function (RSF) analysis. It was felt the best home range estimate pooled observations for all animals and all years during the study. Trial counts and summary statistics were generated for sample unit radii of 400, 600 and 800 meters. Currently, the 400-meter radius appears best suited for the analysis, since it reduces the number of samples units with zero observations. A few more checks and options still need to be explored before a final decision is made.





Histograms, generated by Paul Whelan, illustrating the number of 400-meter sample units containing a specific number of GPS observations for the bull (top) and cow (bottom) datasets

District 8 Biologist Moore oversaw the District 8 portion of the recent mule deer research capture efforts. The project went well and 58 deer were captured and fitted with GPS collars within Kittitas County. This was a team effort among WDFW personnel and other entities. The WDFW effort was lead by Statewide Deer Specialist, Sara Hansen and included local biologists Moore, Wetzel, Nelson, Weeks, and Teske. Assistance with staging our capture effort came from Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Southeast Regional Office, Puget Sound Energy, Wild horse Wind and Solar Facility and EDP Renewables, Kittitas Valley Wind Facility. We were also granted access to capture animals from numerous private landowners throughout the Kittitas Valley.



Baker Aircraft performed the capture work in this photo they are refueling at a parking lot on Puget Sound Energy Wild horse Wind and Solar Facility

Region 3 Wildlife Program staff members participated in immobilizing four elk that were transferred to the Washington State University (WSU) Veterinary College for inclusion in the new Treponema Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) hoof disease study. The operation went smoothly.



Immobilized elk awaiting transport

District 8 Conflict Specialist Wetzel was contacted by a livestock owner near Liberty about a wolf seen near a cattle pasture. Other than close proximity, no wolf-livestock conflict has occurred. A Fox Light and hazing devices were deployed at the location.



Cattle pasture near a reported wolf sighting

At another location, the carcass of a horse that had died of natural causes was removed to deter wolves from visiting the area.



The carcass of a horse that died of natural causes removed to reduce attractant

Laboratory reports are in for the dead bighorn ram that was found floating in the Columbia River several weeks ago. No evidence of pneumonia was detected in the lungs submitted to the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at Washington State University. Colockum Wildlife Area staff personnel were able to recently observe a large group (40+) of bighorn sheep near the headquarters and did not observe any limping or coughing sheep. One “unique” ewe was in the group, shown below.



Bighorn sheep ewes part of the Quilomene sheep herd at Colockum Wildlife Area

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Region 3 Access Manager Garcia and Natural Resource Worker Barbosa started doing spring cleaning projects. They pulled weeds (Russian thistle) on the access road into Pond 1 and 2 and swept the parking lot at Pond 4.



Barbosa using sweeper attachment to clean the Pond 4 parking lot



Removing weeds to prepare a road for ground sterilant

The warm weather has also brought flooding to several of the access sites. Ringer loop road is closed at the gate due to high water across the roadway, effectively closing access to the Thrall site. Access Manager Garcia has closed the Fitzsimmons access site due to water over the entrance road. The Teanaway Junction access site also has water flowing over the roadway but isn't currently enough to cause it to be closed. Manager Garcia is monitoring Teanaway Junction and the other river access sites for any public safety issues.



Ringer loop road underwater



Fitzsimmons Access Site closed due to flooding



Water going over the roadway at Teanaway Junction

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

District 8 Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck patrolled the Thorp, Kittitas, Badger Pocket, and Umptanum areas for elk activity. Elk were hazed out of some of the areas. Permission has been granted by the Yakima Firing Center to pursue elk from Badger Pocket into the Yakima Training Center (YTC) to help move elk further away from crop areas.

A section of elk fence near Cowiche needed repairs to upright posts that began to sag during the recent thaw. District 8 Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck are repairing the fence in that area each week.



Section of the repaired fence near Cowiche

As is typical with the local area, most private access gates in the agency elk fence are often left open all year. This complicates keeping elk out of nearby agriculture areas. The gates were closed in hopes residents will continue the practice.



Open gates in agency elk fence

Officer Nasset, District 8 Conflict Technician Leuck, and Conflict Specialist Wetzel investigated a series of domestic sheep mortalities at a ranch near Ellensburg. The wounds on the sheep were not consistent with the evidence of a wildlife attack, and domestic dogs may have been responsible.



Officer Nasset and Technician Leuck examining wounds on a live domestic sheep

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Oak Creek Forester Hartmann completed surveys for western gray squirrels with state and district habitat and wildlife biologists on the Windy Point commercial thinning project. Upon completion of the surveys, Forester Hartmann started marking leave trees on the project with assistance from Oak Creek Wildlife Area staff members.



Wildlife Biologists Bell and Bernatowicz, Habitat Biologist Downes, Wildlife Area Manager Mackey, and Forester Pfeifle scanning the tree canopy for potential western gray squirrel nests at Windy Point



Oak Creek Natural Resource Technician Kass marks an impressive ponderosa pine as a leave-tree at Windy Point



Douglas-fir stand marked using the Individuals-Clumps-Openings (ICO) strategy

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Oak Creek Wildlife Education Corps (WEC) volunteers continue staffing the Visitor's Center at Oak Creek Headquarters seven days per week. We have served a multitude of visitors during this period, even during weekdays. Peak counts of visitors at the center have been over 500 people in a single day on the weekends. Truck tours are ongoing and have also been popular.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Colockum Wildlife Area staff members spent much of the last week hauling prefabricated vehicle gates from the WDFW Yakima Screen Shop, the fabrication shop that built the gates. The gates are being staged at the Colockum Headquarters, to be used as needed for road management projects.



Large concrete footings used for gates



Steel gate components

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 4

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Salish Sea Waterfowl, Sea Bird, and Marine Mammal Aerial Surveys: Sea Duck Specialist Evenson and biologists Hamer, Murphie, and Michaelis conducted winter aerial surveys of waterfowl, sea bird, and marine mammal populations in Washington's Salish Sea waters. The annual survey provides critical information for the management of Washington's sea duck populations and helps to monitor wintering sea bird and marine mammal populations. The aerial surveys are flown in a de Havilland Beaver at an altitude of 200 feet along all Salish Sea coastlines and extensively throughout nearshore and offshore areas. The biologist observers record all avian and marine mammal observations that fall within an 80-meter wide transect strip on each side of the aircraft. Most recently, surveys were conducted in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the San Juan Islands, Strait of Georgia, Hood Canal, the Whidbey Basin, and the northern embayments. The surveys will be completed during the second week of February.

State Take of Wildlife: District 12 and Olympia worked with Puget Sound Energy (PSE) and Friends of Soos Creek regarding emergency power line work found very close to an active heron colony. The herons are just starting to reestablish nest territories and some early pairing and nest maintenance behavior as part of pre-nesting breeding rituals.



Great blue herons at the Soos Creek heron colony prior to emergency pole work done by PSE - Photo by Puget Sound Energy

Snow Goose Interview: District Biologist Waddell met with a photojournalist from Seattle's Q13 Fox News to discuss the snow geese that winter in Skagit and Whatcom counties. The pair met at Fir Island Farm Reserve Unit on the Skagit Wildlife Area, and Biologist Waddell answered questions on-camera about snow goose biology, why they migrate to this area, and how people can best enjoy viewing these beautiful birds. The day was cold and snowy, and multiple big flocks of snow geese flew over the site during the interview.



A view from Talking Field 3 at the Fir Island Farms Reserve Unit on a slightly warmer day

Island Marble Butterfly: Biologist Milner met with a large landowner on Lopez Island to answer questions and tour his ownership prior to his enrollment in the island marble butterfly Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances. This landowner enrolled in the program and will be discussing additional enrollments with owners whose lands he leases. We now have 14 enrollees in the program and look forward to a few more participating landowners prior to listing the butterfly.

Avian Response to Estuary Restoration Project: WDFW, in partnership with the Center for Natural Areas Management (CNLM), and funded by the ESERP program has launched in northern Puget Sound. CNLM has hired the project technician who will be conducting bird surveys at selected sites. WDFW and CNLM staff have nearly completed placing survey markers at Leque Island, Fir Island Farms, and the Island Unit of the Skagit Wildlife Area. Preliminary surveys were conducted. WDFW Biologist Milner and CNLM Avian Ecologist Gary Slater met with two other landowners to discuss the potential for expanding the surveys onto their projects.



Snow geese coming in at Fir Island Farms - Photo by J. Baker



Dunlin flying high in Port Susan Bay – Photo by K. Herrmann



Bird watchers enjoying a sunny day at Fir Island Farms – Photo by J. Baker

Elk Capture: District Biologist's Waddell and Moore worked with Swinomish Tribal Biologists Nickerson and Parks to dart and collar female elk in the North Cascades Elk Herd. Collared elk will aid WDFW and tribal biologists during annual population surveys and provide for a more accurate population estimate. Additionally, location data obtained by the collars will help biologists better understand elk movements, especially around areas in Skagit and Whatcom counties where there is a high potential for human-elk conflict.



Biologists in a truck attempt to approach and dart a female elk in this herd



A tribal and WDFW biologist successfully dart and collar a female elk. This female recovered quickly and was on her way

East/West Bear Project: District 12 assisted Bear and Cougar Specialist Beausoleil and Assistant Bear and Cougar Specialist Welfelt with ongoing bear den work. This portion of the project entails locating dens, placing cameras to document emergence and cub numbers, re-collar/adjust collars on adult females and potentially collar yearling cubs. Work, where newborn cubs are known to be present, will be limited (camera placement only) to avoid den abandonment.



Westside bear den site recently visited during East/West Bear Project



One of several impassable roads recently encountered during East/West Bear Project

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Region 4 Private Lands Access Program Waterfowl Hunting Sites: The snowy weather impacted accessibility of several waterfowl hunting sites in Region 4, but the season ended strong with good weather and water conditions for duck hunting. Region 4 private lands waterfowl hunting sites will be open for the youth, active duty, and veterans hunt day on Feb 1. Many sites in Skagit and Snohomish counties will remain open for the late snow goose season from Feb 8 to Feb 18.



Snow closed access to multiple Private Lands Access Program waterfowl sites across Region 4. Flooding of low-lying roads impacted access and parking at several waterfowl hunting sites in Region 4.



Snow geese flying over a Snohomish County private lands waterfowl hunting site

Region 4 Private Lands Access Program Waterfowl Hunting Sites: The waterfowl season is nearly over in Region 4, with the late snow goose season ending on Feb 18. Private Lands Access Program personnel have begun removing field signage and blinds in Whatcom County. The exceedingly wet field conditions following river flooding has made work difficult and muddy.



Whatcom County private land waterfowl hunting site showing the flood water height. Private Lands Access Program staff members anchored signposts in flood-prone areas to prevent the signs being lost in floods.



Natural Resource Technician Deyo enjoying a muddy ride to remove a waterfowl blind and field signage from a partner landowner property in Whatcom County





Private Lands Access Program waterfowl hunting site signage and blinds getting cleaned for off-season storage

Change of Season: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm removed waterfowl-related hunting signs and replaced them with signs communicating new seasonal activities such as bird dog training and wildlife and bird watching.

Annual Green River Quality Elk and Deer hunt: District 12 met with tribal and land management entities to derive annual permits and ongoing management needs regarding deer, elk, and other wildlife within GMU 485, Green River and surrounding areas. Permit changes will be coming out in the 2020 Big Game Pamphlet. Ongoing management needs are being examined by all parties.



A youth buck hunter in GMU 485

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Coyote Depredation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Seitz, Sergeant. Maurstad and Officer Peters conducted a depredation investigation on a goat that was killed in Snohomish County. The goat was confirmed to have been killed by coyotes. Several prevention measures were discussed with the producer to help avoid further conflicts.



Goat carcass in Snohomish County confirmed as a coyote depredation

Bear Issues: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Seitz set a culvert trap for a young bear that has been causing issues for several homeowners in Snohomish County. Once the homeowners removed and secured all artificial attractants, the trap was set in hopes of doing a hard release on the bear.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes



Sunset over recently restored Leque Island

5) Providing Education and Outreach

University of Washington – Bat Monitoring: District 12 met with the University of Washington (UW) students to assist in orienting them in how to set-up and use monitoring equipment for bats. Students had trouble with data cards and also needed to be coached via phone. They are all in the know on how to use the equipment and provide data for WDFW now.

Living with Wildlife – Bellevue Master Naturalist Annual Class: District 12 provided a class presentation regarding urban wildlife ecology, urban/suburban wildlife conflict reduction, legalities, and attracting desired species to roughly 30 participants. Class participants go through a few months of training in various natural resource topics, including their own efforts of having to apply and progress through an interview process in order to be a part of the annual program. These natural resource stewards then put their knowledge to work by volunteering their time in Bellevue parks as a docent and program representative. The outreach these volunteers provide on the ground is invaluable to area natural resource managers in getting the word out on the needs of area natural resources and what citizens can do to provide their own management needs. Programs such as this provide boots on the ground and credibility that area resource agencies are lacking – capacity and a real voice listening and providing appropriate resource information for a given situation. Most of the class participants were new to Washington. Further, Bellevue is a majority-minority city; with many differing cultural takes on what natural resource management means and what managers provide to keep our ecosystems healthy and available for all to enjoy. Thanks to Bellevue for this fantastic outreach and management program.



Are my dogs an issue for wildlife in this park? Oops, the sign says no dogs on this trail please, waterfowl are nesting....I didn't see that...who can I ask about how my activities and presence may affect the park and wildlife I love...A master naturalist! - Photo by WDFW

Feeding Wildlife Presentation: District Biologist Waddell gave a presentation on the impacts of feeding wildlife to a group of residents of the Shelter Bay Community in La Conner. The presentation and questions lasted for nearly two hours and were well received. Biologist Waddell provided specifics on intentional and unintentional feeding practices, the positives of feeding birds, and the negative impacts, to wildlife and people, of feeding raccoons, deer, and feral cats.



The title slide for Biologist Waddell's presentation on feeding wildlife

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (SWAAC): Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm completed the recruitment and selection process for the SWAAC. Nine new members were selected to rebuild the committee to 12 members, representing diverse user groups, project partners and stakeholders.

Annual Reporting: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm completed the Noxious Weed Report and Beaver Maintenance Report for activities during the 2019 calendar year.

Private Lands Access Program Abandoned Vehicle Removal: Private Lands Biologist Wingard worked with staff members from Sierra Pacific Industries to remove an abandoned vehicle from their property. The funding for this work is provided by a Department of Ecology grant to the Private Lands Access Program.

Private Lands Access Program and Whatcom Wildlife Area Tire Removal: Natural Resource Technician Otto and Whatcom Wildlife Area Manager Kessler worked with contractors to remove a large pile of tires that had been dumped on property enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. This tire cleanup was funded by the Department of Ecology's Waste Tire Removal Program. 278 tires were properly disposed of.



Private Lands Access Program and Whatcom Wildlife Area personnel disposed of 278 tires that were dumped on private property enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. The tires were stored in the barn area of Lake Terrell while final disposal was scheduled. Contractors with the Department of Ecology Waste Tire Removal program arrived and took the tires to their final resting place.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Sea Duck, Marine Bird Surveys: Biologist Murphie participated in the Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program (PSEMP) marine bird and mammal survey effort. These surveys have been conducted since 1992 and sample the marine shoreline and offshore water of the Salish Sea. Biologist Murphie has participated in this effort since 1995. Observers identify and count all birds and marine mammals seen within a fifty-meter strip on either side of the survey aircraft. Areas flown this reporting period include Hood Canal, central Puget Sound, the San Juan Islands, Skagit Bay, Padilla Bay, and Samish Bay. The survey effort will conclude mid-February.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Abandoned Bear Cubs: On Wednesday, WDFW conflict staff members received a call from a concerned forester. Earlier in the day while walking a transect through a timber stand, he stepped on a blown over tree and out came a bear. The bear ran off. It was then that he heard the cries from under the tree. Realizing that he had scared a female bear away from her cubs, he left the area and continued his workday hoping the sow would return to her cubs. About five or six hours later he returned to his truck, which was parked on a logging road approximately 150 feet from the bear encounter. He could still hear the cubs crying. He left the area and called WDFW. The next morning Region 6 conflict staff members spoke with the forester. The forester had returned to the area to continue his work and reported that he could still hear the cubs crying. Conflict personnel consulted with the WDFW bear specialist. Staff members agreed that the disturbance level was high enough that the sow may have abandoned her cubs. Conflict staff met with the forester and located the cubs, which was not hard as they could be heard crying from a long-distance away.

While very cold, they appeared to be okay. There was no evidence that the sow had come back after 24 hours. Staff members decided that the cubs were abandoned. The cubs were picked up and taken to PAWS and when old enough they will be returned to the wild (photos below). This type of interaction is rare. WDFW staff members are thankful for the forester's concern and for reporting it to us. If he had not reported it, it is likely this would not have ended well for the cubs.



Conflict Biologist Matt Blankenship with orphaned bear cubs

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.