

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

December 1 to 15, 2021

## **REGION 1**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Dead Buck:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman assisted Dr. Devivo with sampling a dead buck that looked otherwise healthy. The caller suspected Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD)/bluetongue but it is typically too late in the year to still have it going on. Westerman needed to help because the buck was either going to have to be dragged away or hauled off in a truck. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) samples were collected, and the gut was opened. There was hemorrhaging throughout the digestive track and many ulcers in the rumen. Rumen acidosis was the likely cause of death from corn and pumpkin.

**Tucannon Bighorn Sheep:** Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Dingman continued to check the Tucannon bighorn sheep herd weekly. There are still eight lambs alive out of the twelve that were born this spring.

**Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance:** Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock collected a few opportunistic samples from dead deer reported to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). We continue to be short of our collection goal, so any reports of semi-fresh deer within the sampling area are followed up on as time allows.

**Vulcan Bighorn Sheep Survey:** Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock conducted a survey of the Vulcan bighorn sheep herd. Unfortunately, they saw very few sheep and will have to continue surveying periodically throughout the winter. On a positive note, a local landowner saw about 45 sheep in early fall, meaning the herd was likely not affected (at least on a large scale) by the summer bluetongue outbreak.

**Winter Lynx Monitoring:** Wildlife Biologist Turnock deployed game cameras in the Kettle mountains as part of a lynx monitoring project. The cameras will be out throughout the winter and spring to detect lynx occupancy.



*Photo taken while setting up one of the cameras used to monitor lynx*

### **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Hunting Questions:** Private Lands Biologist Gaston received questions from hunters who are looking to hunt upland gamebirds in Whitman County. Private Lands Biologist Gaston provided the hunters with information about the Private Lands Program and how to best plan for their hunts. Many questions have been asked about how to utilize the Hunt by Reservation program which continues to grow in popularity.

**Hunting Access:** Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley answered questions from hunters pertaining to hunting access in Columbia and Walla Walla counties through calls, texts, and emails. Thorne Hadley followed up with an upland hunter pertaining to access and discussion of population of birds.

**W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area:** Natural Resources Worker Jensen continued to clean up trash in the campgrounds and around the lakes. He has filled in for Access Technician Heimgartner this month in keeping the outhouses cleaned and stocked with toilet paper. Jensen shutdown Deer Lake and Watson Lake and started draining them for the winter. The new footbridge was installed at the Watson Lake parking area to replace the footbridge that was washed away during the February 2020 flood event. Technician Heimgartner worked at the Wooten Wildlife Area and serviced access sites. He also replaced the deck on the Watson bridge approach.



*Replaced deck on the Watson bridge approach*

## **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Turkey Harassment:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman stopped in at the house where he harassed 130 turkeys from a roost two weeks ago and they have not been back since. The resident is going to purchase a paintball gun to continue any future harassment.

**Elk Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb spoke with three producers about on-going elk damage issues in Walla Walla County. The producers were issued kill permits to augment on-going non-lethal damage abatement measures.

**Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Grant Application:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb spoke with representatives from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) to initiate a supplemental grant application process for additional non-lethal resources to assist with elk hazing and herding efforts. These additional resources would be utilized in the Walla Walla Valley to address commercial crop damage from elk.

**Cloverland Elk:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spent part of one day checking the Cloverland area for elk activity in and around commercial crops. Natural Resource Technician Barron also spent most of a day checking the Cloverland area for elk activity. Wade, Barron, and Natural Resource Worker Rimmelpacher spent one morning in the Cloverland area meeting with producers to share information and introduce Barron and Rimmelpacher. Barron and Rimmelpacher spent multiple days checking the area for elk activity, identifying and monitoring several herds of elk on the George Creek Wildlife Area.

## **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Community Outreach and Teamwork:** Private Lands Biologist Baarstad seeded 20 acres of Conservation Reserve Program grass for a landowner near Harrington who was not physically able to complete the work. Thanks to Private Lands Biologist Gaston and Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area staff members for the help with equipment.

**Habitat Shrub Planting:** Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley planted shrubs at a habitat project in Walla Walla County. Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley met with a Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever Chapter board member and a landowner at a project site to discuss habitat projects and upcoming planting assistance from the chapter.

**Winter Gate Closures:** Sherman Creek Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer closed seasonal road gates at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area and the Kettle River Access Area in early December. He also locked the restrooms at Kettle River Access Area. Palmer waited until December 3, 2021, to close the gate at Bisbee Mountain Road. A contracted logger for the Colville National Forest (CNF) was working further up the hill on CNF-managed land, and not quite finished until then.

**Reardan Addition Kiosk:** Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch contacted the assistant wood shop teacher at Reardan High School. They discussed the kit for the kiosk that will be installed at the newest addition to Reardan Audubon Wildlife Area. If the shop students are unable to assemble the kiosk as planned over this coming winter, Finch and Natural Resources Technician Colvin will pick up the parts and put the kiosk together at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Headquarters.

**Blue Mountains Wildlife Areas:** Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Dingman completed the grant application for Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation for funds to aerially treat yellow star thistle infestations on the W.T. Wooten and the Chief Joseph wildlife areas. She also completed and submitted a grant application for Blue Mountain Community Foundation for funds to aerially treat yellow star thistle infestations on the parts of the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County.

**4-O Ranch Wildlife Area:** Biologist Woodall completed a Project Completion Report for a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation project that funded a big-game food plot at the Bucannon Field. The project entailed cleaning up an old agricultural field and planting something palatable for elk, and other species. The project had some pandemic delays, but two and a half years later it was finished. We seeded this fall and with mild temperatures there was good germination taking place.



*Bucannon Field food plot*

**Asotin Creek Wildlife Area:** Wildlife Biologist Woodall has been working with the U.S. Forest Service and RMEF on coordinating a Lick Creek Fire rehabilitation project. The aerial reseeded took place this week successfully. We are now getting a weed contractor lined up for work in the spring.

Wildlife area staff members closed vehicle gates on December 1, 2021, along South Fork, Lick Creek, and Cougar Creek roads to stop vehicle traffic during the winter months for protection of big game on their winter range. Wildlife area personnel have been preparing for the closure that starts December 15. They picked up equipment from the shop that will be used for winter feeding, purchased eco blocks for a road closure, and have signs available to be hung next week.

### **Providing Education and Outreach**

**New Pheasants Forever Chapter:** Private Lands Biologist Gaston attended a meeting of hunters and landowners in Pullman who are planning to create a new chapter for Pheasants Forever. Private Lands Biologist Gaston provided examples of ways for a new chapter to get involved with habitat conservation in the Palouse area.

**Swanson Lakes Homestead Tour:** Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (SLWA) Assistant Manager Finch and Natural Resources Technician Colvin facilitated a tour of an old homestead site at SLWA for a woman who lived there in the 1930s and 1940s. The woman's son had initiated contact with staff members some weeks ago. The former resident, now 84, lived the first six years of her life on the former farm known as the old Stookey place. The buildings have been burned down by wildfire, but remnants of the old pot-bellied stove and icebox were still discernable. The mother and son also shared photos of the homestead from about 80 years ago. They were happy to see the homestead site, after all these years.



*SLWA visitor, as a child at her homestead ca. 1940*

**Question of the Week:** Sherman Creek Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer recorded an informational message for a Colville radio station to play, discussing non-motorized winter recreation at Sherman Creek and Rustlers Gulch wildlife areas. He also noted the reason for seasonal gate closures: providing winter range for big game. Public Affairs Officer Lehman drew up the message, which Wildlife Area Managers Palmer and Anderson edited before recording.

### **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**District 1 Team Meeting:** Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock attended the virtual District 1 Team Meeting, which the Fish Program hosted. Major topics covered included a presentation of the Shared Stewardship Program and identifying Culture Improvement Project lead volunteers.

**Drone Insurance:** Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area's Assistant Manager Finch and Natural Resources Technician Colvin provided required information to obtain drone insurance. As they have had some run-ins with attacking hawks near Headquarters, they felt it was prudent. (Finch carries insurance on his personal drone, which provided him a replacement after a hawk crashed his drone at his farm this year.) The insurance for the state's drone will provide up to two replacements per year, for crashed equipment.

**Sherman Creek Irrigation Canal:** Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer has nearly completed the annual maintenance task of removing brush and cleaning out the irrigation canal at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area. Palmer estimates he has about 10% of the half-mile length remaining. He will be unable to complete the job next week due to higher-priority administrative tasks. Palmer hopes the weather will hold up long enough to finish before heavy snow and ice put a halt to excavator operation.

**Shop and Regional Office Maintenance:** Northern Region 1 Access Area Manager Dziekan cleaned and organized his shop and office space at the Region 1 headquarters shop and lab building. He completed a few minor tasks in the Region 1 office as well, removing old shelving units and installing wall mounts. Dziekan also ensured that snow and ice was removed from the pathways and parking areas around the office throughout the week.

**New Pickup Truck:** Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch and Natural Resources Technician Colvin traveled to Tumwater and back on Tuesday. (They beat snow and the I-90 closure by one day!) Colvin took delivery of a 2021 Dodge Ram 1500 4x4 quad cab truck. This Motor Pool vehicle replaces Colvin’s previous work truck, a 2006 Ford F-150 with no air conditioning and a spray rig installed in the bed. The old truck will now be relegated to seasonal herbicide application duty only.



*New truck for SLWA NRT Colvin*

**Other**

**W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area:** Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman and Natural Resources Worker Jensen built a well house around the new well head to insulate it. They built the well house to double as a display for a historic bell that Dingman acquired from Camp Wooten Environmental Learning Center. Research found that the bell was made in the 1880s and that type of bell was made for rural schools and churches. No documentation on this specific bell has been found but there were two rural schools in the Tucannon valley, the Russell School and the Waterman School.



*Well house/historic bell display*