

# Wildlife Program

Week of December 3-9, 2012

## **WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION**

**Bat Conservation** - Biologists Gerry Hayes and Gary Wiles distributed the final draft bat conservation plan for peer review; the deadline for comments is January 15, 2013. The plan was distributed to more than 20 potential reviewers outside of the agency, as well as all Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) district biologists, all regional Wildlife Program managers, and some Olympia staff.

## **REGION 1**

### **Gray Wolf Management**

**District 1:** Biologist Shepherd and Officer Anderson designed and purchased materials for the wolf response trailer. Biologist Shepherd delivered the range rider ATV for an overhaul after the range rider season. Biologist Shepherd gave a presentation to the North Spokane Rotary Club concerning wolf recovery and wolf conflict management.

**District 3:** District Biologist Wik located OR-16 (yearling wolf dispersing from Oregon) via radiotelemetry in Garfield County. The animal was not observed, and it was confirmed it was not with another collared wolf.

**Livestock/Wolf Agreements:** Biologists Rasley, McCanna and Game Division Manager Dave Ware continue to work on the final version of these new Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) contracts. Rasley hopes to meet with a Walla Walla County rancher early next week. The rancher would like “to sign our new DPCA Wolf contract at next week’s Cattleman meeting in front of everyone.” So far all of the cattlemen in southeast Washington have been excellent to work with.

Biologist Rasley emailed a DPCA wolf contract (current version) to a rancher in Asotin County at the request of District Biologist Paul Wik.

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE***

### **Wildlife Management**

**Columbia Basin Mule Deer Project:** Biologists Ferguson and Atamian prepared for and flew a portion of the aerial survey of the Columbia Basin Mule Deer Project Phase II – an area in Lincoln and Grant counties, a cooperative effort between Regions 1, 2 and 3. In addition, Ferguson and Atamian conducted ground surveys for the same area as part of the project. Ferguson also flew with biologist Sara Gregory another day and flight followed for biologists Gregory and Finger on Saturday.



*Mule Deer on Irrigated Circle during ground surveys of the Columbia Basin Mule Deer Project Phase II.*

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) producers' meeting** – Kelli Bartholomew, Ephrata representative for the SGI, conducted a two-hour meeting at the U.S. Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Davenport, Friday morning. Wildlife Area Manager (WAM) Juli Anderson and Private Lands Biologist Todd Baarstad attended, as did District 2 Assistant Wildlife Biologist Mike Atamian, who studied sage grouse in Nevada for his M.S. degree. After Bartholomew reviewed options for ranchers who would like assistance related to the SGI, Atamian gave a short slide show, developed by Research Scientist Mike Schroeder, on the status of sage grouse in Lincoln County. Four U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) biologists also attended. The half dozen or so ranchers at the meeting were curious about which habitat improvement options would work for their individual circumstances. Anderson urged these producers to stop by Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area any time to see similar work already completed.

**Sherman Creek Wildlife Area Winter Range Closure** – Winter range gates were closed December 1. The lower portion of the Trout Lake Road is currently being used by the logging operators working on the thinning project for wildlife habitat improvement, so they have the gate open during the day. Even with signs indicating “No Unauthorized Vehicle Access,” “Road Closed,” and “Logging Traffic Only,” people are still driving up Trout Lake Road.

**Asotin Creek Wildlife Area – Winter Closure Gates:** Winter vehicle closure gates were shut on the wildlife area last weekend by WAM Bob Dice and Enforcement Officer Brendan Vance. The only unusual activity found was a smashed video game system scattered along Lick Creek

road. Road conditions above the Smoothing Iron buildings were extremely muddy requiring the use of ATV's to access the Forest Service gate at the top end.

**Chief Joseph Wildlife Area – Trespass Livestock:** Cuevas Winegeart and Debby Flynn spent the majority of their work week installing about 8,000 feet of electric fence at the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. The electric fence prevents trespass livestock from entering fields close to the Headquarters' (HQ) buildings and the Joseph Creek Riparian area. The rest of the wildlife area in Green Gulch and beyond is susceptible to unpermitted grazing due to burned boundary fence

from last summer's Cache Creek Fire. WAM Bob Dice looked at burned hillsides near WDFW property boundaries on Thursday. Small grasses, which are growing in the aftermath of the fire, are not providing much feed for the cows; hence, the reason the cows came running towards Dice expecting to be fed. As of late Thursday afternoon, nine head were standing up against the electric fence looking towards unburned fields. Cuevas and Debby also replaced an aging wooden gate with a new steel gate at the boundary cattle guard between WDFW land and private property.



*Electric fence installed at the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area (above). The burned hillsides are greening up with HQ buildings in center of photo (below). What's left of the boundary stock fence is in the bottom center of photo.*



### Private Lands/Access

**Native Habitat Restoration Whitman County:** Biologist Lewis received a phone call from a landowner that is interested in restoring native Palouse habitat on a 250 acre farm. The landowner is interested in using conservation programs to do native grassland and riparian restoration along the Palouse River. Biologist Lewis discussed conservation options with the landowner and recommended using Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to accomplish habitat objectives. Biologist Lewis will be completing a site visit to assess area and make more detailed recommendations for restoration in the next couple weeks.

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

### Private Lands/Access

**Mount Godfrey Hunting by Reservation:** Habitat Technician Jim Peterson completed installation of “Hunting by Reservation” signs at this new property in Stevens County. Habitat Biologist Dotts entered hunter access and reservation information into the Private Lands Opportunities data capture tool.



***Signs were installed at the Mount Godfrey Hunting by Reservation only area.***

**Private lands access provided:** Private Lands Biologist Dawn Davis spoke with two landowners interested in participating in the Feel Free to Hunt program. These cooperative agreements would include approximately 785 acres of public hunting access in Walla Walla County and potentially more than 3,000 additional acres in Columbia County. Davis will continue to work with these landowners to develop cooperative agreements under the WDFW private lands access programs.

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

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Nuisance Deer in the Town of Republic:** District Wildlife Biologist Dana Base had dialogues with Sikander Jaad, acting Chair of the Republic Mule Deer Conservation Committee, along with WDFW Enforcement Sergeant Mike Charron and Hunter Education Program Manager Carl Klein. A meeting with the Republic deer committee and town officials, including Chief of Police Jan Lewis, is scheduled for January 15, 2013. Objectives will be to plan and implement a management action within the city limits before the end of this winter.

#### **Private Lands/Access**

**Wildlife Conflict Lincoln County:** Private Lands Biologist Baarstad, Private Lands Supervisor Joey McCanna and Wildlife Officer Curt Wood met with landowners Mike and Garrett Lindstrum to discuss their concerns regarding deer damage on their hay fields. Curt and Joey explained the details of the DPCA program and future use of Landowner Access Permits, which the Lindstrums have received in the past.

**Wildlife Conflict Walla Walla County:** Biologist Rasley spent several mornings assisting the Klicker family with hazing some 40 plus whitetails out of their commercial strawberry farm. Even with two electric fences some of the deer are able to get into the strawberries. To date they have filled two damage prevention doe permits. We issued them some more to assist them with their hazing efforts. Most of the deer are coming from Walla Walla Community College lands.

## **REGION 2**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

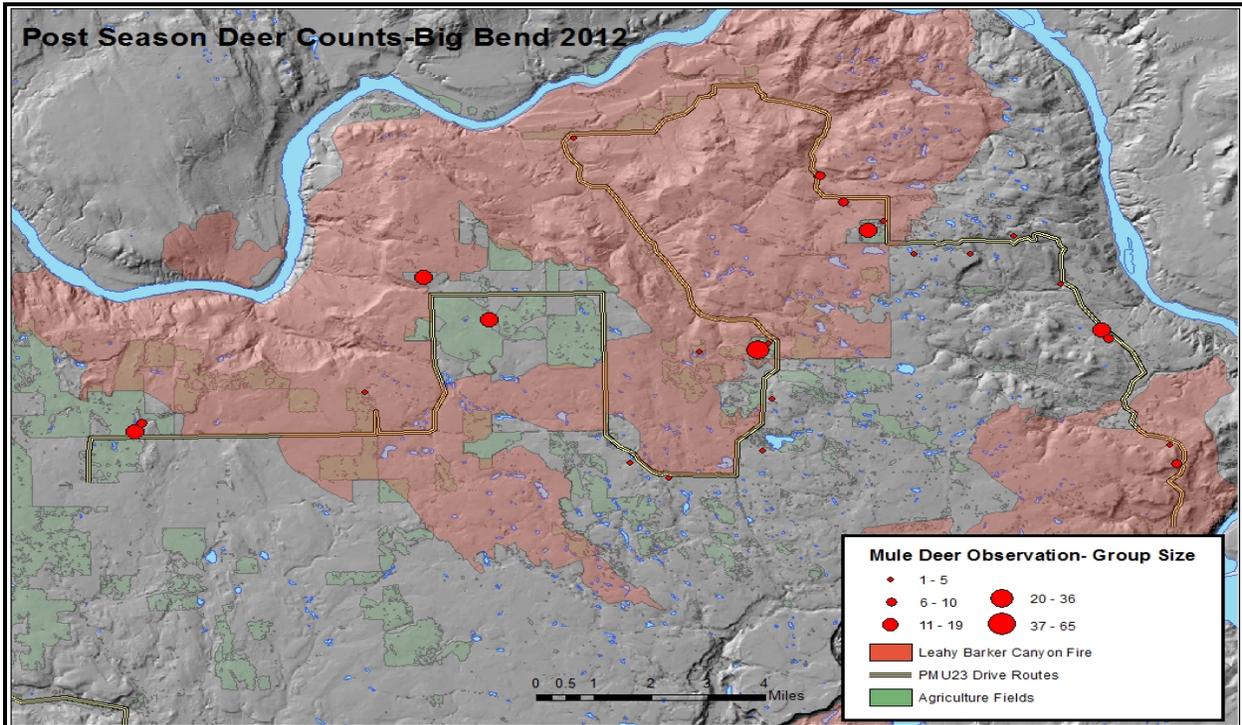
#### **Wildlife Management**

**Response to fire:** The Big Bend deer route was almost completely within the perimeter of the Leahy-Barker Canyon Fire, providing an opportunity to observe their response. While conducting this survey with Private Lands Biologist Braaten we observed few deer within the burned areas (map below). The deer were mostly concentrated on the periphery of the burn and in wheat fields adjacent to burned areas (overall numbers of deer were normal). When deer were within the burn, they were often associated with unburned patches of habitat/wheat (picture

below) and draws with standing vegetation. Much of the burned area is showing significant green-up. If snow builds up on the plateau, then deer could be pushed down in the lower elevations that were burned, but so far this is not the case.



*Deer were often associated in the unburned patches of wheat fields following the Leahy-Barker Canyon fire (above) Map survey of the Big Bend deer route (below).*



**Pygmy Rabbit Recovery Meetings:** Research Scientist Becker held a stakeholder meeting on December 5 which included representatives from Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Grant County Commissioners, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), private landowners and agency staff. Becker and Warren (USFWS) presented the status of the project, fielded questions and had a good discussion. On December 6 the Science Advisory Committee met to troubleshoot issues, discuss future plans and make recommendations for future studies. Both meetings were very productive. Several people from both meetings also attended a site visit, where they were able to see the release site, reintroduction infrastructure, and some rabbits in the enclosures. Thanks to all who attended and contributed.

**Mark-Recapture Sampling:** Becker and Biologist Eidson collected fecal samples to complete the population estimates in the large enclosures. The lab analyses are being conducted by our joint graduate student at University of Idaho.

**Snow Survey Preparations:** Becker worked on preparing for large-scale snow surveys to assess rabbit settlement and survival. Transects were set up and a list of volunteers and staff to enlist was compiled.

### Wildlife Areas

**Sinlahekin Dry Forest Restoration:** Restoration Silviculturist Brett spent two days with Wildlife Forester Kuehn touring the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area and meeting with representatives from Vaagen Brothers and Boise Mills, as well as logging contractors. He has also been handing inquires into logging and timber sales from the Sinlahekin.

**Sherman Creek Prescribed Burn:** Fuels Management Officer Leuschen met with fire staff from the Colville National Forest and US Fish and Wildlife Service – Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge regarding coordination and cooperation on and adjacent to Sherman Creek Wildlife Area.



*Western grebes spotted on Spectacle Lake. Justin Haug photo.*



*Bohemian waxwings perched at Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Headquarters. Justin Haug photo.*

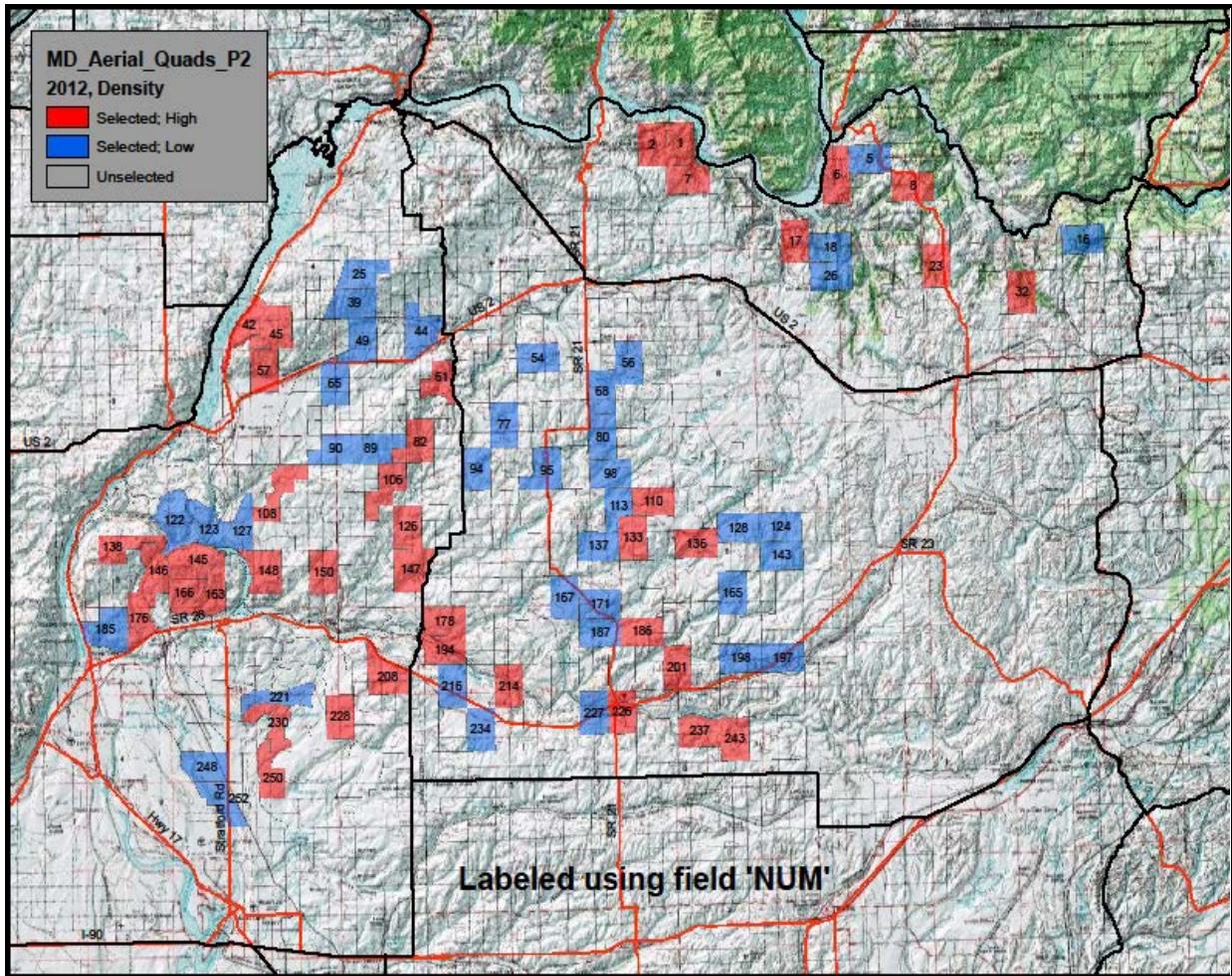
## ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES***

### **Wildlife Management**

**Deer Surveys:** Biologists Gregory and Finger finished Phase II of the Columbia Plateau aerial mule deer survey. Phase II encompasses the western half of Lincoln county and northern Douglas county. Ground counts in parts of Grant County have been below long term averages. This is likely a function of mild conditions making deer less observable (not reliant on green wheat) and more widely distributed. Prior to the aerial survey, Finger met with David and Derek Stevens of Buckrun to discuss the areas we planned to survey, potential ongoing hunts, deer concentrations, and other related topics to keep them in the loop and share concerns. We coordinated with Buckrun while flying the sampling units and no issues were encountered.

Finger, ever wary of the multitude of flying hazards on the Columbia Plateau, began investigating data sources for towers and found easy access to tower data for ArcGIS online by conducting a search for "FCC." Finger found data sets for cell, television, microwave, and pager towers and began building a dataset which we can build maps off of or upload to a GPS. Powerlines of the western United States and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) transmission lines are also available.

**Mule Deer:** Biologist Gallie completed post season deer counts in Population Management Unit (PMU) 23, Douglas County. Six standardized driven routes (nearly 300 miles) are completed annually and cover all the Game Management Units (GMUs) and most of the accessible habitat in this upper PMU of the Columbia Basin. A total of 1255 deer were counted (15 percent increase over last year), resulting in a F:D ratio of 65:100 and B:D ratio of 23:100, and mature buck ratio of 5:100 does. These results are typical of Douglas County. The open habitat and high road density will always challenge buck escapement, and Douglas County parameters are consistent with the other Columbia Basin herds.



**Chelan County Bighorn Sheep:** Biologist Gallie completed counts on the Swakane and Chelan Butte bighorn sheep herds. Both populations appear to be growing, with counts increasing an average of 16% annually. On Chelan Butte, counts returned 136 sheep (12% increase from last year), with 72 ewes, 20 lambs, and 44 rams, of which 22 were  $\frac{3}{4}$  curl or greater. The Swakane count was 121 (11% increase from last year), using high counts of rams from the recent count and high count of ewes from earlier this spring. There were 58 ewes, 24 lambs, and 39 rams, 20 of which were  $\frac{3}{4}$  curl or greater. Efforts to count the Manson herd from ground and boat have been relatively unsuccessful this year and will be attempted again as time permits



*Swakane rams with a lone ewe during the rut.*

**Okanogan County Bighorn Sheep Management:** Biologist Heinlen compiled and formatted the last three months of Bighorn sheep Argos data for the seven sheep collared in the Sinlahekin herd and one sheep collared in the Swakane herd. The Swakane data was displayed and sent to pertinent staff in Wenatchee. The Sinlahekin data was displayed for use during the annual Bighorn sheep survey effort. The data showed all sheep to be in known traditional habitat for this time of year.



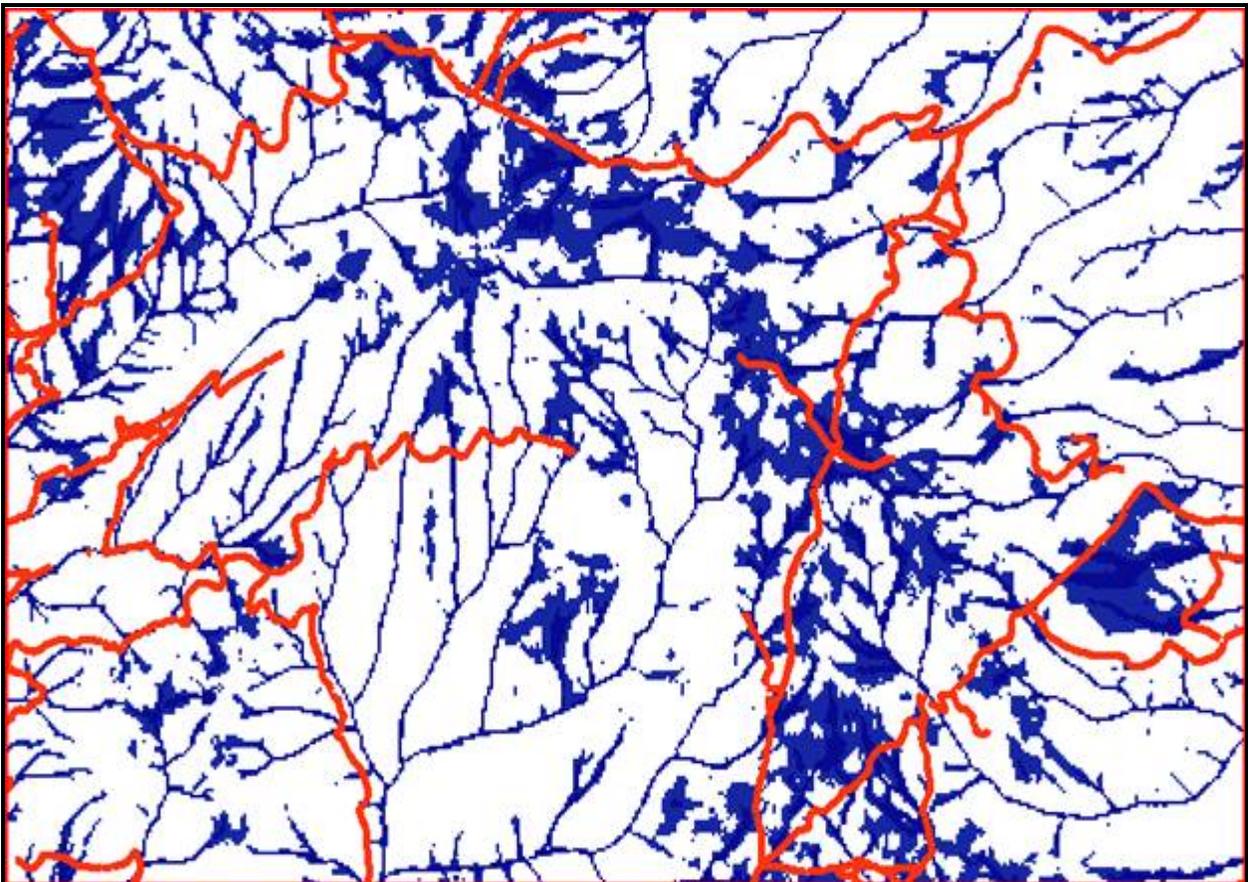
*California bighorn sheep – Sinlahekin herd.*

## **REGION 3**

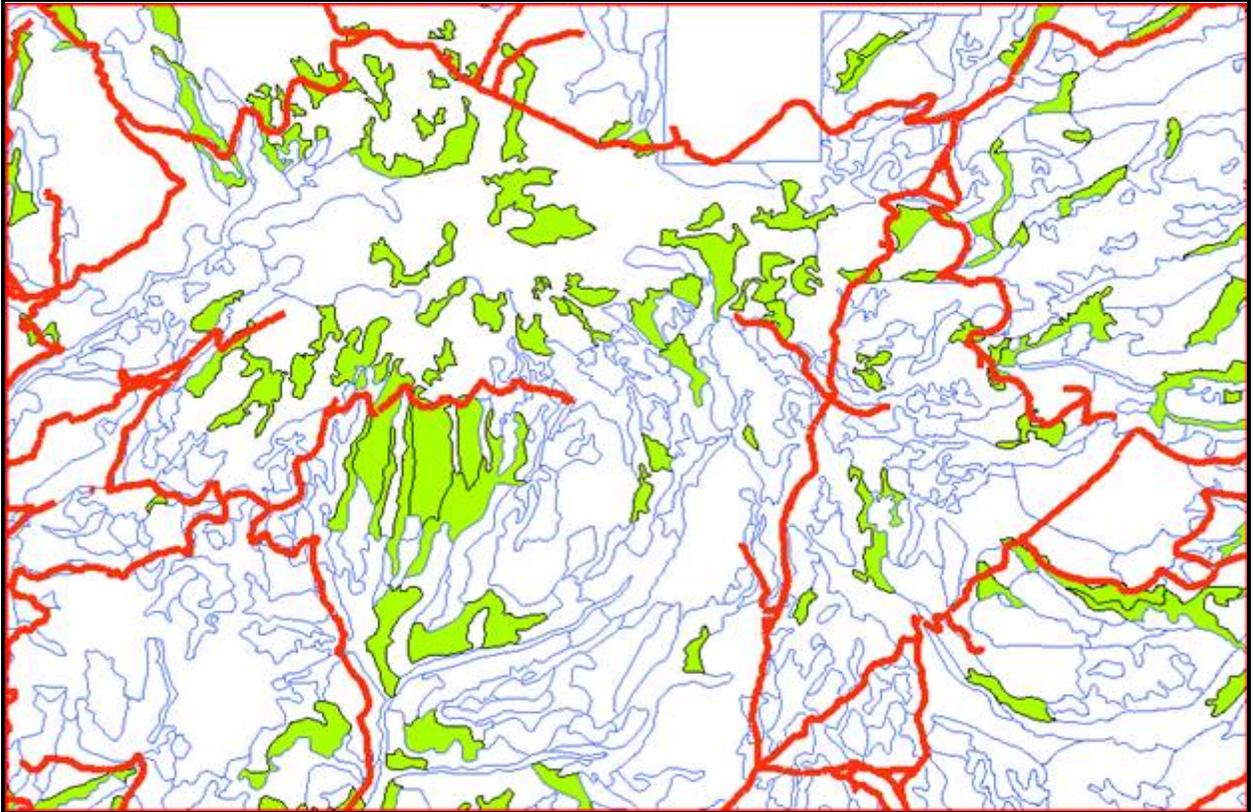
### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Naneum Ridge to Columbia River Recreation Planning:** Biologist William Moore worked on completing areas of low recreation suitability to protect late summer moist meadows habitat for elk. Moore was hoping to be able to apply the Blue Mt. Eastside Elk Model to identify the best habitats in this landscape, but that model will not be ready in time for this effort, therefore surrogate data is being applied. Surrogate data that Moore has looked at includes the CTI Moisture Modeling along with herbaceous productivity taken from the soils survey. Herbaceous productivity data was provided by Jeff Burnham, Statewide Range Ecologist. With the goal of identifying areas that are valuable to elk in late summer, Moore will overlay the  $\geq 80^{\text{th}}$  percentile CTI moisture model with the  $\geq 550$  pounds/acre herbaceous estimate. This surrogate data should identify areas that are relatively moist and that are also productive. Moore is also looking at the August Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) data as well.



*CTI Moisture Model  $\geq 80^{\text{th}}$  percentile*



*Herbaceous Productivity  $\geq 550$  pounds/acre*

**Franklin County Deer Surveys:** Private lands staff worked with other regional staff to conduct the annual District 4 deer survey in Franklin County. Overall numbers were on par with previous years, while mature buck numbers appeared to be up. Private lands staff observed close to 500 individuals over two days, including >10 legal bucks.



*Access Technician Kaelber looking for deer near Kahlotus (left). Mule deer does near Palouse Falls (right).*

## Wildlife Areas

**Cowiche Range Survey:** Oak Creek Wildlife Area Manager Huffman met with Range Ecologist Burnham on the Worrell Ranch property of the Cowiche Unit and toured the past grazing permit area and the Cowiche Mill Fire. While in the area, most water developments and mineral stations were GPSd for future reference. While on the tour, we identified an unknown grass patch as medusahead and discussed control options. We also saw approximately 400 elk and six deer. The western pasture which did not burn in the fire is in good condition and appears to have lower utilization of forage than the moderate level in the grazing permit. The eastern pasture which burned in the fire is still dominated by annuals, but has native bunchgrasses coming back.



*Heavy utilization of sumac by elk or deer near a water tank on the Worrell Ranch property of the Cowiche Unit.*

**Wenas Wildlife Area Post-fire Revegetation:** Wenas Wildlife Area staff spent the week seeding and harrowing burned areas in Hessler with the tractor and ATVs. Approximately 65 acres were seeded and the harrowing will be finished in the coming week.



*Wenas Wildlife Area staff seeding and harrowing burned areas in Hessler Flat.*

## Other

**Winter Conditions:** Conditions are still relatively mild for the season, with no snow accumulations on the valley floor. The L.T. Murray received three to four inches of wet heavy snow on Thursday night and with more in the forecast we'll likely see an influx of elk. Presently there are 300 plus scattered in the vicinity of Joe Watt, Robinson, and beyond. There were 70 to 80 more on the Heart K on Friday morning.

Elk are foraging on open slopes below 3,500 feet. Good fall green up is occurring with rainfall and above normal temperatures for this time of year. Right now there is plenty of elk forage, so we should be able to hold off feeding for a good while depending on weather.

## **REGION 4**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**North Puget Sound Winter Waterfowl Aerial Survey:** Biologists DeBruyn and Cyra flew a waterfowl survey from Snohomish County to Samish Bay. The Whatcom County section was not done due to weather conditions. Just over 60,000 ducks were counted with mallards leading the way followed closely by wigeon and pintails.

**Swan Mortality and Morbidity Project:** Swan Technician Anderson responded to calls regarding sick and dead swans. Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn also assisted with swan collection in Skagit and Whatcom counties. To date, about 44 dead swans have been collected and sampled. Latest swan mortalities below:

	Skagit	Snohomish	Whatcom	Sumas	TOTAL
Powerline suspect	15		6	2	23
Pb suspect	5		4		9
Unknown or Trauma*	1		3	1	5
Feather Pile			1	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>39</b>

*Other Trauma\* - wing fracture*

*Not include - King County - 2 powerline strikes*



*Snowy owls observed in Whatcom County when looking for swans.*

**Northern Puget Sound Lesser Snow Goose Study:** Biologist DeBruyn and Technician Otto surveyed snow geese in the Snohomish river valley. They read collars, counted birds, and obtained permission to access areas being used by the geese. Biologists DeBruyn and Danilson recovered rocket nets that had been left out by the University of Washington team in anticipation of further trapping. Study goals are to trap about 50 more geese to collar and equip four more with radio transmitters.

**North Cascades Elk Herd Plan:** Biologist Danilson and Program Manager Link attended a meeting with the Point Elliott Treaty Tribes to address their feedback on the North Cascades Elk Herd Management Plan. This meeting was the culmination of a several month review process requested by the tribes. Danilson will collate tribal comments and work with other WDFW personnel (Enforcement in particular) to address these comments/issues as efforts to complete a public review draft of the plan continue.

Danilson also assisted in coordinating a meeting with Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), WDFW Enforcement, and tribal representatives aimed at developing a WSDOT proposal to address vehicle collisions with elk along State Route 20 between Sedro Woolley and Concrete.

**Winter Marine Waterfowl Aerial Surveys:** Assistant District Biologist Cyra prepared and acquired equipment and materials for the start of the annual winter marine waterfowl surveys, and flew a shakedown/refresher flight with Marine Waterfowl Specialist Evenson and Region 6 Assistant District Biologist Murphie. Kenmore Air and Chief Pilot Chuck Perry will once again provide the survey platform. These annual surveys are used to determine trends in marine

waterfowl species – both game and diversity species; and results are used to help inform the Pacific Flyway in season setting for sea ducks.

Maps, data, and species information from the nearly twenty years of annual surveys can be found at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/psamp/>

**Navy Pika Contract:** Biologist Milner worked with Everett Navy Base staff to determine the costs related to having WDFW conduct pika surveys on their lands in Snohomish County.

**Island Marble Butterfly:** Biologist Milner met with staff from San Juan Islands National Park, Olympia WDFW, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Xerxes Society, and private consultants to discuss upcoming work plans at the Park for Island Marble Butterfly conservation. The tone of the meeting was very positive and cooperative and all attendees share optimism for working together to protect the butterfly on federal lands.

**Seattle Parks and Recreation – Species Reintroduction Inquiry:** Biologist Anderson provided information to Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) managers regarding SPR volunteers inquiring if they could “reintroduce” common species to habitat enhancement/restoration sites. Anderson relayed this is not possible, given state wildlife laws, and that locally common species will reestablish naturally if all limiting needs are there at the site and on the greater surrounding landscape. It is best to let nature do its thing – no need to tinker in these instances. Plus, it is not within the law to capture, transport and release wild animals without a permit process being met with WDFW. This situation would not be approved by WDFW.

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

### **Wildlife Management**

**WDFW Letter to Heron Habitat Helpers (HHH):** Biologist Anderson provided a letter to Heron Habitat Helpers and city of Seattle. HHH is concerned that current management of herons in Seattle does not match recommendations that WDFW provides via the Priority Habitat and Species program. Management recommendations for various animals of management priority for WDFW can be found at: [http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/mgmt\\_recommendations/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/mgmt_recommendations/)

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Bow Hill Road Pheasant Release Site:** Natural Resource Specialist Greg Meis and Natural Resources Technician Curran Cosgrove began the process of dismantling the parking area and walking bridge access points for the Bow Hill Road Pheasant Release site. Safety zone and other WDFW boundary and regulation signs were also removed. The wildlife area staff continues to receive phone calls relating to late and out of season hunting on the site. Enforcement staff has been made aware of the concerns of the callers and have increased patrols to check activity on the site.

**Samish River Unit:** Manager Belinda Rotton met with Kathy Kilcoyne, the Wetland Biologist of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, to discuss the most current conceptual drawing of the Samish River unit. The meeting began to outline the timeline, roles and responsibilities of the upcoming project. Summary notes will be prepared and further discussion and planning will begin in early January. Items to include are the timing of the public process and the permit package development.

**Island Unit:** Natural Resource Specialist Meis and Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove began manipulating water levels on the Island Unit to improve water conditions on the Seattle Ponds and Ollie Thompson fields.

**Waterfowl and Hunter Use:** Natural Resource Specialist Meis and Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove checked hunter and waterfowl utilization on Leque Island, DeBay's Slough, Island and Samish Units. Waterfowl and hunter numbers were low mid-week, but reports for weekend use from enforcement officers indicate good utilization. On DeBay's Slough 200 plus waterfowl and approximately 50 swans were observed on the site.

**Tennant Lake Wetland Enhancement Project:** Manager Kessler coordinated with Port of Bellingham managers on the Port's wetland enhancement project at Tennant Lake. A willow planting was performed this week and Phase 1 is now complete.

**Tennant Lake Water Levels:** Manager Kessler coordinated with the Whatcom County Parks manager on Tennant Lake water levels. The Tennant Lake water levels are extremely high. Manager Kessler and the Westside Weed Crew Leader Tom Wampler checked and cleared the beaver deceiver pipes and adjusted the lake water levels.

**Lake Terrell Unit Educational Tours:** Manager Kessler coordinated with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association on local school educational tours to the newly remodeled Lake Terrell dam site. Several tours are now occurring to see the coho salmon that continue to make their way up the creek and into Lake Terrell.

**Whatcom County Washington Waterfowl Meeting:** Manager Kessler attended the monthly Whatcom County chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association meeting. He gave an update on current activities and provided information on Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account grants.

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

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Washington Waterfowl Association (WWA):** Biologist Danilson, Technician Otto and Wildlife Area Manager Kessler attended the Whatcom Chapter WWA meeting on December 4. WDFW related business/issues presented included: recruitment of WWA members as volunteers for swan morbidity and mortality project, overview of the lesser snow goose project, update on the quality hunt program, and notification of the request for proposals for WDFW Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) funds.

**Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary:** Biologist Anderson worked with the west side Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary volunteer to fill requests and keep clerical needs up to date. Anderson also provided for data summary requests of local organized habitat groups.

**December “Crossing Paths”:** Biologist Anderson worked with the Crossing Paths biologist team and Public Relations Officer Luers to produce December’s Crossing Paths. This month’s subject covers wildlife adaptations and behavioral changes in winter and what folks can do to lessen impacts on wildlife during the lean times of winter. December’s Crossing Paths is available at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/crossing\\_paths/](http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/crossing_paths/)

**Seattle Times Inquiry – Parvovirus in Coyotes:** Biologist Anderson worked with State Veterinarian Mansfield to respond to a request regarding parvovirus (parvo) in local coyotes. This was in response to the recent parvovirus outbreak in the Seattle area. Mansfield relayed that any wild coyote or dog relative would not be seen running around without severe clinical signs of parvo, as well as in other illnesses like canine distemper. These diseases make the animals very sick. The recent coyote shot in Seattle did not show these symptoms – so it is more likely it was just not doing so well due to other factors, such as the harder winter season when resources are less available. Anderson relayed he has not received calls recently regarding sick coyotes in the King County area and that the most important thing the public can do is make sure to vaccinate pets, as veterinarians recommend, regarding parvo and other diseases.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Headquarters and Leque Island Units:** Natural Resource Specialist Meis and Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove monitored water conditions during the high tide series this week. High tides combined with low pressure and storms can result in damage to dike infrastructure. Water levels did overtop the dikes in a few locations and will continue to be monitored during upcoming high water events.



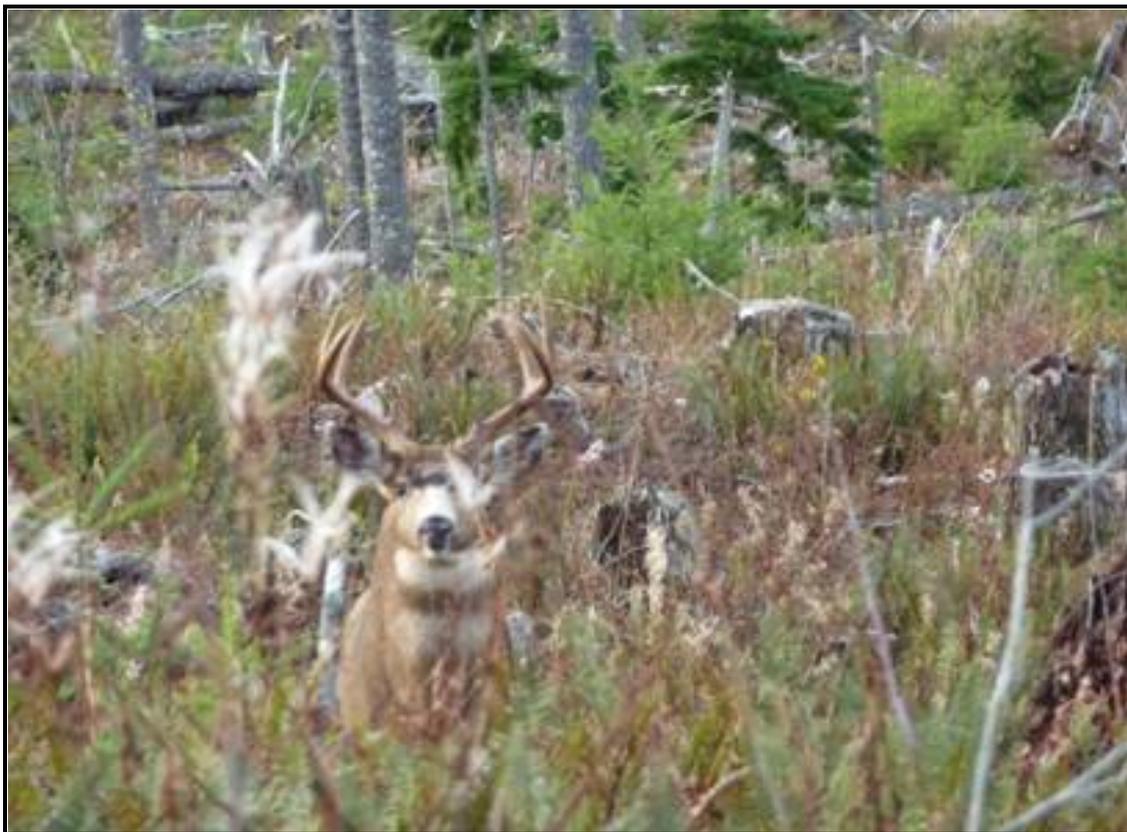
*High tide combined with low pressure weather conditions result in overtopped levee near this tide gate on Wiley Slough Headquarters Restoration Project.*

**Snoqualmie Wildlife Area:** Natural Resources Worker (NRW) Kraig Paulson continued cleaning, repairing and winterizing pheasant pens on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. NRW Paulson cleared brush around the barn to prepare for debris removal. Skagit Wildlife Area staff has been coordinating with NRW Paulson on the mower and additional equipment and barn repair projects.

**Skagit Wildlife Area:** Master Hunter and Pheasant volunteer Alex Moody completed the vehicle cleaning and winterizing the pheasant pens on the Skagit Wildlife Area.

### **Private Lands/Access**

**Game Management Unit (GMU) 418 Elk Hunting Access:** Region 4 private lands staff surveyed the Nooksack GMU for hunter activity, logging operations, and unwanted activity. Only a few permit holders have yet to fill their tags and allowed access to Sierra Pacific property. Private lands staff will continue monitoring and addressing problems within the GMU.



*Beautiful buck spotted by Technician Deyo while out in GMU 418, Nooksack.*

**Snow Goose Quality Program:** Region 4 private lands staff monitored and noted hunter use in units. Varying snow goose activity led to limited snow goose hunting this past week. Cold temperatures at week's end concentrated birds in several areas and may lead to increased hunter effort the coming days.

**Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program:** Region 4 private land staff continued scheduled surveys of hunt units and attended to unit repairs as needed. Technicians Deyo and Otto continued unit blind and parking maintenance at hunt units in the program.



*Technician Otto operates tractor while he and technician Deyo prepare and repair a Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program parking area.*

#### ***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE***

##### **Wildlife Management**

**Wildlife Program Radio Training:** Assistant District Biologist Cyra provided assistance with radio training and assignment of radio call numbers to several Wildlife Program staff.

## **REGION 5**

#### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

##### **Wildlife Management**

**Western Gray Squirrel Management:** Klickitat Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven, Biologists Stephens and Holman, along with Technician White assisted Research Division with a western gray squirrel project on the Klickitat Wildlife Area. The project featured an investigation into the utility of three inch versus four inch diameter PVC hair snares. The baited tubes contain tape which collects hair when the animals try to obtain the bait. The relatively non-invasive method allows for a determination of presence/absence or, with the appropriate DNA analysis,

can be used to identify individual animals and therefore drive a population estimate for the squirrels.

**Columbian White-tailed Deer:** Biologist Miller is working closely with Julia Butler Hansen (JBH) Refuge personnel in preparation for the re-location of CWTD from the refuge this winter. CWTD are proposed to be re-located to Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge to avoid the consequence of a dike breach that threatens to inundate the JBH mainland refuge, currently home to 75-90 deer. Deer have responded to prior flooding events by dispersing and mortality rates of the dispersed deer were very high due to vehicle strikes, predation in new habitats, and starvation. Biologist Meyers with the USFWS has provided a schedule and request for assistance that Region 5 personnel will review soon and try to work out a schedule for this project.

**Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Elk Survey:** The first monthly winter elk survey was conducted by Biologists Miller and Bergh on December 3 to assess herd composition and wintering elk concentration on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area. A total of 28 elk were observed; the rain and wind were so strong that documenting composition was not possible. No mortalities were observed from the viewpoint and no elk were observed close by to determine coat condition or appearance. Hunting in Elk Area 5099 ended on November 25 and probably influenced number of elk on valley floor. Four radio collared elk were heard from the viewpoint.

## Wildlife Areas

### **St. Helens Wildlife Area**

**Riverbank Erosion on the St. Helens Wildlife Area:** Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald monitored the erosion control structure along the river bank of the North Fork Toutle River this week while he was posting the winter closure. The uppermost structure had failed earlier this year and appears to be having a negative impact on the area by pushing the river towards the bank instead of away from it; causing some erosion in the upper part of the area. All of the other structures downstream appear to be intact and protecting the riverbank from any further erosion in the area.



*Failed erosion control structure along the river bank of the North Fork Toutle River was monitored this week.*

**St. Helens Wildlife Area Winter Closure:** Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald posted signage on the Mudflow Unit of the St. Helens Wildlife Area this week, restricting public access to the area from December 1 through April 30. This closure is in place every year during this time period to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering on the Wildlife Area.

## **Cowlitz Wildlife Area**

**Swofford Pond Trail Foot Bridge Replacement:** Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff, working with a DNR inmate crew, removed and replaced 10 foot bridges along the Swofford Pond Trail. Replacement was necessary because the old bridges had become dilapidated and unstable. A couple of new bridges were also installed in areas that were wet and muddy most of the year.



*The Swofford Pond Trail Bridge was removed and replaced.*

**Peterman Road Clearing:** Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff, working with a DNR inmate crew, cleared roadside vegetation from approximately three miles of road on the Peterman Unit. This concludes the annual 2012 vegetation management projects on Peterman. The roads will be further treated next year under the Wildlife Area's integrated vegetation management program.

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

### **Wildlife Areas**

#### **Cowlitz Wildlife Area**

**Peterman Trail Phase 2 Location Determination:** Cowlitz Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Vanderlip met with Tacoma Power to determine the placement of the phase two portion of the

Peterman Multi-use Trail. Tacoma is tasked with providing 20 miles of trail on the Peterman Unit per their FERC license. The meeting's purpose was to ensure that any proposal would have no negative impacts to existing uses, habitat resources, and would meet Cowlitz Wildlife Area management objectives. Vanderlip will continue to provide technical assistance as the project moves through Tacoma Power and is implemented on the Wildlife Area.

#### ***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE***

##### **Wildlife Management**

Biologists Miller, Bergh, Holman, and Stephens practiced with animal capture equipment and reviewed dart loading and animal handling. Region 5 staff recently re-allocated equipment so that Pneu Dart rifles are available in each District.

##### **Winter Conditions:**

###### **D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions**

**Past Weather:** November temperatures were slightly above normal and precipitation was above average. There has been little to no snowfall or accumulation below 3000 feet so far this winter.

**Short-Term Forecast:** Temperatures are expected to be mild and cool over the next week with lowering snow levels to 2,000 feet and some significant snow amounts at higher elevations. The 6-10 and 8-14 days forecast both predict below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation.

**Long-Term Forecast:** The December forecast model shows an equal chance for either above average, below average, or normal temperatures and above average precipitation. The three month forecast model shows an equal chance for above average, below average, or normal temperatures and precipitation.

**Habitat:** Forage is available at most elevations due to the snow free landscape at mid to lower elevations.

**Snow Depths:** Areas below 3,000 feet remain snow free, but this is likely to change over the next week with snow levels dropping to 2,000 feet on some days.

**Animal Concentrations:** No unusual concentrations noted to date. The first monthly winter elk survey was conducted on December 3. A total of 28 elk were observed; the rain and wind were so strong that documenting composition was not possible. Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald noted about 60 elk in the unit on December 4 while conducting other work.

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

**Mortality:** None reported.

**Public Contacts:** None to report regarding winter conditions.

The public is reminded that the portion 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, 2013, to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

## **REGION 6**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Mazama Pocket Gopher – Surveys:** Biologists Tirhi, Skriletz, and Hoenes sent in the last of their Mazama Pocket Gopher Distributional Study data sheets and partially completed transferring all GPS track lines representing opportunistic, directed, and historic surveys to a shapefile to send to headquarters. Headquarters staff will be conducting analysis over the next couple of weeks with an interim report due near the end of December.

**Western Pond Turtles:** Using radio telemetry equipment, Biologist Janet Anthony detected female turtle number nine wintering under sword ferns near the pond in Mason County. Biologist Murphie saw this same turtle, covered with dirt, as she was walking on the trail early last spring. This is the first documentation of a Mason County turtle overwintering on land.

Also, staff at Woodland Park Zoo report that 16 turtles have hatched from the eggs collected at the Mason County site last summer. Eleven eggs still remain in the incubator.

**Japanese Eelgrass:** Biologist Hoenes attended a public meeting that was directed by the Department of Ecology (DOE) and pertained to the control of Japanese eelgrass on commercial clam beds in Willapa Bay. Points of interest from that meeting are as follows: (1) Japanese eelgrass has been classified by the State Weed Board as a Class C noxious weed statewide, (2) DOE does not plan to limit, within a growing season, how many acres clam growers can spray to eliminate Japanese eelgrass, and (3) DOE hopes to have the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and application permit available for public review sometime in early spring 2013.

**Canada Goose Check-Stations:** Biologists Michaelis and Sundstrom manned the Canada goose check stations in Raymond and Reikkola. Michaelis checked 25 geese from eight hunters while Sundstrom checked 29 geese from 14 hunters. None of the geese checked were determined to be dusky Canada geese.

**Willapa Hills Elk Herd Plan:** Biologist Hoenes incorporated editorial comments he received from the first internal review of the Willapa Hills Elk Herd Plan. Hoenes then sent the document out to more than 30 WDFW biologists and managers for broad internal review of the document. The WDFW personnel that received copies of the plan actively participate in the management of

other Washington State elk herds and their expertise and knowledge will allow them to provide input that will enhance the document prior to the public review process.

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

**Wildlife Management**

**Waterfowl Hunting:** Biologist Skriletz began the process of restoring waterfowl hunting access at the lagoon on DNR property on the south end of Indian Island in Jefferson County.

**Wildlife Areas**

**Lower Dungeness Unit:** Manager Guzlas posted site rules and other interpretive information at the 3 Crabs site. Over the past few weeks several duck hunters have trespassed on adjacent property to the new acquisition and WDFW has received several complaints. For the current season, the site will be closed to duck hunting from the shoreline.

The Rivers End lease management area continues to receive consistent hunting pressure on the limited day hunt. The site was full of hunters on the day prior to Thanksgiving.



**Chinook Unit:** Manager Guzlas worked with Estuary MOA team to develop a final draft acquisition map for the Goulter/Mattson BPA acquisition. Next steps - Thom Woodruff will work with the survey shop to stake proposed property lines, all parties will review the survey

map and staked boundaries, and consensus will be reached. They will then develop an offer based on the survey map that includes exact acreage involved – and BPA will concur. If all goes well, we will make the offer to the landowner in December or early 2013. Below is the map that was developed last week.



## **Other**

**Snow Creek Resort:** Regional Program Manager (RPM) Cope, Lands Supervisor Cannon, and Access Supervisor Mitchell visited the Snow Creek Resort for a site review with the current lessee. The current lease is due to expire on December 31. Several maintenance issues and infrastructure needs were identified. It is apparent that, while the current lease mandated the lessee to maintain the site, there were no criteria for that maintenance. Any new agreement must bring the standards up and establish new criteria.

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

**District 17 Team Meeting:** Biologist Hoenes and RPM Cope attended the District 17 Team Meeting. This was the first District Team meeting in some time. There was good representation by all programs.