

Wildlife Program

Week of November 28, 2011

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE



Wolf Plan Approved: After nearly five years of development, on December 3rd the Washington Wolf Conservation and Management Plan was unanimously adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Commission made some modifications to the plan that Wildlife Diversity staff will be incorporating. The new version, due to be available by late January, will be located on the web with CDs provided by request.

Adoption of the plan was a great example of teamwork (it took a village). We highly appreciate all that were involved in this important effort.



Great Blue Heron Management Recommendations:

Biologist Azerrad submitted the Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) Great Blue Heron Management Recommendations for review. This third review provides outside agencies, researchers, jurisdictions, non-profits, and members of the public an opportunity to review the draft. The three-week comment period will run until December 19th. After that, comments will be incorporated in preparation for a final policy review.

SCIENCE DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Western Gray Squirrel Habitat: Matt Vander Haegen met with Forestry and Fish and Wildlife Personnel from Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) to review timber harvests planned on the base for the period of 2012-2015 and to discuss maintaining quality habitat for the state-threatened western gray squirrel in timber harvest units. WDFW Science Division and JBLM will be working cooperatively over the next few years to assess forestry impacts on western gray squirrels.

Recent Publications:

Red Knot: Staff completed a report that investigates Red Knot *Calidris canutus* spring migration at Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay. Publication information is as follows: Buchanan, J.B., Salzer, L.J., Wiles, G.J., Brady, K., Desimone, S.M. & Michaelis, W. 2011. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 118(2): 97–104. The following is an abstract from the report:

Red Knots *Calidris canutus* that migrate along the Pacific Flyway during spring are believed to belong to the *roselaari* subspecies, and in coastal Washington, USA, these knots aggregate in numbers not exceeded elsewhere in the flyway south of Alaska. In May 2010, as part of a continuing effort to investigate knot migration, including an effort to develop an estimate of abundance, we searched the northern areas of Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay, Washington, from airboats for flagged Red Knots originating from Baja California Sur, Mexico. We observed Red Knots roosting on sand or dredge-spoil islands, on estuarine shorelines, and at primary foraging areas. Red Knots were observed roosting primarily at shoreline and island locations, including sites that would not be available to them during extreme high tides or during storm events. The peak abundance of Red Knots occurred on 8 May, when 5,665 were in Grays Harbor and 1,314 in Willapa Bay. We documented 157 individually-marked Red Knots including 154 from Guerrero Negro, Baja California Sur, Mexico, one from the Yukon–Kuskokwim River Estuary in western Alaska, one from Wrangel Island, Russia, and one from Golfo de Santa Clara, Gulf of California, Mexico. We found a significant positive correlation between the dates of first observation of 43 individuals observed in both 2009 and 2010 ($r_s = 0.42$, $P = 0.005$) and this may reflect different timing of individual or cohort movements. Space use by knots changed during the migration period, with early migrants generally using areas near shore and late-season migrants using areas farther from shore. We observed 15 hunting flights by Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* directed at Red Knots, but none of these was successful. Key subjects requiring additional investigation are identified.

Pocket Gopher: Gail Olson recently completed the WDFW Final Report on the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB)-funded Mazama pocket gopher occupancy modeling study. A copy of the report is available from the Wildlife Science Division in Olympia. The following is an abstract from the report:

PART I: Occupancy Modeling for the Mazama Pocket Gopher

This study used state-of-the-art methods to model site occupancy, within-site use, and detection probabilities of Mazama pocket gophers in Thurston and Pierce Counties. Data on pocket gopher presence (using mounds as indicators of presence) and a suite of habitat variables were collected from surveys of 41 sites in Spring 2008, and repeated on 40 sites in Fall 2008. Most sites ($n=33$) were on public lands including 24 sites on Joint Base Lewis McChord. Sites with low levels of Scots broom cover, shorter average vegetation, and soils containing fewer rock fragments (especially those 5.0-10.cm in size) tended to have higher occupancy probabilities. Within occupied sites, plot use was

higher when broom density was low, fall vegetation was taller and the soil was of a sandy-loam type. Detection probabilities were most strongly influenced by time of year, with surveys in September and October having six times greater detectability than March through May, and about double that of November surveys.

PART II: The Use of Mound Surveys to Index Pocket Gopher Abundance

This study investigated the relationship between pocket gopher mounds and abundance at two sites in Thurston County: the Olympia Airport and Wolf Haven International. Replicate square plots that were 25m on each side were established at each site in Spring and Fall 2008. All pocket gopher mounds located in each plot were mapped and subsequently live-trapped to determine their association with individual gophers. Overall, there was a positive relationship between the number of mounds and number of gophers, but the Airport had about three times more mounds per gopher than did Wolf Haven in both seasons. Both sites had about the same number of mounds per gophers across seasons within sites. An evaluation of the general utility of mound surveys as an index to pocket gopher abundance (including results from this study and those from other published studies) concluded that establishing a site-specific relationship between the two metrics is necessary. This is likely practical only on the most important sites for which the effort required to simultaneously estimate abundance and conduct mound counts is worthwhile. Otherwise, mound surveys should be restricted to use in establishing pocket gopher presence.

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

ArcGIS 10 Upgrade and WSDM Applications & Tools: Over the last few weeks, all WSDM tools, applications, and databases have been tested in preparation for migrating ArcSDE environment from 9.3 to 10. The core environment will be migrated by IT this weekend. Everything is expected to function normally on Monday as users return and use new environment. This will conclude completion of all migration from ArcGIS 9.3 to 10. Desktop ArcMap and ArcCatalog were migrated several months ago.

OUTREACH DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

WildWatchcams: Watchable Wildlife Section Manager Gibilisco met with Wolf Haven staff to discuss reactivation and possible expansion of the western bluebird cam located on a section of restored prairie lands managed by Wolf Haven. The bluebird cam serves as an educational component for recovery efforts of the Western bluebird and prairie restoration in the Puget

Sound. Staff members from Wolf Haven have indicated an interest in expansion of the project and placing a greater emphasis on prairie habitat and additional wildlife species.

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Logistics Coordination for Northeast Washington White-tailed Deer Research Project:

District Wildlife Program personnel including Scott Bendixen, Jay Shepherd, and Dana Base worked with Ungulate Research Biologist Woody Myers and University of Montana wildlife graduate student Charlie Henderson in planning and coordination activities for the new research project on white-tailed deer in northeastern Washington. This effort included meeting with the Colville Detachment of Wildlife Officers and a field tour of potential sites to deploy clover traps for deer.

Columbia Basin Mule Deer Project: Biologists Ferguson, Atamian, Livingston, Finger and Hoenes completed the Columbia Basin Mule Deer Surveys after five days of flying. The survey was just completed last Friday evening, so count numbers have yet to be combined in the coming weeks. However, it appears this year's deer distribution was more similar to 2009 than 2010 (big snow year) – with deer present in northern units, more scattered, and often found in smaller groups.





Bighorn Sheep Capture Effort: District Biologists Paul Wik and Mark Vekasy spent a good portion of the week working on bighorn sheep issues. On Monday, Mark spent half the day searching for an unmarked group of bighorn sheep along the Grande Ronde River for a scheduled capture on Tuesday. No sheep were located on Monday, but on Tuesday morning when the capture crew arrived, 17 sheep were on the river bar that was used for handling the captured sheep. On Tuesday, 5 bighorns were captured from the Asotin Herd and transferred to WSU for research purposes, and 7 sheep were captured in the Black Butte herd and fitted with radio collars as part of the Hells Canyon Initiative Research Project. This capture required more than usual logistical planning, with three states and multiple sensitive landowner issues involved. Thanks to Blue Mountains Wildlife Area staff for their critical assistance in this capture effort.

Wildlife Areas



Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) Grant Completion – Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area: Lincoln County Conservation District’s Elsa Jacobsen worked with Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Mike Finch, to confirm the completion of an ALEA grant to remove 6.5 miles of interior fencing and drop the steel T-posts (heavy corner braces were left standing). The last of the wire was removed this week by one contractor, and the second contractor also finished his work this week. Fence removal reduces potential fence collision mortality, for native grouse.

Welch unit of the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area – site where interior fence was removed in fall 2011.

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

Wildlife Management

Private Lands Biologist Dawn Davis followed-up with Contract Officer Ted Nelson on developing a Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH) cooperative agreement with the Rainwater Wildlife Area and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) and entered the project into CAPS for approval. The Rainwater Wildlife Area is approximately 11,000 acres located south of Dayton in Columbia County. Posting FFTH signs will assist fish and wildlife officers enforce wildlife area rules. Davis will follow-up with Jerry Middel (Rainwater and Wanaket Wildlife Areas Project Lead) next week (weather permitting) to tour the wildlife area and discuss sign placement.

Wildlife Areas



WT Wooten Wildlife Area – Campground Project: With the end of November on Wednesday, Dave Meisner and Robert Grijalva’s seasons of work have ended. They worked hard on the project and completed cementing in fire rings at all ten campgrounds on the Wooten Wildlife Area. Additionally, they did some clean-up work in the campgrounds, making many campsites easier to identify for the public. The next step in this project is installation of carsonite posts with identifying letters to

mark each campsite. Assistant Manager Dingman will be looking into costs for carsonite posts and will produce a map product which shows all ten campgrounds with their lettered campsites. Along with the posts marking each campsite, each campground will also have its own small Kiosk explaining wildlife area camping rules and other related information. *Picture: Dave Meisner and Robert Grijalva clear a fallen tree in campground #9 at the Wooten Wildlife Area.*

Winter Conditions

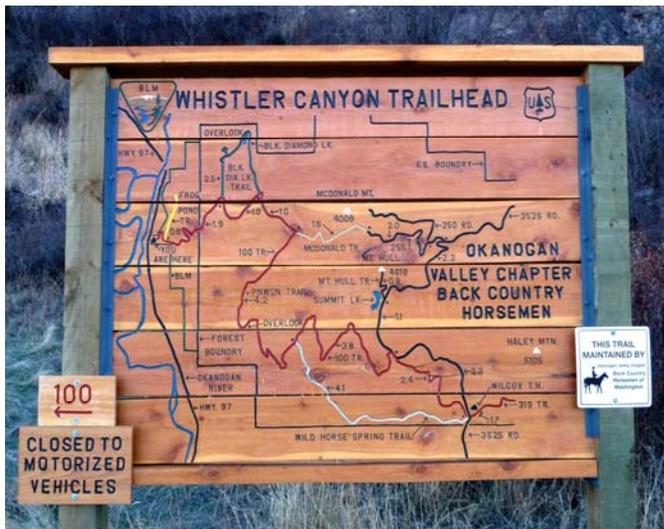
Northeast Washington: High pressure continued to dominate District 1 as snow levels from the last few weeks have receded. This negatively affected deer movement or at least tracking according to some hunters.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.



Job Shadow: A Reardan High School senior, Natalie Harper, tracked grouse with WSU Technician Debbie Ambrose on Wednesday, November 30. Ms. Harper is planning to attend Washington State University and study wildlife biology.

REGION 2



Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail: The U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Trail Association and the Okanogan Valley Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen have been working for the past few years to establish a section of the Pacific Northwest trail through Mt. Hull, termed the Whistler Canyon Trail. Through this effort, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have now created a series of trails throughout the Mt. Hull area. Improvements such as signs, fencing, trail construction, and improved access to the western trail head off Highway 97

occurred this summer. This trail system is designated non-motorized and is being promoted for hikers, hunters, horseback riders, mountain bikers, rock climbers, and other recreationists. The area around the west trail head off Hwy 97 and associated sections of the trail are heavily used by the Mt. Hull Bighorn sheep herd, and the degree to which trail activity may affect sheep behavior is unknown. Herd harassment by domestic dogs is an occasional issue that hopefully will not be exacerbated by the new trails.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Areas – Recreational Opportunities: Late archery white-tail deer hunting is still ongoing, however, late archery mule deer ended Nov 30. There are still opportunities to observe trumpeter and tundra swans as well as other wintering waterfowl and raptors.



REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Deer Surveys: District Wildlife Biologist Livingston participated in an aerial survey of Columbia Basin deer. This was the third year of a three year coordinated effort across Regions 1, 2, and 3 to assess Columbia Basin mule deer abundance and age and sex ratios using a sightability modeling technique. In Game Management Unit (GMU) 381 (East Franklin County), a total of 1,356 deer were observed. Ratios were 19 bucks and 67 fawns per 100 does. Data from all GMU's will be combined and population and variance estimates will be produced using the software program Aerial Survey in coming weeks.

Waterfowl Surveys: District Wildlife Biologist Livingston and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Wildlife Biologist Newsome conducted an aerial survey of waterfowl along the south Columbia and lower Snake Rivers. A large number of ducks were well distributed throughout the survey area. The vast majority of ducks observed were occupying the reserves and sanctuaries around the Umatilla and McNary Refuges, the lower Snake River and the Hanford Reach. Mallards were by far the most abundant, with widgeon being second in abundance. Data is still being transcribed from audio recorders and will be summarized and reported next week.

Wildlife Areas

Colockum Boat Ramp: Colockum staff continued coordinating with Lacey Shop regarding work on the Colockum Boat Ramp. All the barrier rock has been hauled and the excavation has been completed for the vault toilet, handicap ramp, and slope improvements to the boat ramp.

BPA Request for Additional Funds: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Confer Morris worked with BPA Contracting Officer's Representative L'Heureux to submit a request to the BPA Fish and Wildlife Committee. The request is for an in-year increase in budget to address restoration needs for the Sheep Company fire, which burned 571 acres of shrub-steppe this summer. The presentation went well and the Committee agreed with the need.

Cattle Guard Installation: Oak Creek Wildlife Area Manager Huffman and Assistant Manager Berry with assistance from Sunnyside Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Sak and Technician Medina installed a cattle guard on Cowiche Mill Road. The guard was installed where the elk fence crosses the road and will assist in keeping the elk above the fence and out of the orchards. Before the cattle guard was installed, elk were running through the drift fence that paralleled Cowiche Mill Road and could walk down the road to get below the fence. Yakima County provided dump trucks to haul away material, several truck loads of rock, along with warning signs and flaggers to direct traffic. The existing elk fence will be tied into the cattle guard, and a gate will be installed nearby to allow horses and pedestrians to go around the cattle guard.

Winter Conditions

Snow that fell before Thanksgiving has melted off at the lower and mid-elevations, and elk are still ranging across the landscape so feeding hasn't yet started. There are roughly 200 elk near the Joe Watt feed station, but natural forage is still available.

Temperatures have been in the 30's and 40's during the day, with lows in the 20's and 30's. For the upcoming week, temperatures are expected to be in the 30's during the day, with lows in the teens and 20's, and sunny to partly cloudy throughout the week.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation PAC Proposals: Biologist Kertson completed and submitted his Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation PAC proposal in support of elk surveys in Game Management Unit 460. Specifically, he is soliciting funds to conduct spring and fall surveys to quantify elk population characteristics and distribution.

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

Wildlife Areas

South Padilla Bay: Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Schuster, Lands Agent Kye Iris and Olympia WDFW Real Estate Staff participated in a conference call with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant management staff. The purpose of the call was to discuss the status of the South Padilla Bay Coastal Wetland Grant. This grant has remained in open status due to some confusion regarding restoration requirements. The conversation revolved around the status of the restoration of the site and grant compliance. It was determined that the grant had been amended to an acquisition only grant and is now considered complete and can be closed. Next steps for final reporting and the requirements for use of program income generated from agricultural leases will be forthcoming from U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Sandhill Cranes: Biologist Anderson met with USFWS biologists at Conboy National Wildlife Refuge to discuss the potential for summarizing over 15 years of breeding crane observational data into a couple of reports. The USFWS currently houses the data base and we are working to look at several factors influencing trends in pair success and survivability as it relates to banding data.

Wildlife Areas

Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area:

Winter Closure: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins posted signs to advise the public of the annual winter closure on the Mudflow Unit. This portion of the Wildlife Area is closed each year to protect our largest concentration of wintering elk from human disturbance.

Weed Management: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins coordinated with U.S. Forest Service Biologist Chandler on an application for Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Funding to control Hawkweed. The Forest Service will be the applicant on this proposal, which will train and utilize volunteers to survey for hawkweed and fund control efforts through Cowlitz County Weed Management. Through the project we hope to increase control efforts both on the Wildlife Area and the Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. We first noted mouse ear hawkweed two years ago and now recognize it as a major threat to elk winter range conditions as it provides little in the way of forage and crowds out and eliminates desirable plants.

Private Lands/Access

Wetland Reserve Program: Biologist Stephens and Habitat Biologist Fornes met with Biologist Maggi from NRCS. WDFW is partnering with NRCS on a Wetland Reserve Program outreach effort in the upper Chehalis watershed and the meeting was a brief overview for WDFW biologists of what the project will involve.

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

Wildlife Management

Area 2A Goose Season: The last week was quiet in Management Area 2A due to the break in the Hunting season, however hunting will resume on December 7th of this week. The first part of the season went well with the Vancouver, Woodland, and Cathlamet check station attendants checking 566 geese for 254 hunters at a harvest rate of 2.23 geese per hunter. A total of six Duskiees were harvested out of Management Area 2A, yet quotas were not reached in any zone. Hunters can expect all zones to be open when the hunt resumes on Wednesday, December 7th. Due to the break in hunt, it is recommended that participants revisit the migratory waterfowl season pamphlet for regulations, requirements, and restrictions before hunting on Wednesday. First time participants this season should also be sure to review the contents of the pamphlet. Hunters should be aware that the number of allowable cackling geese has increased to three birds per daily bag limit. Allowable hunting hours remain the same from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and the Vancouver, Woodland, and Cathlamet check stations will continue to operate from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm on hunt days.

Canada Goose Population Surveys: In cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Region 5 Wildlife Biologists conducted surveys for Canada geese in selected areas of southwest Washington. The survey is focused on dusky Canada geese and involves locating flocks of duskiees and examining the birds for neck collars. Population information generated via wintering observations in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon are compiled with data generated from aerial surveys of the geese on their breeding grounds in the Copper River delta of Alaska to develop a robust population estimate.

Biologists Holman and George conducted the survey in the Woodland Bottoms and Kalama River areas of Cowlitz County. Approximately 2,500 geese were observed including cackling, Taverner's, lesser, western, and greater white-fronted geese; however, no duskiees were located.

Biologist Stephens conducted a Canada goose collar survey in Wahkiakum and northern Cowlitz counties. Nearly 2,300 cackling Canada geese were counted, 1,100 of those were examined for neck collars and 2 collars were observed. No dusky Canada geese were detected during the survey. A collared Tundra swan was observed in Grays Bay. The collar code was reported to USGS and it was determined that the swan was captured and collared as an adult female near King Salmon on the Alaska Peninsula during July of 2007.

2012-14 Three-Year Big Game Season Setting Effort: Regional Wildlife Program Manager Jonker along with Regional Wildlife Biologists met twice with Game Management Staff from Olympia to discuss season setting efforts for the next 3-year package. The primary topic of discussion focused around cougar management both at the Statewide and Regional level. Other topics included minor changes to permit levels for both deer and elk as well as additional Master Hunter opportunities designed to address situations of agricultural damage.

Private Lands/Access

Hunting Access: Biologist Stephens accompanied Officer Chamberlin during a patrol of DNR and Pope Resources land on the south side of the Swift Reservoir. Biologist Stephens is working with private landowners in the area to maintain public access to several thousand acres of DNR land including a trailhead to Mitchell Peak.

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

Wildlife Management

Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study –Body Condition: Regional Wildlife Program and Customer Service Staff spoke with many individuals who have drawn antlerless elk tags and have been requested to participate in collecting samples for the St. Helens Elk Study. Collection volume has increased recently with high-success rate hunts occurring in GMUs 550 Coweeman, 524 Margaret, 556 Toutle, and 554 Yale. Organ collections continue through December 15th.

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area:

Historic Properties Management Plan: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins coordinated review of the draft phase 1 document with BPA archaeological staff and delivered comments to the contractor. The plan is nearing completion and provides a well written and concise inventory of historic sites within the Wildlife Area and their context within the larger Vancouver Lowlands Archaeological District. Phase 2 will follow at a later date and will deal with potential impacts associated with proposed management and how best to mitigate any potential effects.

Winter Conditions:

D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:

Past Weather: Late fall conditions can be a significant factor in overall winter severity and its influence on big game. 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.

Short-Term Forecast: Predominately dry over the next week with any snowfall above 3000 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks suggest below normal temperatures and normal precipitation in the South Cascades.

Long-Term Forecast: The longer term outlook maps suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter and into early spring.

Habitat: Growing conditions were good over the spring and summer, which should have produced above average forage growth. This is consistent with general observations on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area and most of the newer forage enhancement sites are showing a marked improvement in production.

Snow Depths: Areas below 3000 feet are mostly snow free. Snowpack is slightly above average.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. The first winter survey of the monitoring area on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area is scheduled for next week.

Animal Condition: No reports to date of animals in poor condition that can be attributed to winter severity or lack of forage.

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: Weather in the South Cascades is typical for this time of year and the snowpack is considered moderate at higher elevations. We are in a low precipitation period with temperatures above normal during the day. The trend calls for mild weather in the next couple weeks and no expected storms are predicted that would stress big game populations at this time.

Winter Severity: The Klickitat Wildlife Area is snow-free and forage habitat is available. There is little 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 has increased for big game this past week.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations seen due to inclement conditions.

Animal Condition: Animals appear to be in good condition and no winter stress has been reported.

Mortality: None documented this week.

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

REGION 6

None.