

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

November 1 to 15, 2022

## **REGION 2**

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

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**



*Ram killed in a vehicle collision along HWY 97A* — Photo by J. Eilers

**Bighorn Sheep Mortalities:** Within the past month-and-a-half, there have been four bighorn sheep ram mortalities from vehicular collisions along Highway 97A, between Wenatchee and Chelan. Washington Department of Transportation (DOT) has road-side signs alerting vehicles of high sheep abundance along roads this time of year. Biologists urge drivers to proceed with extra caution along Highway 97A now and through the winter.

The skull and horns of the deceased rams were collected and pinned. For each head, biologists recorded horn measurements, estimated age, and performed a nasal swab to monitor for diseases of concern, such as *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (M. ovi). These ram skulls will be donated to the Wenatchee Sportsman's Association where they will be auctioned to the public. The proceeds from this auction will be used for conservation of Washington bighorn sheep.

**Career Development:** Biologists Jeffreys and Eilers attended the 2022 National Wildlife Society Conference in Spokane. Biologists attended a variety of presentations to learn about current wildlife research across North America and advancements in wildlife monitoring methods and technologies. Biologists also participated in a workshop to learn a new method of analyzing wildlife GPS movement data with a low sample size and anticipate applying this knowledge to bighorn rams and mountain goats collared in the Lake Chelan Basin early next year.

**Pygmy Rabbit Reintroduction:** Lands Operations Manager Finger set up a meeting with Bureau of Reclamation Natural Resources Supervisor Doolittle to discuss the potential for reintroducing

pygmy rabbits into the Black Rock Coulee area. This area is currently a focus of a wetland restoration effort to restore Artesian and Black Lakes to seasonal wetlands by restoring the shallow aquifer by delivering water from the East Low Canal to the lake beds. Reclamation was supportive of the concept and offered to assist in any way they could.



*It was a winter wonderland at the Shady Pass grouse barrel* — Photo by J. Eilers

**Forest Grouse:** Biologists Jeffreys and Eilers collected grouse wing samples from the four grouse barrels around Chelan County. Hunters use these barrels to deposit one wing and tail of each harvested grouse, which then allows biologists to identify the age and species of harvested grouse and provides a means of monitoring harvest and population trends. The locations of the grouse barrels can be found by on the [WDFW website](#).

**Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Ring-necked Pheasants:** Biologists Eilers and Jeffreys and Wildlife Area Manager Ron Fox released ring-necked pheasants at Chelan Butte Wildlife Area (WLA) and Swakane Wildlife Area. As part of the Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program, rooster pheasants are released in these wildlife areas and others across central and eastern Washington to increase hunt opportunity for upland game bird hunters.



*Ring-necked pheasants being loaded into work trucks*



*Ring-necked pheasants being released at Chelan Butte Wildlife Area* — Photos by volunteers Pam and John Eilers

### **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Bird Release:** Biologists Morris and Cook picked up pheasants and transported them to the Chiliwist Wildlife Area where they released some and transferred the rest to Biologist Heinlen to release in other area.



*Biologist Morris releasing pheasants on the Chiliwist Wildlife Area*

**Hunter Access:** Biologist Morris checked signs on hunter access properties and checked on numerous other hunter access properties during the general rifle season to ensure things were no issues.

**Recreation and Conservation Office Boat Facilities Program:** Lands Operations Manager Finger presented the Vernita Bridge planning project to the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) panel as a dry run to receive feedback from the panel on where improvements can be made. Conceptual design of the Vernita Bridge Water Access redevelopment. The site currently has no infrastructure and widespread impacts are occurring.



*Due to power loading boats, a cobble bar has developed, which users must learn to avoid or potentially experience damage to their boats* — Photo by a local fishing guide

**Land Boundaries:** Natural Resource Worker Connor Clifford drove boundary lines around the wildlife area to improve signage dictating where lands begin and end for more informed means of access.



**Unconfirmed Wolf Sighting:** Specialist Heilhecker documented an unconfirmed wolf sighting near Brewster. The reporting party gave a description of the animal. He was not able to get a photograph. Specialist Heilhecker explained that the sighting occurred nearby, but outside of any known wolf territories. However, this is also the time of year when wolves disperse and could pass through anywhere in Okanogan County. The reporting party had no concerns regarding the sighting.

### **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Habitat Plots:** Biologist Morris picked up plants in preparation for dormant planting this fall. Morris, Biologist Cook, and Biologist Braaten will use the trees and shrubs Morris picked up to create habitat for upland game and non-game wildlife on private lands in Grant and Douglas counties.

**Grant County Mosquito Control:** Lands Operations Manager Finger led an annual meeting between WDFW staff members Assistant District Biologist Clements, Northern Leopard Frog Specialist Grabowski, and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson; Grant County Mosquito Control (GCMC) personnel; and Bureau of Reclamation, who was not present at this time. Most of the meeting involved discussion around the Laguna area of Moses Lake, which is a northern leopard frog “red zone”, meaning that trap counts must reach a relatively high level before adulticide applications will be approved per the Mosquito Control Integrated Pest Management developed between WDFW and GCMC. GCMC would like to see the threshold numbers reduced because they are struggling to keep up with control around the Laguna area. A threshold adjustment may be a heavy lift and we may be able to work with GCMC on vegetation management to improve their effectiveness with larvicides.

**Frenchman Regulated Access Area Plug Planting:** Assistant Manager Mcpherson, Specialist Walker, and Natural Resource Worker Clifford planted 1,800 plugs to enhance native vegetation within the TD-1 project. Great Basin wild rye, needle and thread, and Indian rice grass were

planted in areas of recent soil disturbance or low plant density. These efforts will help boost the density of native vegetation and increase soil stability.



*Indian rice grass plugs* — Photo by R. Walker

**Providing Education and Outreach**



*First slide of presentation, featuring three mammal species native to northcentral Washington and Chelan County: mountain goat, wolverine, and mule deer*

**Community Outreach and Class Presentation:** Biologist Jeffreys visited the Wenatchee Valley Community College campus to give a presentation on the mammals of northcentral Washington

to the Wenatchee Naturalist course taught by Susan Ballinger. Biologist Jeffrey introduced many of the medium to large mammals present in our area and discussed identification, life history, population status and threats, and current WDFW conservation, research, and wildlife management efforts.



*Biologist Morris at the Lind-Ritzville Career Showcase in Othello*

**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Career Showcase:** Biologist Morris participated in the Lind-Ritzville career showcase at Othello High School and spoke with approximately 100 students about different career opportunities with the WDFW and what the departments' objective were. Morris also shared his experiences being a biologist, why he chose this career, and what students need to do to prepare for a career with WDFW.

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

**Range Rider Management:** Specialist Heilhecker met with a contracted range rider to collect equipment loaned out for the season. The range rider returned trail cameras and two InReach devices. Specialist Heilhecker took photos of the InReach devices and sent the information to HQ staff members to include the devices on her inventory list.

**Meetings:** Biologists Cook and Morris and Supervisor Rickel attended the North Central Area Association of Conservation Districts meeting. Connections were made with Natural Resource

Conversation Service area staff members to better improve partner cooperation. Biologists were also able to give input on changes conservation districts would like to see with Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a federal Farm Bill program which can be used to install habitat improvements. Cook and Morris made greater connections with the local conservation district around work done on CRP.

## **Other**

**Training:** Wildlife Conflict staff members attended a Spillman Flex training.

**Wolf Advisory Group:** Specialist Heilhecker participated in a Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) planning meeting. This group helps shape policy direction for wolf management in Washington State. Heilhecker also met separately with the facilitator to give her perspective on WAG.

**Inter-Agency Coordination:** Specialist Heilhecker participated in a meeting regarding an WDFW agricultural lease and provided input.

**Mitigating Potential “Movi” Spread:** As of the early 1800s, there were an estimated 1.5 to 2 million bighorn sheep in North America. Today, less than 70,000 remain. Overhunting, habitat loss and, most significantly, the spread of the ‘Movi’ from domestic sheep to wild herds led to the extirpation of bighorns from Washington by the mid-1920s. It is thanks to reintroduction efforts by hunting and conservation organizations and state game managers that our state once again has this native sheep, but the threat of disease still looms over the long-term success of the bighorn restoration efforts.

Bighorn sheep are highly susceptible to respiratory disease. Pneumonia outbreaks, or Movi, contributed to the historical extinction of bighorn sheep in Washington and continue to take a toll on reintroduced populations. The pathogen most closely associated with pneumonia in bighorns is not native to North America, and thus bighorns have not had evolutionary time to adapt to it.

Movi is the short name for *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, which is a bacteria that infects domestic sheep and domestic goats worldwide. Wildlife health researchers across the west have found that pneumonia in bighorns is most often associated with Movi, although other bacteria typically take advantage of its presence and cause death. Movi in bighorn sheep can cause up to a 90% mortality rate in bighorn sheep lambs.

Movi is spread through direct nose to nose contact between animals, and aerosol transmission of respiratory droplets through the air. Domestic sheep can carry Movi, and it is usually accompanied by few or no signs of disease. However, wild sheep are not adapted to these bacteria and when exposed, often develop severe pneumonia and die. Following these outbreaks, some bighorn sheep become carriers of Movi. This can cause disease and death in lambs that prevents population recovery and can also be a threat to nearby uninfected herds.

In a perfect world, wildlife managers would like domestic animals raised in one geographical location, and bighorn sheep existing in a different geographical location. When there is overlap of bighorn sheep and domestic animals on the same landscape, excluding contact between the two



groups, becomes the main priority. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but providing a physical barrier, such as a fence, remains the best approach to preventing contact.

Fences designed for disease prevention have their own dilemmas. Erecting an eight-foot fence contains the domestic animals within the fence, but disease transmission can continue because animals can touch noses through the fence. How far can the “sneeze” particulates from a domestic animal and a bighorn sheep travel? About 12 feet. So, in addition to the eight-foot fence already accounting for direct contact, a second fence 12 feet away and at least four feet high must be built on the outside perimeter of the eight-foot fence, as illustrated in the photos below. This second fence ensures domestic animals have no physical contact with bighorn sheep and it lessens the likelihood of transmitting particulates through the air by sneezing.



To accomplish the goals of excluding domestic animals from bighorn sheep populations, WDFW collaborates with conservation groups focused on all thing’s bighorn sheep. These groups include Washington Wild Sheep Foundation, Idaho Wild Sheep Foundation, Asotin County Conservation District, Idaho Fish and Game, and the Bighorn Sheep Health Program. These collaborations will be vital in addressing wildlife management concerns regarding bighorn sheep conservation in the future.



*Sunrise from Conconully Road in Okanogan County* — Dupont



*Honey Lake on the Scotch Creek WLA* — Photo by C. Peterson



*Medina and White had an unexpected visitor watching them roll out the hose lay on the Colockum Wildlife Area — Photo by C. White*



*Smoky sunset above the Similkameen River* — Photo by Haug



*Sumac above Fish Lake Road on the Sinlahekin WLA* — Photo by Haug



*View near Baldy Pass on opening day of the general rifle season* — Photo by Haug



*Early morning on Driscoll Island* — Photo by Haug



*Sharp-shinned hawk near Tonasket, Okanogan County* — Photo by Haug



*Fall scenery at the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit* — Photo by Haug



*McAlester Mountain near South Pass, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area* — Photo by Haug





*Project Coordinator Gallie and Veterinarian Technician McCormick administer a vaccine to one of the Sagebrush Flats pygmy rabbits*



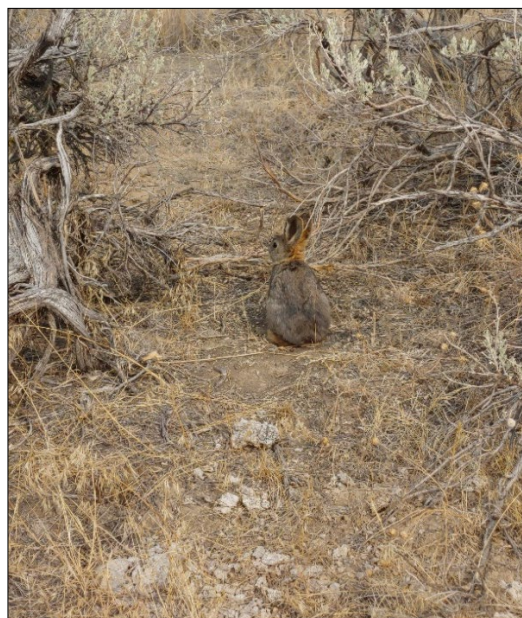
*(Left) The sun rises over quality pygmy rabbit habitat on a smoky morning – Photo by J. Morris  
(Right) Volunteers and staff members catch the sunrise over Beezley Hills as they walk to check traps for pygmy rabbits*

**Pygmy Rabbit Wild Capture Effort:** Over the last few weeks the pygmy rabbit crew had captured a total of 16 wild pygmy rabbits with the assistance of WDFW staff members, U.S Fish and Wildlife personnel, and volunteers. The purpose of capturing these wild pygmy rabbits was to vaccinate them against Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2). This disease is a highly contagious virus that infects wild and domestic rabbits. RHDV2 does not impact human health but is deadly to rabbits. The virus attacks the liver and leads to internal bleeding. RHDV2 has been found in Oregon and Idaho making it even more important to vaccinate Columbian Basin pygmy rabbits before RHDV2 reaches Washington. During the capture effort, it was exciting to see evidence of new burrow systems and high rabbit activity. More [information about RHDV2](#) and its potential impact.



*Trap efforts are successful! A pygmy rabbit waits to be released*

**Kit Capture Effort:** Kit captures for the 2022 season have ended. The last of the kits within the Beezley Hills and Sagebrush Flats breeding enclosures have been placed in the Rimrock and Palisades release pens. A grand total of 111 kits were produced this year! Currently, the release pens are looking promising. Rimrock release pens (39 kits) are showing new burrow systems and high rabbit activity. The Palisades release pens (35 kits) are on the slower side. The pygmy rabbits here have not yet dug new burrows but there are plenty of pellets in the area showing that they are hanging around.



*A kit observes its new home in the Rimrock release pen*



*Volunteers from Conservation Northwest release adult pygmy rabbits back into the Beezley Hills breeding enclosure. Check out the rabbit on the far-right leaping mid-air*

**New Rabbit Trapping Techniques:** In the hopes of increasing pygmy rabbit captures, the pygmy rabbit team has developed a new way to trap rabbits. It turns out that pygmy rabbits love the taste of apples. By placing apples within the traps, the team is hoping to capture more of these secretive creatures. So far, the method is working well!



*After munching on an apple, a pygmy rabbit washes its face*



*Biologist Soltysiak is welcomed to WDFW Region 2*

**New to the Team:** A new member of the pygmy rabbit team has arrived! Biologist Soltysiak joins the WDFW with years of experience working with rabbits. She is excited to bring her skills to the pygmy rabbit team.

We are always looking for new people to join our pygmy rabbit team. If you have an interest in helping on the project, [consider becoming a volunteer](#).

**Future Pygmy Rabbit Recovery Area Planning:** Coordinator Gallie and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biologist Veverka toured three potential Recovery Areas in South Central Washington. Due to habitat loss from wildfires, we are needing to identify and establish reintroduction sites in other portions of the former range within the Columbia Basin. The site visits with local WDFW, USFWS, and Department of Ecology (DOE) staff members were very informative.

We toured suitable habitat areas within the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge, Hanford Reach National Monument/Saddle Mtn, and the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Of the three areas visited, the National Monument site on Saddle Mountain looked the most promising.



*Biologist Morris added his tracks to the diverse wildlife tracks while posting signs on a Feel Free to Hunt property — Photo by J. Morris*

**Hunter Access:** Private Land Biologists Braaten, Cook and Morris have been very busy responding to hunter inquiries by phone and email about private land hunting opportunities, checking that signs are posted, correct contact numbers are listed, and reposting Hunter Access signs on properties enrolled in the program. Biologist Cook completed the contract renewal process for several Hunter Access agreements. Four contracts were completed and sent out for landowner signatures.

**Lewis Butte and Riser Lake Access Improvements:** Capital Asset Management Program completed the construction on the very popular Lewis Butte/Riser Lake access area on the Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area. The crew expanded parking, placed a new toilet facility, and improved portions of the loop trail around Riser Lake. A new kiosk is to be installed which will display information about mule deer habitat and protection during critical times of the year. WDFW received \$1,500 from the Okanogan Trails Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation to build and place the sign and information.



*Vehicles using the renovated Riser Lake access area* — Photo by Haug

**Boating Facilities Program Grants:** Lands Operations Manager Haug submitted two RCO applications to improve water access at Sidley Lake near Molson and Spectacle Lake near Loomis. These projects will improve parking, provide better access to the lake, improve toilet facilities, standardize signage and at the Spectacle site, and provide a boat loading ramp. The Sidley Lake project will have a boating float as well. Full applications and presentations are scheduled for early next year.

**Pearrygin State Park Winter Recreation:** Lands Operations Manager Haug and Methow WLA Manager Troyer met with staff members from Pearrygin State Park to discuss the potential inclusion of the Lloyd Ranch parking area and winter trails network into their Sno-Park program. There were several issues that needed addressing including signage, responsibilities, and resource protection. The proposal will be part of the district team discussion next month with a potential land use agreement to follow.

**Upper Methow Forest Restoration:** Forester Mize has been making regular trips this season to assess forest health conditions and lay out several units for commercial thinning. Currently, there are four units that have been cruised and flagged, totaling a combined 465 acres. There are two units in the Rendezvous Unit near Little Cub Creek that total 175 acres. There's an additional 80 acres at the Golden Doe Unit and another 210 acres on a heavily timbered, north facing slope in the Ramsey Creek area of the Methow Unit. Aside from laying out these units, Forester Mize was also instrumental in coordinating a field trip with agency staff members as well as a wildlife biologist from the Yakama Nation. At the end of the field trip everyone in attendance was generally in agreement that all units would greatly benefit from forest health treatments. The next steps will be conducting cultural resource surveys likely followed by a formal bidding process for the commercial thinning component.

**Methow Salmon Habitat Projects Tour:** Recently, local lands, habitats, fisheries, and wildlife staff members met in the field to review two fisheries enhancement projects recently completed by the Yakama Nation. Both projects were centered around reconnecting relic side channels to provide more diverse habitat for Endangered Species Act listed fish. One project is located at the confluence of the Methow River, and Alder Creek and the other is along the mainstem of the

Chewuch River. Additionally, the staff members also met with a technical team from Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation to review a proposed project at the M2 Floodplain along the Methow River.



*WDFW and Yakama Tribe staff members touring salmon project on the Golden Doe Unit —*  
Photo by Haug

**McLoughlin Falls West Acquisition Wildfire:** Manager Wehmeyer and Assistant Manager Riley spent time hiking through the McLoughlin Falls West Acquisition Wildfire Area to assess the need for seeding and dozer line rehab. On their hike they noticed many areas burnt fast and this allowed the plants to survive. Many had already started to resprout as seen in the photo. They even found a lupine that started to sprout up. Most of the rehab work will be on the dozer line that will include seeding and spending time in the area next spring treating any noxious weeds that may come up.



*Post-wildfire impacts and recovery on McLoughlin Falls West —* Photo by Wehmeyer

**Scotch Creek Riparian Enhancement:** Staff members constructed a new high fence enclosure within the project area and put in four new Beaver Dam Analogs (BDA). The limbs for weaving the new BDA's were cut and collected off the Chopaka unit and hauled back to the project area. The enclosure will be planted later this fall with native deciduous shrubs. Staff members also planted 200 water birch within the project area in an enclosure that was constructed the previous

week. The enclosure will prevent deer from browsing the newly planted birch, inhibiting their growth. Water birch provides an important winter food source for sharp-tail grouse when snow and ice impede the grouse from burrowing in the snow to find other food sources.



*Staff members Peterson and White collecting Douglas Fir slash for BDAs — Photo by Dupont*



*Water birch planted in riparian enclosure — Photo by Dupont*

**Strawberry Lake Enclosure Plantings:** Staff members planted 300 native trees and shrubs in an enclosure that was previously constructed near Strawberry Lake on the Chesaw Unit. The species planted include Water birch, Aspen, Chokecherry, Hawthorne, and Red Osier Dogwood. The planting will improve habitat diversity, forage for big game and wintering Sharp-tail grouse.





*(Left) Staff members Peterson and White constructing the enclosure near Strawberry Lake, on the Chesaw Unit — Photo by Oscar Medina (Right) Newly planted Aspen in the Strawberry Lake enclosure — Photo by C. White*

**Chesaw Unit Shrubsteppe Enhancement:** Staff members planted 330 forb plug seedlings and 100 native grass plugs to improve habitat quality, diversity, and nesting cover for upland bird species including the sharp-tail grouse on the Chesaw Unit.



*Rabbitbrush planting at the Chesaw Unit — Photo by Dupont*

**Douglas County State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement CRP:** This year’s State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) CRP sign up in Douglas County presented some challenges. Public notice of the sign up and how contracts were assigned was not clear, but very late in the federal fiscal year 14 contracts offers were provided in mid-August to Biologist Braaten for plans to be developed. The plans required a significant amount of work in a short timeframe but were completed by Braaten by Sept. 14, 2022. It was discovered recently that the Douglas County Farm Service Agency office failed to obtain landowner signatures on five of the 14 plans resulting in the loss of contracts and associated acreage by the impacted landowners. These challenges and others

have highlighted some of the difficulties WDFW is experiencing while working on the agreement with Natural Resources Conservation Service for this work.

**Habitat Plots:** Biologist Cook has checked on some supplemental food plots planted this past spring. There was not much success for the food plots. It is likely low germination of seed and high bird predation on the seed that are the two largest factors impacting the food plot success.

### **Providing Education and Outreach**

**Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Outreach and Education:** Okanogan High School Ecology Class came out to the Driscoll Island Unit for their annual field trip. During their visit they conducted water quality tests sampled and identified invertebrates. Assistant Manager Riley was able to help the students with identify the different invertebrates that they collected in their water samples. It was a beautiful day for the students to be outside and get some hands-on learning and field experience.



***(Left) Okanogan High School students sampling invertebrates in the Similkameen River; (Right) Students surveying and identifying plant species on Driscoll Island*** — Photos by Wehmeyer

Also, Tonasket Outreach Program spent a day at Driscoll Island. The students spent time identifying plants, and they did a scavenger hunt along with identifying invertebrates. These students ranged from kindergarten to 12th grade. Assistant Manager Riley and Manager Wehmeyer enjoyed the day helping the students learn new things and answering many questions about our jobs and the area.

**Charles and Mary Eder Agricultural Lease:** Staff members rented a large air compressor and blew out all the underground and above ground irrigation lines to prevent them from freezing over winter. Staff members also dug up a large eight-inch irrigation valve that was stuck in then closed position. Replacement of the valve will allow one of the two pumps to provide water to the entire system when open and isolate each pump to their own system when closed.



*Scotch Creek staff members in front of new access management gates* — Photos by Dupont

**Scotch Creek Access Management:** Scotch Creek WLA staff members installed new gates to limit unauthorized access to areas of the Tunk Creek and Similkameen-Chopaka Units. The gates were installed leading up to the general hunting season.

**Scotch Creek Infrastructure Maintenance:** Staff members ordered and spread two loads of gravel and moved a storage shed to the gravel area. Moving the storage shed will make maneuvering, parking vehicles, and snow plowing easier and more convenient around the Headquarters compound. Staff members also winterized Headquarters outbuildings, the office, and the office lawn irrigation system.



*Scotch Creek storage shed moved to its new location* — Photo by B. Dupont

**Carter Mountain Unit Carcass Issue:** Eight deer carcasses were discovered dumped next to the gate at the Pine Creek entrance of the Carter Mountain Wildlife Area near Tonasket between Oct. 17 and 24. The carcasses were removed and a “no dumping” sign was placed near the gate.





*Charles and Mary Eder Unit with Chopaka Mountain in the background* — Photo by B. Dupont



## **REGION 3**

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

#### **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Wenas Black Canyon Trough:** Assistant Manager Taylor extended and buried the drain hosing leading from the trough to allow for better drainage in the area. Additionally, the existing portion of the hose had to be reburied due to a vehicle driving off the green dot road and getting stuck in mud surrounding the drain hose.

#### **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Wenas Fall Elk Fence Check:** Assistant Manager Taylor, Specialist Frame, and Technician Stoltenow traveled along the elk fence throughout the wildlife area to check for and repair any holes in the fence and reinstall any downed breakaway fencing. Several holes were patched, with some being caused by wildlife and some cut by people. In addition, multiple breakaway fences in the bottom of canyons had to be picked up and retied to the supporting fence posts.

#### **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Wenas Habitat Work:** The Wenas Wildlife Area wrapped up all fall seeding and shrub planting. This year over 7,000 shrubs were planted throughout the Wenas. The species planted included Wyoming sagebrush, golden current, Antelope bitterbrush, woods rose, elderberry, Douglas hawthorne, and serviceberry. Most of this funding came from a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Grant. A focus point of the shrub planting was on Cleman Mountain in riparian and upland areas burned in the 2020 Evans Canyon fire. The team additionally planted shrubs within the Cow Canyon and Assistant Manager Taylor reseeded fire breaks that were created to hold the burn. Several riparian areas were also planted with shrubs along with quaking aspen cuttings. Assistant Manager Taylor has been lining out riparian restoration in McCabe, Black Canyon, and Cottonwood. All areas planted held primary key habitat for the Yakima elk herd, mule deer, upland birds, and diversity species. The areas are recovering and within time will hold the same value of habitat. Next fall over 10,000 shrubs will be planted within the Cow Canyon and Evans Canyon. The WLA team was grateful for additional help they received with plug plantings from the Forestry Team, Habitat Team, and Off-Road Vehicle Education Specialist Schrauth.

The upper fields of McCabe were drill seeded with native grasses by Assistant Manager Taylor. Technician Stoltenow helped haul in equipment to the area. This was the final area planned to be seeded in McCabe. The area will be aerially sprayed for another year and depending on grass development may be left alone and given time for establishment.



*Snow already covering shrub plantings in Black Canyon*



*Shrub planting near Umtanum Creek within the burn of the Cow Canyon Fire*

**Wenas Wildlife Area Umptanum Thinning:** Manager Hughes, Assistant Manager Taylor and Forester Nequette met with the interdisciplinary team for a site visit on the Umptanum Thinning Unit. This area burned in the Cow Canyon fire and is now being planned to be thinned January or February of 2023. The site visit was focused on an alternate plan to be able to thin within the riparian sections. Manager Hughes and Habitat Biologist Bartrand developed a plan for crown placement and a log barb to hold in sediment after the burn and redirect flow to stop the stream

from flooding the county road each year in spring. After assessing the habitat throughout the area Hughes came up with a plan with Nequette to bring back the areas that were historically shrub steppe by planting shrubs and a limited number of trees after the area is thinned. Planting is required in areas thinned if they burned prior to the thinning. Hughes is working on applying for a Fish Habitat Enhancement Hydraulic Permit for the woody debris placement and minor excavation to redirect flow. The field visit went well and the immediate team planning the project is addressing any comments currently before submitting the alternate plan.



*Umptanum Unit planned for thinning Winter of 2023*

**Colockum Forest Treatments:** Thinning work is now fully underway on the Colockum Wildlife Area South Fork Colockum Creek Project. Contractors have finished the pre-harvest road improvements for Unit 1 (Ingersoll Road), the harvester is at work and log trucks are now hauling logs off the unit. This is a typical WDFW habitat improvement project aimed at returning the stand to more normal tree densities to improve resiliency to fire, insects, and disease. This is the start of a large 958-acre project made up of six units. WDFW foresters are monitoring the work closely to ensure contractors follow the harvest prescription.





*Untreated forest stand in Unit 1 of the South Fork Colockum Creek Project*



*Recently thinned forest stand in Unit 1, South Fork Colockum Creek Project*

### Other

**Wenas Fence Post Cutting:** Assistant Manager Taylor, Technician Stoltenow, and Specialist Frame cut sucker pipe down to size to be used for fence posts in future elk fence and stock fence installations.

## **REGION 6**

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

#### **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Grouse Wing and Tail Collection Barrels:** Biologist Murphie placed grouse wing collection barrels at two locations in District 15. They are located at Simpson Mill 5 near Matlock and at the George Adams Hatchery north of Shelton. So far, 31 wings have been collected. Biologist Cent set up a new grouse wing/tail collection station at the Montesano office and continued checking stations every one-to-two weeks.

**Puget Sound Ecosystem Monitoring Program Image Review:** During the winter, a crew of WDFW biologists conduct aerial surveys of waterfowl and marine birds throughout the inland marine waters of Washington. Data collected includes species identification, count, and location of observation. As part of a trial effort to add more detail to these surveys, for example, age and sex ratios among observed seaducks, thousands of digital images were collected in 2022. Biologist Murphie and others are currently reviewing these images to assess the feasibility of this effort.

**Scoter Capture and Banding:** Biologist Murphie assisted the Waterfowl Section Team capturing surf and white-winged scoters near Bellingham this week. He reports that 31 ducks were captured when he was there. Some of these were fitted with GPS-tracking instruments, which will provide information on their movements. The rest were banded only. Biologist Cent also traveled to the Bellingham area and assisted the Waterfowl section with scoter captures.

**Dusky Goose Surveys:** Biologists Sundstrom, Novack, and Cent conducted dusky goose surveys throughout Grays Harbor and Pacific counties.

**Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly:** Biologist McMillan compiled, entered and quality checked 2022 Season Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly survey results for Dan Kelly and Eden Valley sites. The raw count data for Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) route was shared with CNLM staff member Sanders Freed.

Biologist McMillan has reviewed the most recent Department of Natural Resources proposed timber harvest and thinning and concurred along with other WDFW staff. The proposal is expected to increase the habitat footprint for Taylor's Checkerspot at this site.

Check out the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service documents on the [draft recovery plan for Taylor's checkerspot butterfly](#) and the [recovery implementation strategy](#).

#### **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

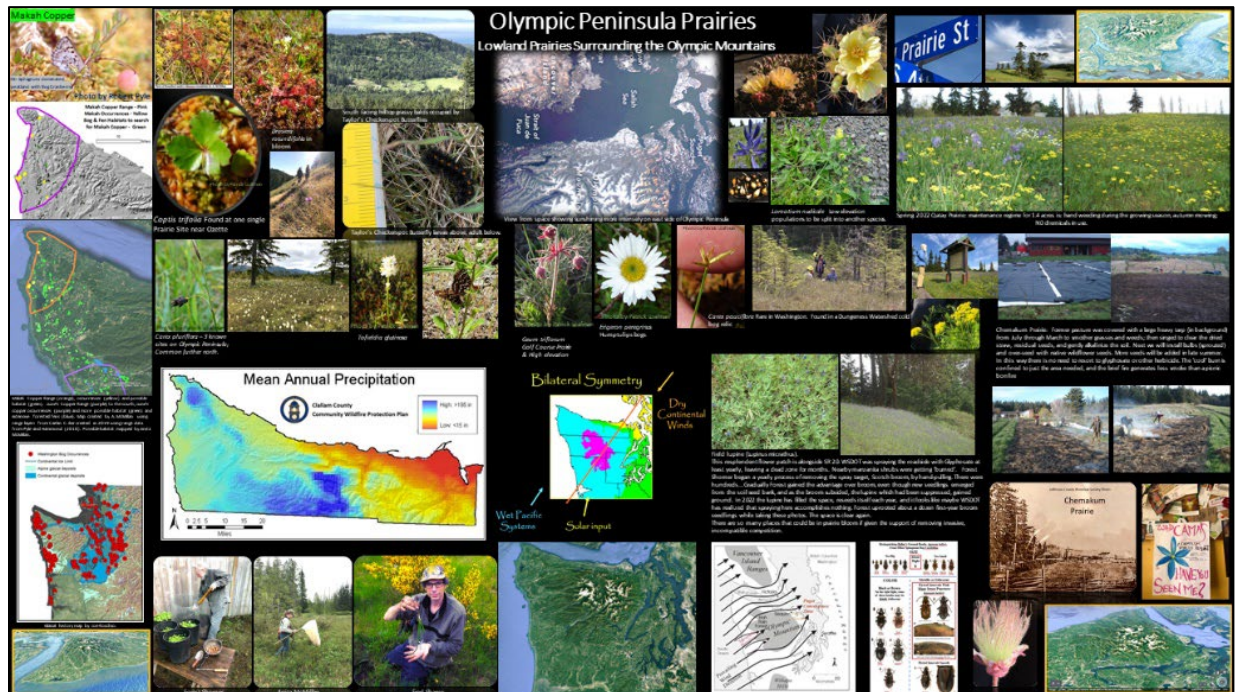
**Deer Permit Holder Interviews:** Biologist Novack conducted interviews of over 40 deer permit holders for various units within District 17. Most of the hunters contacted had never received a phone call of any kind from WDFW.

## Conserving Natural Landscapes

**Zella Schultz Unit:** Members of the Montesano and Skagit Weed Crews assisted Prairie Restoration Specialist Cook and Wildlife Area Manager Laushman in a multiday field effort at Protection Island, part of the North Olympic Wildlife Area. The Zella Schultz Unit on Protection Island is vital to marine birds, including a large nesting colony of rhinoceros auklets, which burned in the summer of 2021 and has since been overtaken by invasive plants. Staff members helped brush-cut senesced weeds, spray herbicide on new growth, and seed bare areas with native species.

**Davis Creek Unit:** Biologists Novack and Cent continued removing fencing on the newly purchased sections of the Davis Creek Unit. The former landowner has removed the last of his cattle and progress is being made toward more fully integrating the property into the Davis Creek unit.

**Prairie-Oak Conservation:** District Wildlife Biologist Anita McMillan co-authored the Poster Presentation: Olympic Peninsula Prairies – Lowland Prairies Surrounding the Olympic Mountains.





*Spraying herbicide near auklet colonies*



*Seeding native plant species on Protection Island*

Biologist McMillan and Forest Shomer encouraged Fred Sharpe to share his presentation: Geology of the Olympic Mountain Rain Shadow. The combination complemented ongoing networking that was further enhanced with attendance by Biologist McMillan and Fred Sharpe at the 2022 [Cascadia Prairie-Oak Partnership Conference Oak and Prairie Conservation](#) at a Crossroads: Setting a Path for Success. Nov. 7-10, 2022, Vancouver. The poster and oral presentation were part of the [program](#).

### **Providing Education and Outreach**

**General Wildlife Inquiries:** Responded to inquiries received by phone or email related to:

- Three inquiries about deer and deer hunting,
- an inquiry about elk and elk hunting,
- and two inquiries about waterfowl hunting.

### **Other**

**Employee Career Development:** Biologist Tirhi attended the weeklong The Wildlife Society (TWS) Annual Conference held Nov. 5 to the 11 in Spokane. Tirhi saw presentations on research and management ranging from frogs and turtles to deer, bear, cougar, and wolves. Tirhi also attended a four-hour workshop on better crafting presentations, something Tirhi does much of for public education or for submitting grants to obtain funds to manage wildlife or buy land for wildlife. Tirhi attended several equipment talks and demos on the newest technologies being applied to wildlife management including drones, artificial intelligence, electronic marking, and infrared. Attending professional, national conferences of the caliber of TWS makes for more informed and better wildlife managers for the Department and is money well spent. Biologist Cent also attended The Wildlife Society Conference in Spokane.