

Wildlife Program

Week of December 19, 2011

LANDS DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Addition: The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has completed the purchase of 40 acres on Ephrata Lake in Grant County south of Soap Lake. This project will enhance waterfowl habitat management opportunities and provide a migratory waterfowl resting site. A large portion of the property is within the riparian zone of Ephrata Lake, with the upland portion being native grassland, comprised of bunchgrasses, forbs, and shrubs. It is integral to a large, public land protection complex that includes additional lands owned by WDFW, Department of Natural Resources and Bureau of Reclamation. The acquisition and protection of this property provides important habitat for 1,000-3,000 waterfowl during months of open water. This project is being funded by Migratory Waterfowl funds and a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant. Authority for this acquisition is provided in the capital budget.

OUTREACH

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Wildlife Management

Web Connections: Jeff Heinlen's discovery of an extremely rare Ross' gull on Palmer Lake near Tonasket has generated a lot of interest and visitation to Okanogan County, by avid birders to catch a glimpse. Check out Omak's [KOMW radio interview](#) with Jeff, and the [Facebook entry](#)

Private Lands/Access

Corn Stubble Fields Program: Regions 2 and 3 have obtained hunting leases on harvested crop fields to attract ducks and geese, and provide places for hunters to hunt. These "Feel Free to Hunt" private parcels are mostly near George and Mesa. Additional communications with local community leaders is continuing, describing the value of these leases to hunters as places to hunt; but also to local landowners for the infusion some additional income from their land; and to the local business communities for sales to visiting hunters. See details at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/waterfowl/where_to_go.html and at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/private_lands/ and also at the [Facebook entry](#)

WildWatchcams-Sealcam: Chuck Gibilisco worked with contractors and WDFW biologists to fine-tune the newly-installed, ALEA-funded, solar powered remote control sealcam. On-going discussions with Cascadia Research will determine further cooperative harbor seal research objectives and public seal watching through the WildWatchcam Project. Early in the New Year the remotely accessible camera will be programmed to regularly run through a range of preset camera locations to check for harbor seal presence and activities. Motion sensors will also trigger a camera response to record images. Cascadia Research will be working with WDFW to

coordinate marine mammals monitoring with NOAA and Makah tribal biologists and students in a 2012 harbor seal project.

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Diversity Outcomes Publication: Staff in multiple sections of the Wildlife Diversity Division completed a technical publication on past shorebird investigations. The citation is: Buchanan, J.B., L.J. Salzer, G.J. Wiles, K. Brady, S.M. Desimone, and W. Michaelis. 2011. An investigation of Red Knot *Calidris canutus* spring migration at Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay, Washington. Wader Study Group Bulletin 118(2):97-104.

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Salmo and Diamond Wolf Packs Survey: Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Jay Shepherd accomplished a fixed-wing aircraft survey of the Salmo and Diamond Wolf Packs in northeastern Washington on Wednesday (12/21/2011) of this week with Pilot Dave Parker of Northern Air. Ten wolves from the Diamond Pack members were observed as well as three wolves in the Salmo Pack. Just one day earlier, on December 20th a radio-collared two-year-old female wolf from the Diamond Pack was reportedly trapped and killed by a lawful Idaho trapper. The GPS collar will be handed over to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game for retrieval by WDFW at a future date. This wolf was trapped approximately 300 yards east of the Idaho / Washington state line within Idaho.



Diamond Wolf Pack (9 wolves are in picture) as observed from a fixed-wing aircraft monitoring flight on 12/21/2011.

Wildlife Areas

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (SLWA)

U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Cooperative Projects – Dormaier Property

Enhancement: WLA Assistant Manager Mike Finch accompanied BLM biologist Glenn Paulson on a site visit to this BLM-owned property, in western Lincoln County south of Almira. There had been sage grouse present on this property at least as recently as the 1970's. BLM is interested in habitat restoration on the hay flats of this property along Wilson Creek. This would include inter-seeding the current alfalfa fields with grasses, and restoring old, weedy hay fields to grasslands. SLWA staff has completed several shrub-steppe habitat restoration and enhancement projects for BLM in the past, and is currently working on a similar project on SLWA, with assistance from a BLM cost-share grant. If BLM should desire assistance with field work at Dormaier, and dedicates funds to pay for this work, SLWA staff would be able to take on this work in 2012 and beyond. This would also help fund the six-month seasonal employment term of SLWA seasonal technician James Bauer. Looking at the big picture, this shrub-steppe habitat restoration may help strengthen connectivity corridors with sharp-tailed and sage grouse populations west of SLWA.



South end, Dormaier, restoration candidate



North end, Dormaier, inter-seeding candidate



Heron tracks, Dormaier, 12/22/11



Hay flat flood gate, Dormaier, 12/22/11

Wooten Wildlife Area: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Kari Dingman saw (and photographed) a cow moose along Cummings Creek.



A cow moose seen by Cummings Creek on the Wooten Wildlife Area.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Wildlife Recreation Notes

Northeast Washington: Bald Eagles and waterfowl have been readily observable this week due to low snow and ice conditions on the Pend Oreille and Columbia Rivers. The Snowy Owl is still in the valley bottom near Colville and is generally easy to find along with Rough-legged Hawks off of certain valley roads.

Winter Weather Conditions

Northeast Washington: A small storm system came through northeastern Washington on Tuesday night. Colville and surroundings received 2-4 inches of snow and remained mostly foggy or cloudy for the remainder of the week except for a clear day on Wednesday. Temperatures moderated to highs in the low thirties and lows in the teens.

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area: The air stagnation pattern that predominated the last three weeks broke on December 21 when the sun came out and burned off the heaviest fog and frost. Skies remained sunny on December 22. There has been no precipitation in the last week. Temperatures had been holding between 20 and 30 degrees, day and night, through December

20. As of December 21, nights have dropped to the low teens, and days are creeping into the low 30's. With the clearing weather a bit of wind has also come in, as much as 5-7 mph.

GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area



Z-Lake Aeration System Signage: Swanson Lakes WLA staff have worked with Mike Keegan, representative of the Spokane Fly Fishers (SFF) club, to draft a sign to be posted near Z-Lake off Telford Road, stating that the aeration of the lake has been a cooperative project between the SFF and WDFW. WLA Manager Juli Anderson also spoke with Julie Howard, a WDFW engineer out of Olympia, concerning the logistics of drafting and producing this sign. As of December 22, the first draft of the sign is as pictured.

REGION 2

None

REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Deer Survey: District Wildlife Biologist Mike Livingston compiled and summarized deer ground-based survey data. A total of 573 deer were classified in Franklin County. The ratios were 19 bucks and 59 fawns per 100 does. In comparison, aerial surveys conducted two weeks earlier, in the same general area, yielded a total count of 1,356 deer and ratios of 19 bucks and 67 fawns per 100 does. The freezing fog conditions during the survey reduced deer activity and observations until late in the morning each day (picture below).



Wildlife Area

Oak Creek Wildlife Area: Assistant Manager Berry, Technicians Kass and Medina, Laborer Gavin and a volunteer spent three more days repairing the elk fence on the Worrell Ranch Property, south of Cowiche Creek. The fence blew down when strong winds piled weeds against the fence (pictures below). Many posts broke off and rock jacks tipped over. The fence is now standing and will function through the winter. If the mild weather continues, additional repairs may be done this winter, otherwise all improvement will be completed in the spring.





REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Private Lands/Access

Swan conservation: Technician Otto and Deyo assisted University of Washington Biologist Mike Smith with his work on private lands in the Region. This project looks to evaluate swan use and forage effects on crops in the area. Technician Otto assisted technician Lapsansky on swan carcass collection. While patrolling for swans, Otto captured an injured Emperor goose and transferred bird to rehabilitation center for care.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Wildlife Management

2012-2014 Hunting Package Meeting with Co-managers: Wildlife Program Manager Russell Link met with Tribal Co-managers to review and finalize elements of the Department's three-year hunting package. Major changes to objectives and season structures are generally set on a three-year cycle with minor adjustments made during the off years. The process for developing a three-year hunting season package is an expanded version of the annual season-setting process. The exception is the migratory bird hunting seasons, which are all set on an annual cycle to coincide with federal season-setting processes.

Winter Conditions: Continued dry and mild.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Areas

Estuary MOA coordination: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins attended the monthly interagency coordination meeting. Most of the time was spent in discussion regarding the Chinook Wildlife Area project in Region 6. It appears that monitoring information that the MOA team has collected or compiled in cooperation with a consultant has shed a great deal of light on the constraints and opportunities on this site. WDFW engineers are nearing completion of a plan for the Abernathy project. Wildlife program staff have not yet seen the plan but we have few concerns regarding this site. Most of the Shillapoo discussion related to an upcoming meeting with the action agencies where the Corps will present their proposed approach the Feasibility Study. A draft literature review relating to floodplain lakes was also distributed.

Klickitat Wildlife Area

Soda Springs Unit BLM Parcel: A BLM parcel is a topic of discussion as WDFW works on its HCP and BLM develops its Resource Management Plan concurrently. BLM wants to issue any grazing permits that affect their ownership, yet there are practical considerations that will shape implementation. This parcel is part of a coordinated resource management plan that was developed for a sustainable grazing program in the Simcoe Mountains. Most of the BLM parcel is much too steep for cattle to navigate, but there are areas with gentle enough terrain to warrant an inspection for grazing impacts. The vegetation on the site is a mosaic of old growth ponderosa pine/Douglas fir forest, oak woodlands, and open grassland. The conifer forest has a fairly open canopy, allowing for an extensive appears to be rocky and shallow, and large expanses of the grassland seems to be mostly cheat grass and other less desirable species. There was indication of fencing. The forest seems to be in much better shape, with mostly native plants present. Manager Van Leuven found a western gray squirrel nest, heard a Douglas squirrel, and observed a varied thrush, as well as observed golden eagles nearby. The character of the conifer forest seemed appropriate for spotted owls but Van Leuven did not get a response when calling.

GOAL 2: Provide sustainable fishing, hunting and other wildlife-related recreational experiences.

Wildlife Management

Post Season Deer Surveys: Biologist Holman and Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven conducted a post-season deer survey flight over portions of GMU 388 (Grayback). Biologist Anderson provided flight-following for the survey. Mild winter weather and lack of snow cover made survey conditions less than ideal. In spite of the mediocre conditions, approximately 472 wintering deer were observed on the flight. Buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios will be calculated and summarized in future reports.

Biologists Holman and Stephens conducted a ground-based post-season deer survey in portions of GMU 382 (East Klickitat). Similar to the conditions mentioned above, the East Klickitat GMU is almost entirely snow free and deer populations are scattered. Approximately 75 deer were observed during the effort. Buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios will be calculated and summarized in future reports.

Biologist Anderson also met with a volunteer in White Salmon to provide them maps and instructions for assisting WDFW with deer surveys in 578 until the end of the month.

GOAL 3: Use sound business practices, deliver high-quality customer service.

Wildlife Areas

Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area:

Budget: Program Manager Jonker and Wildlife Area Manager Calkins met with Section Manager Dahmer by video conference to review a detailed proposal to enhance the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area Budget. The reasoning behind the proposal and meeting was to provide a reasonable financial investment to support technician time and work on Wildlife Area Projects. Providing goods and services funding will allow us to begin to make meaningful progress on weed control, forage maintenance/enhancement, addressing infrastructure related resource issues, and public access management.

Cowlitz Wildlife Area:

Kosmos North Field Access Maintenance: The vehicle access to the North Field at Kosmos had become muddy and rutted. This is a field access intended for summer entry but has been seeing more activity later in the year from the public. Hunters will park at this gate from the release of the first pheasant to the closing days of the late deer and elk season. CWA staff placed 3” inch rock to harden the access road and prevent further degradation of the site.

Other

Vehicle Accident: Technician Boylan was involved in a two car non injury accident shortly after leaving the office on 12/22. Boylan was coming to a stop at the intersection and the WDGW truck was struck by another vehicle making a right hand turn. Boylan was not at fault and the other driver stated that sun glare affected his vision causing him to cross too far across the street. The only damage we can find is a broken hubcap on the vehicle Boylan was driving. Wildlife Area Manager Calkins reviewed reports and submitted them to the safety and risk management office.

Winter Conditions:

D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:

Past Weather: November temperatures were below normal and precipitation was slightly above average. Snow accumulated in mid and low elevations early in the month but was later melted off by a major warm rainstorm. The month of December has been unusually dry but temperatures have been below normal.

Short-Term Forecast: Temperatures are expected to be warmer over the next week with moderate precipitation; a more normal pattern. Little snow is expected below 3,000 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks both suggest temperatures in the normal range and precipitation amounts above normal.

Long-Term Forecast: The longer term outlook maps suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter, but it appears now that spring may be more moderate than previously forecasted.

Habitat: Lower elevation areas currently have little snow cover making for reasonable forage availability. Use of grasses and forbs on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area has been light to date and only minimal use of shrubs has been noted.

Snow Depths: Areas below 3,000 feet remain mostly snow free. Snowpack is below average. See attached spreadsheet for detailed information. (MSH_Sno-Depth.pdf).

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. On December 5, 2011 a total of 116 elk were present in the mudflow unit monitoring area, which is below levels that would raise concerns.

Animal Condition: No reports to date of animals in poor condition that can be attributed to winter conditions. Animals observed to date appear to be in good condition.

Mortality: None to report.

Public Contacts: None to report related to winter conditions.

The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area lying East of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30 to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

District 9: Winter Conditions

Past Weather: Precipitation in the South Cascades continues on a pace to be one of the driest Decembers on record. Snowpack is 60% of normal. Average temperatures have fallen this week but it appears that we will go into 2012 with no severe winters conditions to report.

Winter Severity: The Klickitat Wildlife Area is mostly snow-free and forage habitat available. There is no concern for the current severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. The eastern portions of Klickitat County have had no snow accumulation and deer are in good condition.

Habitat: Habitat is open and forage habitat continues to be available throughout District 9.

Animal Concentrations: Biologists conducted deer surveys in Klickitat County this week and deer were not seen in concentrations suggesting any winter stress.

Animal Condition: Deer and elk appear to be in good condition and no winter stress/mortality has been reported except for typical road kills.

Mortality: None documented this week.

Public Contacts: No concerns raised by the public this week.

REGION 6

None