

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

February 16 to 28, 2022

## **REGION 3**

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

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Pasco Deer Rescue:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand and District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra responded to a call concerning a young deer that was trapped within compound at a large distributorship in Pasco. With assistance of the company's workers, a section of fence was removed, and the deer was successfully hazed from the area.



*Deer approaching removed fence panel during hazing*

**Sage Grouse Sighting South of the Yakima Nation:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett and District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra inspected a property where two male sage grouse were sighted. While searching the property no birds were seen, however suspected scat was found close to where the birds were seen by the property owner.

**Annual Burrowing Owl Project Maintenance Begins:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and volunteers began repairs and checks of the ~80 artificial burrows used by burrowing owls in District 4. Some owls were onsite and likely overwintered at their breeding burrows to get a head start again this season. Fidorra checked burrows and coordinated with volunteers for maintenance checks.

**Deer Studies:** Over the last few weeks three deer collars have gone on mortality mode in the Ellensburg area. District 4 Conflict Specialist Wetzel has only been able to get to one due to snow, trees down, and mud. Collection of the other two will depend on weather/travel conditions.

**Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Wenas Lower Buffalo Road Parking Area:** Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes connected with her Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Lease Manager Barry on a plan to develop a parking area at Lower Buffalo Road, near the skyline trail trailhead. Hughes and Land Operations Manager Huffman coordinated with DNR on addressing any concerns they had with the parking area. DNR is working on adding this update into a recent DNR Lease renewal for the Wenas. Assistant Manager Taylor and Hughes came up with a good design this past summer for the parking area. Hughes went over the design and plan for implementation with Barry. The area is an extremely high use area on the Wenas Wildlife Area due to the road leading to the start of the skyline trail. Due to the amount of people using this area and popularity of the trail, there is a need for greater management of the area. The Wenas Wildlife Area is working on plans for increasing signage here and developing a structured parking lot, which will help prevent the public from driving off the main green dot road.

**Hunting Opportunity in Yakima County Reenrolling:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett met with a landowner to enroll his property into a hunting access program. This newly purchased land was historically in the “Hunt By Written Permission” program and the landowner would like to see it reenrolled for the 2022 hunting seasons. Hulett also inspected a 2016 habitat restoration project located on the property. Oddly enough, all the sagebrush plantings failed but the current, wild rose and bitterbrush had some survival.



*2016 habitat project on recently purchased property. Weeds dominated all open areas in the matting which led to some of the failures*

**Wildlife Viewing Opportunities Set to Open:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett set up Region 3’s first two “Register for Viewing” access opportunities. These sites will be open March 1 and it is expected that the viewing opportunities will get better the closer to spring. Each site will be posted on birding apps like E-bird to promote the opportunities.



*Parking area at Harder Spring wildlife viewing site*

**Yakima Elk Hunting:** The recent elk survey of the Yakima herd yielded an estimate over 11,000 elk. The numbers are surprising given recent yearling bull harvest/recruitment, but antlerless opportunity is being increased for the 2022 season.

**Winter Recreation on the Colockum:** Colockum Wildlife Area staff members spent a day snowmobiling out of the Lily Lake Snow Park to inspect trail conditions, inspect boundary signage, and hopefully check the condition of the Game Reserve Cabin. Poor snow conditions made the going difficult and staff members were not able to reach the cabin located on Naneum Ridge.





*Colockum Manager Lopushinsky and Assistant Manager Hagan using snowmobiles to check signs along the big game winter range boundary*

**Sandhill Crane Sightings:** Sandhill cranes have started showing up at the Windmill Unit of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area. They can be observed in agricultural fields between Basin City and Othello through early April.



*Sandhill cranes at the Windmill Unit near Basin City*

**Waterfowl Viewing Opportunities:** With all the wetlands full and triticale growing in many of the leased fields, thousands of geese have been utilizing the Sunnyside Unit for foraging and resting grounds in recent weeks. The Rice Paddies Wetland are chocked full of northern pintails, mallards, greenwing teal, Canada geese, tundra swans, and even a few pelicans. The Johnson Wetland also has been visited by hundreds of pintails, mallards, and Canada geese recently.



*Flocks of geese and swans resting at Giffen Lake- Sunnyside Unit*



*Several hundred snow geese in leased field feeding on triticale sprouts near the Sunnyside Headquarters*

## **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**West Richland Deer Damage:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a deer damage complaint from a corn and pumpkin operation along the Yakima River in West Richland. Late last summer and early fall, this farm received substantial deer damage to these crops from a group of localized deer. Hazing and hunting with Master Hunters helped some, but the population continues to increase, and the landowner is concerned for this year's plantings. The landowner claims that over 100 deer are frequenting the area. Additional hunting by Master Hunters and Youth Special Permits are being planned.

**Kittitas County:** Elk are moving into the east county conflict zones, but numbers are only in the hundreds currently. Conflict Technician Leuck, Conflict Specialist Wetzel, and landowners are engaged in hazing elk at these locations.

**Cowiche Elk:** A group of 60 plus elk continue to walk on a cattle guard to enter nearby orchards at night. The elk seem to be eating mostly old apples and grass, but the learned habit is of concern for nearby orchardists. One issue might be that the cattle guard is getting filled in with dirt, making the drop if the elk slip of little consequence. Lands Operation Manager Huffman spoke with Yakima County about cleaning the material out under the guard. Long-term, a different design that makes it harder for elk to get good footing will be needed. The elk have developed the guard walking skill in recent years and now regularly cross to get outside the elk fence.

**Yakima County:** District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Steven Wetzel worked on repairing a section of elk fence in Tampico. The area burned several years ago, and the jacks are burned out. This winter, the snow load tipped the fence over.





*Tipped over elk fence*



*Elk fence standing up*

## **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

### **Conservation Districts and WDFW Submit Grant for Fire Restoration and Prevention:**

District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and Private Lands Biologist Hulett worked with Yakima Conservation Districts on their proposal to fund vegetative fuel breaks and shrub-steppe restoration in the Blackrock Valley. This area is an important connective corridor for elk and shrub-steppe species but has been repeatedly impacted for large frequent fires. If accepted, the grant will provide a minimum of \$50,000 to fund greenstrip fuel breaks and sage-steppe habitat restoration on private lands.

**Solar Project Reviews:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra and Habitat Biologist Ritter met with project representatives at multiple proposed solar sites in Benton County. These projects were early in siting considerations and potential wildlife impacts and mitigation topics were discussed.

## **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Wenas Natural Resource Technician Hiring and Preparation:** Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes continued to work on the recruitment process for filling two vacant Natural Resource Technician positions. Assistant Manager Taylor and Hughes conducted interviews of qualified applicants. We are hoping to have both positions filled and staff members starting by the beginning of April. An all-staff meeting was conducted on the Wenas to discuss spring workload and the projects the technicians will be starting out on. Taylor and Hughes have been working together on lining out everything for the spring workload, which will include residual spraying, spraying on habitat projects, fencing to be installed and checked, signing, Bonneville Power Administration monitoring, and a whole lot more.

## **REGION 6**

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

## **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program Survey:** Each year Department of Fish and Wildlife crew members (Biologists Evenson, Hamer, and Murphie) conduct a survey of wintering waterfowl (emphasis on sea ducks), marine birds, and marine mammals throughout the inland marine waters of Washington. These crew members fly more than 4,000 miles in December and January, sometimes into February. Observers tally what they see (species, count, and time) within a 50-meter strip on both sides of the aircraft, as they fly along 200 feet above the water at 85 knots (about 100mph). This survey has been completed for the season. The data is currently in error checking and management phases.



**Oregon Spotted Frog Surveys:** District 11 is fully booked conducting the annual spotted frog surveys. The season got off to an early start in mid-February with warm, wet weather only to be put on hold (by frogs) over the last 10 days due to unseasonably cold dry weather. The district normally does two surveys per site but will have to add a third and possibly fourth survey due to the weather disruption, stall of eggs, and the current research project that requires a complete and thorough census of each active site. Tirhi and volunteers Terry and Bartley did two surveys of the two Salmon Creek sites and one survey of three Fishpond Creek Sites. Egg masses did experience some freezer burns (top egg jelly) with the temperatures plummeting. The increased wet, warm weather this week and next should bring welcomed relief to all amphibians and spotted frogs are expected to resume egg mass deposition (ovipositioning) in quantities.



*Oregon spotted frog egg cluster (e.g., multiple egg masses) laid in their preferred habitat = shallow, sun exposed, still water wetlands. Salmon Creek, Thurston County*



*Oregon spotted frog egg mass fully exposed and having freeze damage due to low water levels combined with freezing temperatures. Salmon Creek, Thurston County*

**Wolf Monitoring:** Biologist Tirhi and volunteer Terry spent two days visiting deployed wolf monitoring trail cameras in order to change batteries and SD cards. The first day was an attempt to get to a remote camera off Highway 410 deployed in the fall using the new tracked ATV. Unfortunately, timber logging on the U.S. Forest Service access road had muddied the road and Tirhi's truck got stuck. Fortunately, the winch on the quad was helpful in getting the truck out (mostly using power from the truck) and getting the ATV trailer turned around. The second outing onto industrial forestlands was more successful with three cameras being changed out.



A fourth had mysteriously been knocked out of the tree (strap cut), the back security attachment broke and the window broken but the camera was not stolen. Strange!



*Volunteer Terry positioning the tracked ATV to remove a work truck stuck on muddied forest service road*

### **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Access team members continue to prepare sites for the upcoming lowland lake season opener. They performed vegetation maintenance, aligned, and reset parking stops at North Bay. Barrier rocks were also placed at a few locations to deter trespassing and access to closed areas.



*Barrier rocks installed*





**Thurston County:** Summit Lake team members Freimund and Walker spent a couple hours cleaning around the Lacey Construction Shop in an effort to show appreciation for all of the support they provide the Water Access Team.

*Before*



*After*



*Before*

*Lacey shop*

*After*



**Other Work Performed:** Access staff members were assisted by Enforcement with disposal of another abandoned boat on WDFW property in Mason County.



### **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Saint Martin's Campus Habitat Conservation Plan:** Biologist Tirhi reviewed and provided comments to the draft Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for future use and development of the Saint Martin's campus in Tumwater, Thurston County. WDFW thanks Saint Martin's for considering the impacts to listed Mazama pocket gophers in the vision for the future of the campus.

### **Providing Education and Outreach**

**General Wildlife Inquiries:** Biologist Murphie responded to inquiries received by phone or email related to deer, Olympic goat hunting, Olympic elk hunting, bear hunting, osprey, and Western pond turtles.

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

**Olympic Elk Herd Draft Plan:** Biologist Murphie compiled a new draft plan and sent it to Regional Program Manager Calkins for comment.

**Olympic Mountain Goat Removal Project:** Biologist Murphie attended a multi-agency meeting to discuss details of 2022 efforts to remove goats from the Olympics.

**Aircraft Safety Instructor Prep:** Two courses are coming up in April. Biologist Murphie has been spending time on preparing the presentation for this course.

**Aircraft Safety Training:** Biologist Murphie completed the A-100 online course. This is the basic aircraft safety course given by the Department of Interior.

**Budget and Inventory Issues:** Program Manager Calkins, Biologist Cook, and former Wildlife Area Manager Lowery worked together to resolve a long outstanding inventory issue and making adjustments to correct a large budget issue. Many thanks to Nelson in the budget office and Harlow for their patience and help working through these issues.