

Wildlife Program

Week of December 17-23, 2012

REGION 1

Wolf Management

District 1: Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Jay Shepherd worked on the wolf depredation response trailer and associated ATV. Biologist Shepherd returned paintball equipment to Captain Rahn in Spokane. Shepherd spoke to Matt Scott of the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers about wolves and elk. Biologist Shepherd went up the Aladdin Road and determined the Smackout pack had left the vicinity of a picture turned in by a resident who saw four wolves. Shepherd was contacted by the West Spokane Rotary Club to speak and a date was set after they learned of the North Spokane Club's wolf talk two weeks ago. Biologist Shepherd went to Thomas Lake and Beaver Lodge resort to investigate the days of locations from a Smackout wolf with a quarter to a third of a mile of residences. Many deer and moose trails explain the wolf activity and no residents were aware of any sightings.



A resident submitted this picture of Smackout wolves spotted along the Aladdin Road in north Stevens County.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Areas

WT Wooten Wildlife Area – Mountain Lion Project: Assistant Area Manager Dingman spent two days assisting the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) crew with capture efforts. Four cats have been collared so far this year. A 148-pound male was caught this week. Carnivore Biologist Ben Maletzke has worked with volunteers from the University of Idaho and Washington State University to assist with the project this year and Erica Carlson was with the group when the 148-pound tom was caught.



Private Lands/Access

Cooperative Habitat Project in Walla Walla County: Private Lands Biologist Dawn Davis spoke with a Walla Walla producer about site preparation for native grass seeding on over 20 acres. The habitat enhancements are part of a cooperative effort between the producer, Pheasants Forever, and WDFW. The landowner is also interested in establishing forbs and shrub cover to benefit pheasants and other wildlife.



A cooperative habitat project involved site preparations for native grass planting in Walla Walla County to establish pheasant nesting and brood-rearing habitat.

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

Wildlife Management

Transplanted Hanford Elk Harvested in NE Washington: District Wildlife Biologist Dana Base received a telephone call from a special permit muzzleloader hunter who harvested a radio-collared cow elk within Pend Oreille County of Game Management Unit (GMU) 117 on December 16, 2012. This elk was transplanted to Pend Oreille County from the Hanford area on March 7, 2000. The cow elk was aged as a yearling when transplanted, probably approaching the sunset of its natural life at age 14 this year. The well-worn radio-collar was delivered to staff at Swanson Lake Wildlife Area (convenient location for the hunter) and will be routed to Ungulate Research Scientist Woody Myers.

Private Lands/Access

Boise Cascade Access: Biologist Rasley met with Boise Cascade Fiber Farm Manager regarding elk numbers and tree damage on their 10,000 acre tree farm. They said there seems to be more elk this year than in the past with the same amount of damage to their trees. They also said they are happy with the current number of elk tags WDFW is issuing to address their damage. So far the two November bull tags and the first two December bull tags have been filled. The two ladies in the photos on the next page are posing with their first bull elk. Two more bull tags started on December 15.



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

Private Lands/Access

Organic Farm with Habitat: Biologist Lewis met with a landowner who is starting a new organic farm in Whitman County. The landowner visited the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to sign up for the NRCS high tunnel program. The landowner is interested in creating some windbreak areas to protect high tunnels and planting areas from herbicide drift. Windbreaks will be planted to native, wildlife friendly shrub and tree species. The landowner also wants to develop riparian buffers and field borders to benefit local wildlife as well. Biologist Lewis and a NRCS technician are planning a site visit to assess current conditions and develop conservation plans.

REGION 2

None

REGION 3

None

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Northern Puget Sound Lesser Snow Goose Study: Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn conducted a snow goose aerial survey in conjunction with a separate survey conducted by Dr. Sean Boyd of Environment Canada. Dr. Boyd has been conducting snow goose surveys of the North Puget Sound snow goose population (i.e. northwest Washington and the Fraser Delta in British Columbia) for the past 20 years. With Dr. Boyd's pending retirement, District 14 staff and the waterfowl section are ramping up in preparation for taking over this survey in future years while evaluating the new survey methods. Since the surveys utilize aerial photography (and interpretation is conducted at a later date), no data are available at this time.

Several neck collars and VHF radio collars were intentionally held back from earlier trapping efforts, with the intent of deploying them in a satellite flock of geese that has been wintering in the Snohomish River valley. In early December, District 14 personnel located neck collars and VHF collars in this flock, thus validating that these geese were part of the population already captured. So, District 14 and Region 4 Private Lands personnel have been attempting to capture geese on a "time available" basis. On Friday, December 21, Biologist Roozen and Technicians

Otto and Deyo successfully rocket netted 15 geese, and were able to deploy remaining VHF collars and several neck collars. To date, 322 geese have been captured this fall.



The Northern Puget Sound Lesser Snow Goose Study provided this aerial view of thousands of lesser snow geese on the Fir Island Snow Goose reserve (above). Explosives ignite as Technician Otto deploys rocket net at the Boe Road Snow Goose Management Area (below).





Region 4 private lands personnel removing geese from rocket net.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Project: Technician Anderson continued to respond to hotline calls reporting dead, sick and injured swans. Anderson collected dead swans from Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom counties and surveyed known roost sites and feeding areas (latest tally in table below). There was an increase in the percentage of power line strike birds and no suspected lead poisoned swans collected this week. In addition, there was an increase in the number of calls from people reporting swans observed as lone swans and potentially injured or diseased (observed sick and lethargic, listing motion, flightless, etc.). Citizens who see dead, sick, or injured swans are reminded to report these to the WDFW swan and nutria hotline at (360) 466-4345 ext. 266.

	Skagit	Snohomish	Whatcom	Sumas	TOTAL
Power line suspect	16	2	20	2	40
Pb suspect	6		6		12
Unknown or Trauma*	5		4	1	10
Feather Pile			2	1	3
TOTAL	27	2	32	4	65

Winter Marine Waterfowl Aerial Surveys: Marine Bird Specialist Evenson and Assistant District Biologists Cyra and Murphie completed the second week of annual winter marine waterfowl surveys. This week the weather allowed only one day of surveys allowing us to complete approximately 30 percent of the survey routes to date. Time on the ground was used to

transcribe data from days flown earlier. 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 20 years of annual surveys can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/psamp/>

Woodland Park Zoo (WPZ) and WDFW Citizen Amphibian Monitoring Planning: Biologist Anderson met with WPZ staff to discuss the approaching training session for the 2013 citizen amphibian monitoring program. Anderson will be providing the training for the citizens. The training includes identification of various local common (or rarities of interest) amphibians, how to survey without touching animals or egg masses, how to use GPS, and how to sign-up as a WDFW volunteer amongst other topics and general questions. The 2012 pilot season was very successful, finishing with 60 volunteers and looking like a potential repeat next season. More information on this program is available at <http://www.zoo.org/backyardhabitat>

Osprey Conflict Reduction permits: Biologist Anderson has consulted with a number of cell tower management entities regarding cell tower maintenance needs that require WDFW to issue a nest removal permit. These permits are issued when the nest is inactive, during the non-breeding season. Osprey nests cannot be removed or destroyed without a permit from WDFW during this time. When Osprey are active in the nest (bird or eggs in nest) the birds, the nest, and eggs are protected both under state and federal laws. During the winter season, when osprey are south in e.g. Mexico, WDFW requires a permit under the state Wildlife Interaction Rules to remove the inactive nest, but the request must be a damage or safety situation. Information on the Wildlife Interaction Rules is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/rules/>

Wildlife Areas

Lake Terrell Water Levels: Due to heavy rains, the water level in Lake Terrell flooded Lake Terrell Road. Manager Kessler used the new Lake Terrell dam overflow release valve to safely let out water and lower the lake water level. He monitored the lake water level throughout the week and readjusted the valve when needed. The system worked perfectly with the road flooding receding after a couple days.

Leque Island: Restoration Projects Coordinator Brokaw and Manager Link participated in a conference call with a representative from Ducks Unlimited and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Sole Source Aquifer Program to discuss a timeline for EPA review of a groundwater report. The groundwater report is intended to provide additional information in development of a preferred land-use plan on Leque Island, which is between Stanwood and Camano Island.

The call resulted in EPA targeting January 31, 2013, as the review completion date. Coordinator Brokaw provided this update and disseminated the groundwater report to Leque Island stakeholders via email. Included in the email was a brief outline of next steps, which includes initiating a public process to determine the preferred land-use plan for Leque Island.

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

Wildlife Management

Brant Age Survey: Biologist DeBruyn instructed Stephanie Fisher, an AmeriCorps volunteer working at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, on the fine points of determining age and race of brant as they graveled at the Swinomish reserve. Fisher is an educator working on the International Brant Monitoring Project, which focuses on taking grade school kids out to count brant.

Snow Goose Festival Planning: Biologist Milner hosted a tour of the Skagit and Port Susan Deltas for Jim Chu, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) International Bird Program, and Rob Butler, retired Canadian Wildlife Service biologist. Dr. Butler graciously agreed to be our featured speaker at the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site designation that will occur during the Snow Goose Festival and wanted to see the area first hand in preparation for his talk. Finding a day that worked for everyone was challenging. We picked the day when our area was experiencing record high tides and gale force winds. In spite of the inhospitable weather, we had a fine tour and were able to compare many interesting perspectives.



Dr. Rob Butler, Ruth Milner and Jim Chu enjoyed the view of Skagit Bay as the wind blew furiously around them.

Urban Wildlife Presentation to Pacific Crest Middle School: Biologist Anderson presented to the entirety of the Pacific Crest Middle School in Ballard. Anderson provided an interactive hands-on question and answer format, with some slides that went through various common “urban” taxa. American Crow was the favorite among the 60 plus students – as they are studying crows in class. A couple budding biologists in the class had many answers for the rest of their classmates.

Wildlife Areas

Lummi Island Overlook Fence: Manager Kessler visited the Lummi Island unit and repaired recent damage to the overlook boundary fence. Someone had knocked out several of the cedar fence slat boards. The boards were reinstalled and secured in place. Kessler also checked and repaired the unit boundary signs.

Samish Unit: Manager Belinda Rotton, Natural Resources Specialist (NRS) Greg Meis, and Natural Resources Technician Curran Cosgrove toured the Samish Unit to monitor water levels and evaluate the current wetland and agricultural enhancements proposals and potential locations for new hunting blinds.

Island Unit: Natural Resources Technician Cosgrove and Natural Resources Specialist Meis monitored water levels and adjusted water control structures on the Island Unit.

Private Lands/Access

Bow Hill Road Pheasant Release Site: Biologist Roozen met with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff. Meeting topics included the pheasant hunting season and potential for continuation of WDFW's land use license. Region 4 staff will work to analyze the sites productivity and difficulties, and evaluate the future of the site.

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

Wildlife Management

North Cascades Elk Herd Management: Biologist Danilson worked with biologists from Washington Department of Transportation and the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe to reconcile data on elk related vehicle collisions along SR 20 from 2012. The best estimate of lethal elk collisions for 2012 (to date) along SR 20 between Sedro Woolley and Concrete is a total of 49, which makes this highway corridor one of the top three in Washington state for elk-vehicle collisions. This estimate does not include incidents where elk are hit, but not killed, because these are often not reported and much more difficult to conclusively document. Another bull elk was hit last week, but apparently not killed. This data will be used to develop a proposal to address this situation.

Late Archery Deer Hunt – GMU 454, Issaquah Unit: Biologist Anderson received a number of calls regarding hunters looking to get a deer in the current Western Washington late archery hunt, Issaquah unit. The Issaquah unit is largely private land. It is the most urban Game Management Unit in the state, incorporating all the major metro areas that cannot be hunted in. This is a unit that, from a management standpoint, benefits from some population harvest pressure to keep game animals from potentially creating conflict and seeking solace in urban areas. It is currently “any deer” for archery until December 31 – make it a holiday hunt!

However, access to hunting areas is problematic due to the large private land component. That said there are some nice opportunities on DNR and DFW lands, if one puts in the homework and holds firm to the importance that many areas receive multiple types of recreational activity use. Wear orange in areas where other recreational users have potential to be in the more common use areas of your hunt area, be smart and hunt hours that have reduced chance of contact with others. Always make safety the number one priority and just enjoy being outdoors. Learn more about hunts in your local area here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/>

Wildlife Areas

Snoqualmie Wildlife Area: Natural Resources Worker Kraig Paulson continued cleaning, repairing and winterizing pheasant pens on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. Paulson also cleared brush around the barn to prepare for debris removal.

Headquarters and Leque Island Units: Wildlife Area staff spent Monday morning monitoring water levels during the extremely high tide. The bay front dikes at the Snow Goose Reserve were overtopped near the parking area, as well as several places at Leque Island. Water was about two inches from overtopping the dike at Headquarters. Wildlife Area staff discussed upcoming agriculture lease renewals for the Swan Reserve, Snow Goose Reserve, Leque Island, Samish and Padilla Bay Units

Fir Island Farm Units: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove and NRS Meis filled potholes and graded the parking lot and entrance road at the Fir Island Farms Snow Goose Reserve.

Private Lands/Access

GMU 418 Elk Hunting Access: Private lands staff continued to monitor access and address problems within the GMU. Three unfilled tag holders have through December to fill their tags.

Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program: Region 4 private land staff continued scheduled surveys of waterfowl quality hunt units and attended to unit repairs as needed. Hunting success varied with the weather, but many units saw use through the week. Region 4 private lands staff also monitored and noted hunter use in the snow goose quality hunt units. Several small flocks of geese were spread out throughout the Region made for limited use and success in the units.



Barley planted at a Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program unit. Private lands staff contracted the program partner landowner to plant food plots to enhance the surrounding units.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Columbia White-tailed deer (CWTD): Biologists Miller and Bergh completed the final CWTD surveys on Willow Grove and Puget Island. The fawn:doe:buck ratios have been high on Puget Island and evidence of reproduction is present on the small area of habitat on Willow Grove. Region 5 staff also participated in the monthly conference call on the status of the emergency translocation of CWTD from Julia Butler Hanson National Wildlife Refuge. The draft Environmental Assessment for this translocation is currently in the public comment period and comments are due by January 2, 2013. The draft Environmental Assessment is available at <http://www.fws.gov/willapa/pdf/CWTD%20Translocation%20Draft%20EA.pdf>

Resident Dark Goose (RDG) Program Evaluation Report: Staff from Regions 5 and 6 met with Waterfowl Section Manager Kraege to discuss the RDG Program Evaluation Report. Several future management strategies were discussed and will be included in the draft report to send to partnering agencies. Input from those agencies will help guide our future management of this small, but important population of resident geese.

Post Season Deer Surveys: Biologist Holman summarized data collected during the recently conducted deer survey flights over the Klickitat County Game Management Units. Survey conditions were suitable though not ideal for the three-day effort. A total of ~1,350 deer were observed in aggregate with 1,083 classified to age and sex. The buck to doe ratios generated from this work are used to evaluate the effectiveness of current hunting management strategies in meeting the post-season buck to doe ratio goal of 15-19 bucks per 100 does, as outlined in the Game Management Plan. The results of the surveys are as follows by GMU:

GMU 578 West Klickitat: 179 deer classified, buck to doe ratio of 20:100, three-year mean buck to doe ratio of 12:100.

GMU 388 Grayback: 361 deer classified, buck to doe ratio of 23:100, three-year mean buck to doe ratio of 18:100.

GMU 382 East Klickitat: 543 deer classified, buck to doe ratio of 11:100, three-year mean buck to doe ratio of 13:100.

Klickitat GMUs pooled: 1,083 deer classified, buck to doe ratio of 16:100, three-year mean buck to doe ratio of 15:100.

Collectively, the Klickitat GMUs are performing well under the three-point antler restriction in early general seasons with later hunting opportunities offered partially by permit-only and partially to primitive weapons. One possible exception is GMU 382, where the buck to doe post-season objective has not been reached in five of the preceding seven years. Please see photos below of Klickitat County deer taken during the surveys, courtesy of Biologist Bergh.



Deer survey flights in Klickitat County Game Management Units. Stefanie Bergh photos.



Black-tailed Deer Research Project: A fawn mortality search associated with the Region 5 portion of the black-tailed deer research project was conducted. Study does and their associated young are being monitored by a combination of remote (satellite) and field (VHF) methods. The does are located in two study clusters concentrated within the Washougal (568) and Coweeman

(550) Game Management Units. To date, in the Washougal cluster of five remaining does, four fawns remain alive. Please see the photos below taken from nearly the same location within GMU 568 in summer versus winter conditions.



The Washougal Game Management Unit (568) in summer versus winter conditions.

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

Wildlife Management

Trout Lake Elk Area Permit Hunt: Biologist Anderson was contacted by two hunters who have permits for the upcoming January elk permit hunt. Information was given regarding landowners with potential damage and weather conditions that may impact success. To date, three elk have been harvested during this hunt.

Winter Conditions

District 10 and MSHWA Winter Conditions

Past Weather: November temperatures were slightly above normal and precipitation was above average for the month. Snow levels this past week dropped to below 1,000 feet with some accumulation, but increased to 2,500-3,000 later in the week. Elevations above 2,500 feet received significant snowfall, with areas accumulating two to six feet of snow in the past seven days depending on elevation and location around the Mount St. Helens area.

Short-Term Forecast: Temperatures are expected to be cool over the next week with the snow level being above 2,000 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day forecast both predict below normal temperatures and below normal precipitation.

Long-Term Forecast: The January 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 lower elevations. Most areas above 1,500 feet currently have light snow cover, while areas above 2,500 feet have significant snow cover.

Snow Depths: Several inches of snow fell this past week, with snow levels briefly lowering below 1,000 feet.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations of elk noted to date. On December 3, 2012, a total of 28 elk were present on the Mudflow Unit monitoring area. The Wildlife Area Manager 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 Mount 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: Above normal snowfall has created severe winter conditions in the south Cascades over the past week.

Winter Severity: The Klickitat Wildlife Area is 60 percent open with five to six inches of snow on the remaining portion of the landscape. The eastern portions of Klickitat County are snow-free and deer are reported to be in good condition.

Habitat: Habitat is generally open below 1,500 feet with heavy snow above 2,000 feet.

Animal Concentrations: Deer widely distributed throughout eastern Klickitat County. Deer and elk are starting to concentrate in the south Cascades.

Animal Condition: Deer and elk appear to be in very good condition and no winter stress/mortality has been reported.

Mortality: None reported this week

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

REGION 6

Marine Bird Surveys: Biologist Murphie along with Biologists Evenson (HQ) and Cyra (Region 4) began winter surveys of marine birds last week. The 2012-2013 Season is Murphie's 17th participating in this effort. These surveys are conducted by air and sample areas across all the inland marine waters of the greater Puget Sound Region. Last week, they completed about 24 percent of the planned survey route (see Figure below from J. Evenson).

