

Wildlife Program

Week of August 13-19, 2012

LANDS DIVISION

South Willapa River Access Site: The Pacific County Anglers have developed a much needed parking lot at the South Willapa River Access Site in Pacific County. Under the Adopt and Access program they have also taken on the maintenance of the site. The Pacific County Anglers worked very hard starting with the planning and permit process to the site's construction, completion, and adoption. Brian Mitchell, Region 6 Access Manger, helped with the planning and design of the site and provided the sign standard and regulatory signs.



WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

USFWS Section 6 Acquisition Grants – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced awards for the non-traditional Endangered Species Grants this week. Even though the national grant funds were significantly reduced in 2012, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) received 25 percent of the total available Habitat Conservation Plan Acquisition grants funds, \$3.7 million to purchase another section of the Mountain View 4-O Ranch along the Grande Ronde River in Asotin County. Thurston County received \$750,000 to continue developing the South Puget Sound Prairie Habitat Conservation Plan.

Staff Coordination for Prairie HCP Preparation – Section Manager Bruce Thompson facilitated a work session among 10 staff in Wildlife Diversity and Science Divisions that are

preparing species status narratives and distribution maps as part of South Puget Sound Prairie Habitat Conservation Plan development by Thurston County. Preparation of drafts for 11 narratives is on track for delivery by the October 1, 2012 target date.

Butterfly Threat Response – Biologist Ann Potter responded to a reported herbicide application to the host plant for the Yuma skipper at the only known site in Washington, Sun Lakes State Park. The next nearest known location of this species is approximately 200 miles south in eastern Oregon. Yuma skipper is a Washington Species of Greatest Conservation Need and a state candidate for listing. The butterfly lays eggs and caterpillars develop on *Phragmites*, and Sun Lakes State Park supports native *Phragmites* (not the non-native, invasive form). Local lepidopterists reported the herbicide application to state officials and the national lepidopterist community. Biologist Potter coordinated with State Park’s stewards to determine what happened and report back to the group of concerned parties. Parks determined that the spray application was planned through an interagency group for controlling invasive aquatic plants. Strategies were developed jointly with Parks, WDFW, and private parties on how to proceed with impact assessment and address process issues that led to this action, which is a significant threat to the butterfly.



Native Phragmites treated with herbicide in rare butterfly habitat. David James photo.

Use of Habitat Connectivity Project Products: The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has used the montane species analysis results in the Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group (WHCWG) statewide connectivity analysis (WHCWG 2010) to build in a connectivity element in the forest plan for the Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forest. This includes measures to improve connectivity and adaptive management. Joanne Schuett Hames reviewed and commented on a draft paper regarding how the connectivity work is being incorporated into the forest plan. Jessica Gonzales, USFWS, reported that the Columbia Plateau connectivity analysis is getting lots of attention at high levels in the FWS as a case study for the "new" surrogate species management approach to landscape conservation.

WILDLIFE OUTREACH DIVISION

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

Citizen Science: Citizen Science coordinator Margaret Tudor received the Coastal America Partnership Award from Rebecca Blank, the Acting Secretary of Commerce of the United States Department of Commerce. The award recognized Tudor's Ocean Science education program that brought together a network of individuals and organizations, initiating outstanding field studies and stewardship experiences at local beaches that made significant contributions toward the restoration and protection of our Nation's coastal environment.

Citizen Science – Margaret Tudor, Chuck Gibilisco and Lauri Vigue met to identify new methods to keep the volunteer on-the-ground coordination in balance with the science portions of the Ecological Integrity Monitoring (EIM) at the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (SLWA). Successes and challenges identified in the first pilot Wildlife Area EIM project were analyzed and will be applied or modified for the upcoming Sinlahekin Wildlife Area EIM workshop and project launch later in September. Four wildlife areas will eventually participate in the pilot EIM, with citizen scientists serving as a key component in level II monitoring efforts.

REGION 1

Wolf Management

District 1

Gray Wolf Management: District Wildlife Biologist (DWB) Dana Base along with Wildlife Officers Dan Anderson and Don Weatherman responded to a reported cattle depredation in the Wedge on Washington state land (Department of Natural Resources) under cattle grazing lease by the Diamond M Ranch. A necropsy was conducted on a dead calf, photographs and notes taken, and reports prepared back at the office. DWB Base subsequently discussed the incident in a conference call with WDFW staff and others from cooperating agencies.

District 3

Gray Wolf: District Biologist Wik received one report of a wolf in the Dayton GMU during the week. The contact came from a hunter out scouting for elk that District Biologist Wik made contact with the previous week.

Assistant District Biologist Vekasy checked six trail camera placements for wolf activity and checked numerous road systems for other signs (tracks, scat). No new images of wolves were taken and no fresh sign of wolves was found along any of the trails or roads surveyed.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Areas

Water Development at Sherman Creek Wildlife Area (SCWA) — Natural Resource Technician 2 (NRT2) Jerry “Chris” Christensen and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager (WAAM) Daro Palmer installed a watering trough for wildlife at the SCWA headquarters. Another project made possible by the use of the Access tractor borrowed from Scott Young.



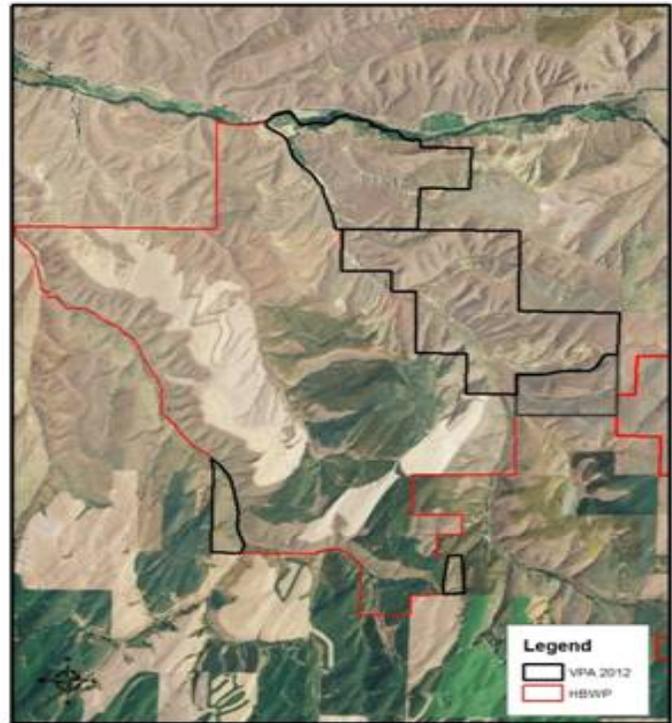
This new water trough has another trough along the backside for smaller animals.

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

Private Lands/Access

Access and Habitat Initiative: *Asotin/Garfield Counties.* Biologist Earl wrapped up a long series of landowner contacts. Earl worked hard to move the VPA program ahead in the pheasant focus portion of Garfield County. Earl spent several days, mostly outside regular business hours, meeting with landowners, their extended family, and legal groups to promote this program. Biologist Earl worked diligently with 31 landowners and was able to secure public access on

nine properties. These nine landowners combine to offer 9,213.75 acres of public access and 476.76 acres of habitat enhancements to Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and riparian forests. Several of the landowners who did not sign up, stated that it was “just bad timing” as harvest is now in full swing. In general, they hoped that WDFW would continue to offer this program in the future when they had more time to sit down and discuss the terms. *Walla Walla/Columbia Counties*. Davis followed up with three landowners with private lands in Columbia County interested in enrolling in the VPA program. Davis enrolled 1,847 ac into Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH) under the VPA access initiative and two additional landowners that adjoin this property switched a portion of their property from Hunting Only by Written Permission (HBWP) to FFTH, resulting in over 10,000 acres of public hunting access south of Starbuck between Smith Hollow and Kellogg Hollow. In addition, these cooperative agreements include more than one mile of river access along the Tucannon River. To date, Davis has enrolled 12 contracts into the VPA program totaling over 10,678 acres of public hunting access.



REGION 2

Wolves

District 6 Environmental Education: Biologist Fitkin and USFS biologist Rohrer co-taught a two-day carnivore field seminar for the North Cascades Institute, a nationally respected environmental education organization. The class focused on the ecology and management of lynx, grizzly bears, wolverines, and wolves and highlighted the ongoing projects on these species that we are actively involved with. In addition to providing an educational opportunity for adults, the tuition proceeds will be used to help support the Institute’s renowned youth programs.

District 7 Wolves: Wolf technician Spence expanded his routine search for wolves in Okanogan and Yakima Counties. He is currently spending time responding to reports with high probability while surveying those areas identified by WDFW staff as having had continued reports of wolf activity. We have roughly 600 trap nights of remote camera monitoring logged across the area with no wolves observed. Countless miles of driven survey routes have not turned up tracks or any other sign to date. Other than in those areas where we have known active packs (Teaway pack and the Lookout pack), he has not recovered evidence of an active pack in Regions 2 or 3.

It is generally acknowledged that wolves will make themselves known when they are established in an area and so far that has been the case in central Washington. The areas in Regions 2 & 3 where road density allows access usually has high use by the public, with those users producing a low level of reports. However, both regions have a significant amount of relatively undeveloped habitat that may harbor wolves and that we have not systematically surveyed to date. With the onset of fall and the increased activity associated with hunting, we expected an increase in reports of wolves as hunters enter the field. Technician Spence's time will be more focused on individual reports in the hopes of finding evidence of use.

District Biologists

District 5: Grant / Adams District - Rich Finger / Vacant

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Triploid Checkered Whiptail: Biologist Finger revisited the areas where triploid checkered whiptails were confirmed in 2010. The whiptails are occupying a fairly large piece of ground, though only seven detections were made. Habitats used are; parking lots (particularly around the barrier rock), late succession sagebrush stands with little understory, and riparian zones with dense willow.



Triploid checkered whiptail. The black dot in the lower right hand corner of the photograph is a small burrowed which the whiptail exited just before taking the picture. Many holes such as this occur at the base of the barrier rock which lines the entire parking area.

Inland Avian Predation Working Group: Biologist Finger attended a working group meeting at The Dalles on August 6 to learn more about the proposed plans to relocate Caspian terns. Biologist Finger attended a tour of Goose Island (Potholes Reservoir), Goose Island (Banks Lake), and Twinning Island (Banks Lake) to engage in discussions about the potential re-location of Caspian terns to alternate nesting islands in an effort to reduce depredation of endangered steelhead smolts. The current plan for Goose Island (Potholes Reservoir) is to use pier blocks, wooden posts, and yellow poly rope (oyster rope) to create a 10' by 10' grid of flagged rope to dissuade tern nesting. The recipient site at Goose Island (Banks Lake) will be treated with gravel (chip seal) to improve nesting habitat for terns. Depth of chip seal material is to be determined.



The group gathers around Pete Loschl (Oregon Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit) at Goose Island (Banks Lake) to look over aerial photographs which show locations of nesting gulls and terns.

District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen

Bat Monitoring: Biologist Fitkin and Wildlife Area Manager Tom McCoy surveyed the “bat houses” located on a WDFW conservation easement property to document use by Townsend’s big-eared bats. We documented 50 individuals (primarily mothers and young) in one of the houses. These buildings are part of a complex of old structures that serve as natal roost sites for one of Washington’s largest populations of this at risk species.



Roosting Townsend's big-eared bat group (left), bats on the wing (right).

District 7: Chelan / Douglas District – David Volsen / Jon Gallie

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Western Gray Squirrel: Biologist Gallie placed 37 hair-snag tubes in Chelan County to document current distribution of western gray squirrels. Eighteen sites were placed on the North Shore of Lake Chelan, with about half of them in continuous forest, while the remaining are in smaller strings of forest in canyons, and not large blocks of continuous habitat. These linear stringers of forest are continuous with habitat and squirrel populations in the Methow Valley. No detections of western gray squirrels have been reported along this section of the North Shore in 20 years.

The other two routes are in the Entiat Valley. These represent the southernmost blocks of forested habitat remaining from the fires of the last decades and are the forested stands closest to where known squirrels occur (based on recovered roadway mortalities). There are eight tube sites on Crum Canyon and 11 sites in Mud Canyon.

Species Recovery

Pygmy Rabbit Recovery - Penny Becker

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Husbandry of Enclosures and Monitoring of Released Kits: The final release of pygmy rabbit kits this breeding season was completed on July 23. Since May, 103 kits have been

released to the wild and we estimate that well over 150 kits were born in the enclosures. Research Scientist Becker, Biologist Eidson and graduate student DeMay spent time on Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area providing supplemental feed to the pygmy rabbits in the large enclosures and kits in the nursery area. DeMay returned to University of Idaho at the end of the week to attend classes and perform laboratory genetic work.

Presentation for Douglas County Commissioners: Research Scientist Becker and Wildlife Program Manager Monda gave an update on pygmy rabbit recovery and our plans to build another enclosure for holding rabbits to the Douglas County Commissioners.

Coordination for Spring 2013 Translocations: Becker spent time working on paperwork to gain final approval for translocations next year from the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission. Becker also contacted Bureau of Land Management in Oregon to check on the pygmy rabbit populations we took rabbits from in 2011 and discuss the possibility of another capture in the next one to two years.

Data Collection and Analyses: Becker and Eidson analyzed spatial data to determine cluster locations where rabbits have settled. These locations will be surveyed for characteristics that made these areas attractive to dispersing rabbits. We also began developing a population model using updated demographic and genetic inputs to gain more perspective on long term pygmy rabbit recovery.

Wildlife Areas

Wells Wildlife Area Complex –Dan Peterson / Ann Winters / Fidel Rios

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Fire Rehab: Biologists Dan Peterson and Ann Winters met with Jerry Benson and Mel Asher of BFI Inc, Research Scientist Mike Schroeder, Wildlife Area Manager Dale Swedberg, Biologist Eric Ellis (BLM), Biologist Jim McGee (Douglas PUD) to discuss restoration needs and techniques for the areas burned in the Foster Creek and Central Ferry Canyon fires. The use and timing of aerial seeding, drill seeding, straw bales, and erosion control products were the primary topics.

Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex – Greg Fitzgerald / Brian Cole

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

Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area: Wildlife Area Manager Fitzgerald checked the soil moisture in the planted food plots in cell seven in the Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area. The millet is up and growing, with ample soil moisture and warm weather, the millet should make seed. Volunteer millet and Smartweed are already setting seed.

After catching up from vacation the first half of August, Assistant Manager Cole retrieved the wheel tractor from the repair shop and put it into service mowing the weeds and tall vegetation in and around the Frenchman Ponds. Mowing the taller vegetation within the wetland cells will result in more open water when flooded later this fall and shatter the seed heads, making them available for dabbling ducks.



Millet Food Plot



Smartweed.

Private Lands - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski

Weekender Opportunities

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE): Private Lands Biologist Braaten completed 22 SAFE conservation plans for Farm Service Agency (FSA) the last few weeks. Private Lands Biologist Braaten also began the process of marking forb seeding areas for this fall. Private Lands Biologist Braaten also continues to work with landowners enrolled in SAFE on weed issues, seed mixes, etc. Private Lands Biologists Cotton and Wisniewski completed and sent SAFE plans to Foster Creek Conservation District (FCCD). All except for a handful of plans that are waiting for decisions from landowners or FSA have been completed and sent to FCCD. Private Lands Biologist Cotton and Kelli Bartholomew, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), met with two Grant county landowners to finalize plans for their SAFE contracts. Kelli will be completing the plans and sending them to Grant County FSA.

Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI): Assisted Kelli Bartholomew, NRCS, with ARC-GIS mapping of fences that have been marked by WDFW in north Douglas County recently. This will assist them in completing a SGI project with one of the landowners who will likely be required to mark additional fences.

REGION 3

None

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Wildlife Management

Pelagic Cormorant Nesting Survey: Biologist Cyra revisited and revised the data tables from this summer's Pelagic Cormorant Nesting survey in the Northern Puget Sound to incorporate later surveys and data provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey. It appears that this cliff nesting bird has moved away from many traditional nesting locations in favor of human-made structures including navigation aids and dock pilings.

Marine Bird Delectability Survey: Biologist Cyra continued transcriptions of delectability surveys flown late this last winter. Eight days of surveys were flown to compare observer differences, detection rate, identification differences, and observer platform impacts to the counts. Analysis of the digital images is still in the planning stages.



The construction crew for the Cherry Valley fish passage project began dredging the southern drainage ditch on the Cherry Valley Unit. Cleaning the ditch will increase the efficiency of flood water removal on the unit and will allow fish a way out that are brought in by a flood event.

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

Wildlife Management

Region 4 Spring Bear Hunt: Biologist Danilson facilitated a conference call with staff in Mill Creek and Olympia regarding the 2012 spring bear hunt and proposed recommendations for the 2013 season. Considerable feedback was provided on the various strategies Wildlife Program staff implemented in 2012 within the North Skagit spring bear hunt unit to address feedback received from private timber landowners and Washington Department of Natural Resources. These strategies may be adopted for the Monroe unit in 2013, along with some modifications for the North Skagit unit.

Western Mallard Model Work: Biologist DeBruyn baited and attempted to trap ducks at three trapping sites in Whatcom County. After working through numerous “kinks” in the trapping effort (including a Coopers hawk in one trap), DeBruyn managed to catch and band 20 mallards and a single wood duck. Because of the hot weather experienced last week, trapping was not conducted in the afternoons to minimize heat related stress/mortality. The primary objective of this project is to capture and band mallards to provide data on survival for long-term population modeling work for western mallard populations.



A juvenile female Coopers hawk was inadvertently caught (and safely released) in a duck trap in Whatcom County. P. DeBruyn photo.

North Cascades Elk Habitat Management Discussion: Biologist Danilson met with representatives from Seattle City Light, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe to develop a strategy/process to evaluate the potential for developing elk habitat management projects on Seattle City Light properties. This is the beginning of a process that, for the time being, focuses on Seattle City Light lands within the South Fork Nooksack River watershed. Seattle City Light acquired approximately 4,000 acres in the watershed in the 1990s in conjunction with its Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) dam relicensing process. The isolated nature of these parcels is such that they may offer one of the better prospects for forage enhancement within the managed range of the North Cascades Elk Herd.

Private Lands/Access

Whidbey Deer Hunting: Biologist Roozen and technician Otto met with Whidbey-Camano Land Trust representatives to discuss public access on private lands on the islands. Roozen, Otto and the Trust developed a plan that jointly provides and manages access to the public. Roozen is drafting agreements for both the Trust and private landowners, developing signage for the properties, and assisting the Trust create maps that delineates additional adjoining acreage.

New 2012 Westside Pheasant Release Location: Biologist Roozen worked on finalizing agreements with landowners and securing a selected location for pheasant hunting. Agreements

are drafted and have been distributed to the correct parties for signature. Work is commencing on site in preparation for the youth and senior pheasant hunting weekends. Both private lands and wildlife area staff are working to prepare the site for the public. Technician Otto cut a trail from the parking area to the hunt site, while specialist Meis and technician Cosgrove created reader board for the site.

Wildlife Areas

Skagit Headquarter/Wiley Slough: Natural Resource Specialist Greg Meis and Natural Resources Tech Curran Cosgrove began survey and removal of Purple Loosestrife in the Wiley Slough Restoration site and adjacent marsh area. The North Sound Weed Crew was available to remove and spray plants for one day.

Island Unit: Manager Belinda Rotton provided a map to Habitat Biologist Brian Williams to review to determine permitting requirements from the Services for a proposed ditch cleaning project for the Island Unit. The request has been forwarded to the federal agencies for consideration.

Field and drainage conditions have improved on the Island. Natural Resource Specialist Meis and Natural Resource Tech Cosgrove will disk areas too wet early in the season. They will also disk and cultipack portions of the fields to improve walking access. It is too late to plant crops this season so the objective is to allow millet and smartweed growth, but to set-back reed canary grass and cattail in wetter field edges. This should also improve field access for waterfowl.

Lake Terrell Pheasant Pen Improvements: Manager Kessler installed lighting in the pheasant pen loading area. He also repaired the watering system, getting it ready for the upcoming season.

Crescent Lake Unit Trail Project: Manager Paulson mowed walking trails through the big leaf maple forest on the Crescent Lake Unit. These trails will be signed, mapped, and maintained throughout the year.

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

Wildlife Management

GMU 418 Elk Hunting Access: Biologist Roozen and technician Otto made some final preparations for the GMU 418 permit holders. Archery hunters will gain access beginning next week to scout the timberlands. Private lands staff will work with Sierra Pacific and WDFW Enforcement to manage hunter activity.

Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program: Biologist Roozen and technician Otto continued making contacts with potential partners throughout Region 4. Roozen and Otto continued drafting landowner agreements for this waterfowl hunting season. Both will work in the following weeks to draft and distribute agreements to partner landowners in the region.

Wildlife Areas



Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Belinda Rotton visited photo points at Headquarters to record vegetation progression in the newly restored intertidal area. This photo shows a field with water plantain, some bull rush, and limited cattail. This particular field is getting good use by ducks, geese, and shorebirds during low tides.

Milltown Island: Manager Rotton and Regional Wildlife Program Manager Russell Link toured Milltown Island with Skagit River Systems Cooperative Restoration (SRSC) Ecologist Eric Mickelson. SRSC is currently maintaining habitat plantings and preparing for potential dike removal and channel work. Additional permitting and agency approval for this proposed work is still pending.

Leque Island: Manager Rotton attended an open house hosted by the Washington State Department of Transportation for the Davis Slough Bridge Repair project. This project, scheduled to begin next summer, will raise Highway 532 and construct a new higher and wider bridge across Davis Slough. The bridge and road work may modify the access and parking to WDFW property. Additional meetings are scheduled to discuss land, easement, and access issues for this project.

Wiley Slough Restoration: Manager Rotton visited photo points to record vegetation progression in the newly restored intertidal area. This particular field is getting good use by ducks, geese, and shorebirds during low tides.

Stillwater Unit Noxious Weed Control: WDFW weed crew sprayed tansy ragwort and teasel throughout the Stillwater Unit and Sound Salmon Solutions sprayed weeds in their riparian planting.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE

Wildlife Management

Provide Program Radio Training: Biologist Cyra provided radio training and wildlife radio call numbers to staff in preparation for their use of state radios. Updated internal and SharePoint files to reflect training and assignments.

Blue Card Training: Skagit Wildlife Area staff attended Blue Card Training at the North Bend Forest Service Office with other Region 4 Wildlife Area staff. Jody Taylor from the Wenas Wildlife Area near Ellensburg was the instructor for the course

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Wildlife Management

Sandhill Cranes: Biologist Anderson and USFS Biologist Rutchy conducted a site visit to Skookum Meadow (photo below) on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The purpose of the site visit was to follow-up on a report from last week by USFS staff that a pair of sandhill cranes was using the meadow. Although no birds were seen this week, several crane feathers were found at the site indicating that they were recently present. The greater sandhill crane subspecies (Washington's breeding birds) are molting this time of year and will have lost nearly all their stained (rusty) feathers by early October.



Skookum Meadow.

As the Washington sandhill crane breeding population expands, it has been suspected that USFS wetland/meadows on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest could be potential foraging and breeding habitat. Skookum Meadow is located at approximately 3,100 ft., similar in elevation to habitat used by a small population of sandhill cranes breeding on the Mt. Hood National Forest in Oregon. This is the first year that sandhill cranes have been verified on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and additional surveys will take place next year to document any nesting attempts.

Streaked Horned Lark Survey: Biologist Bergh joined biologists from the Center for Natural Lands Management and the USFWS for streaked horned lark surveys in the lower Columbia River. These birds are a state endangered species and prefer an open grassland habitat, which has almost disappeared in southwest Washington. The dredge material islands in the lower Columbia provide the early successional habitat that the larks prefer. The group visited eight sites in the Lower Columbia River and surveyed for larks over two days. Some birds were detected still tending young, although we saw quite a bit of flocking and very minimal singing. Because it is late in the season, detections were difficult as birds were mostly silent and differentiating which bird was which was challenging due to flocking.



Streaked Horned Lark Survey for the Lower Columbia River Islands.

Larks on each island:

Rice – 16	Welch - 0
Miller Sands – 5	Tenasillahee - 0
Pillar Rock – 0	Whites/Brown - 45
Kalama Steelscape – 4	Crims - 8

Cowlitz Ranger District Elk Habitat Tour: Biologist Bergh attended a tour of elk habitat improvement projects on the Cowlitz Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The purpose of the tour was to show members of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation sites where

their funds, along with funds from the Puyallup Tribe, have been used for pre-commercial wide-spaced thinning to open up the forest to benefit elk forage. New ideas for maintenance of these thinning projects were also generated.

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area

Vegetation Management at Shillapoo: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald continues to mow pastures and spot spray Purple loosestrife in the North and South Units. This past week he was able to mow about 35 acres of pasture and surveyed about 200 acres in the Shillapoo lakebed for Purple loosestrife and sprayed each plant that he encountered. The loosestrife seems to be decreasing in numbers in all of the areas except for one where there might be a very small increase from last year's numbers. The loosestrife infested areas will continue to be surveyed and treated on a 10-14 day interval through the end of September.

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

Wildlife Areas

Cowlitz Wildlife Area

Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Grant: Cowlitz Wildlife Area Manager Grabski gave a presentation to the Recreation and Conservation Office panel for "Water Access." The proposed project for the Swofford Pond Unit would develop a new fishing dock, expand the existing parking lot near the boat ramp, and provide accessible restroom facilities.

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Wildlife Management

Mazama Pocket Gophers: Of the 68 multiple-parcel ownerships (corporate/governmental) assigned to District 11 as part of the five-county pocket gopher distribution and habitat study, Biologist Tirhi made contact with all that she was assigned. Tirhi has received access authority for six of the nine that Cope was assigned (Wave 1 assignment), and one of the two that Skriletz was assigned. Tirhi has received contact information from Olympia for the remaining 42 she was assigned to contact and will finish making those early this week. Most landowners Tirhi contacted first by phone followed up with either a mail or an email packet of information, including the access approval signature page. Tirhi has received access approval from two, negative from one (Miles Sand and Gravel), and is awaiting a response on the remainder.

Biologists Hoenes and Michaelis conducted surveys in Capitol Forest in association with WDFW's effort to improve its understanding about Mazama pocket gopher distribution. All sights were located in industrial timberland clear-cuts and no gopher mounds were detected. Biologist Schmidt completed plot surveys for 12 of the 20 sites assigned as part of Wave 1, finding several sites positive for gopher presence; Schmidt has three plots remaining (Capitol Forest). Tirhi and Schmidt are still awaiting access authority letters for four of the properties in Wave 1 (Port of Olympia ownership).

Townsend Big Eared Bat: Biologist Tirhi and Debbie Young (Tacoma Power) conducted the annual exit survey of the Townsend's Big Eared Bat maternity colony at La Grande Hydroelectric Dam. Structures at the dam have been used for years by this maternity (female with pups) colony. First bats were out at 8:35 pm and the last at 9:10 pm with a total count of 183 bats. This is comparable to the annual count from the last five years, suggesting that the colony is remaining stable. Townsends are a state candidate species and a federal species of concern. Maternity colonies and winter



hibernacula are primary locations for the protection of this species. A handful of maternity colonies are known in the state, but few hibernacula, especially in western Washington. In 2011, Tirhi and Young captured two post-lactating females in late fall and equipped them with radio transmitters with hopes of tracking the females to winter hibernacula. Unfortunately, the signals were never located once the bats were released. Tirhi was pleased to see that trapping late in fall had no effect on spring use of the site as predicted.

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

Private Lands/Access

Fire Closures: Bio Harris communicated with several of the large Timber companies on assisting them with getting the message out in case they have to close their lands to public access due to extreme fire danger. This not only aids the landowner, but also gets the message to hunters to help them in determining where they can hunt. This is a more proactive approach to assisting hunters and landowners than the agency has done in the past. Response from land owners on our efforts to get the word out has been positive. RPM Cope is working on finding out if we can use the email list to communicate closures and/or changes to hunters who signed up to receive emails from the agency. This will greatly help in getting the word out as it is highly probable that the message will be posted on hunting and fishing related forums shortly after sending.

Currently, most of Region 6 is at a class one or two industrial fire level. At a level two, depending on the situation, landowners may close or restrict access. A level three (the highest level) will likely mean closure of most if not all private forest lands.

Fruit Growers Supply Company: Due to extreme fire danger, Fruit Growers Supply Company has closed all lands in Western Washington to public access. This closure will remain in effect until further notice.

Port Blakely Tree Farm: All Port Blakely Tree Farm lands are currently closed to public access until further notice due to fire danger. As of today, much of their lands are within the level two industrial fire class. Last week some of their lands were in a level three.

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

Elk Management and Elk Damage to Private Property: Biologist Tirhi and Enforcement Officer Dustin Prater are working collaboratively to assist Maris Farms, Buckley, with mitigating ongoing elk damage to crops. Elk in the Lower White River drainage of Game Management Unit 652 (Puyallup) routinely travel the river corridor and occasionally move upslope to frequent agricultural fields of Buckley and Enumclaw. Additionally, various small groups of elk in this area do not migrate to high elevation summer range, but rather subsist year-round within the valley, eating crops and fallow fields. Enforcement has provided Maris Farms with elk hazing materials (crackers and shells) for years which are having little lasting affect such that other options are being sought. Tirhi met with the landowner to offer two Master Hunter permit hunts with the intent of taking out two lead cows (antlerless). These regional hunt permits are designed to be used for properties experiencing elk damage; hunters applying for the hunt are requested to be available to hunt within 24 hours of being contacted. Tirhi successfully contacted the first hunter, who had arranged to hunt, but was injured just previous to the weekend. Tirhi left messages with the second hunter on Friday and provided landowner contact. Tirhi has also discussed with the landowner a pilot project to plant a crop strip for elk nearby the corn crop (which is being damaged) that would hopefully contain a crop more appealing to elk than corn. Finally, Tirhi is in discussion with headquarters about payment options for the landowner, who prefers that over building and maintaining a fence.