

Wildlife Program

Week of December 24-30, 2012

REGION 1

Gray Wolf Management

District 1: On Christmas Eve, Biologist Shepherd, WDFW Officer Erickson, and Stevens County Sheriff Allen visited a property in the Blue Creek area where three dead horses were found by a caretaker. The investigation determined that only one had predator tracks in the vicinity and was fed upon. The tracks indicated coyotes were the predator and it was determined the animals did not die from a wolf attack as reported by the caretaker.



Biologist Shepherd contacted a local rancher to discuss his Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement and relayed to him that one of the radio-collared Smackout wolves has been localized 1.2 miles west of his home ranch in the Wedge for several days after going north from the Pend Oreille Lakes east of Colville into Canada and back to the southwest into the Wedge.



Biologist Shepherd contacted WDFW Officer Weatherman concerning going to the wolf's locations in the Wedge next week as the rancher

WDFW Officer Erickson and Stevens County Sheriff Allen observed a dead horse in the Blue Creek area (directly above). Coyote track scavenged in the Blue Creek area (top of page).

indicated he has stock in the area. Biologist Shepherd was contacted by Biologist Becker concerning logistics of upcoming winter wolf captures. Biologist Shepherd contacted local residents and ranchers in the Aladdin Valley relaying suspected Smackout wolf pack locations given the location of the remaining radio-collared male.

District 2: Biologist Atamian returned calls for two potential wolf sightings called in this Friday. One was a deer kill with some tracks around it, most looked to be coyote. However, one was a little larger, but the track was messed up a bit and may have been a double. Atamian told the caller that if more kills or the animal itself was seen again in the area to give us a call and take more pictures. The other call turned out to be a kill site with no tracks or other evidence as to what the predator was or even what the prey was.



Larger canid track, using a quarter for scale, found around a deer kill by the centennial trail near Spokane Falls Community College.

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

Wildlife Management

Winter Turkey Surveys:

District wildlife program staff continued winter surveys of turkeys this week. As accomplished for deer surveys earlier this year all turkey survey transects have been standardized into 15 mile long segments using rural county roads. Transects will be surveyed between December 16 through January 31.



Winter turkeys on the Deer Creek survey route in Pend Oreille County.

Other

Winter Conditions: At Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, skies were generally overcast this week, with temperatures dropping into the 20's overnight and then rising to the 30's during the day. Occasional light snowfall occurred throughout the week. Snow depth at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area headquarters is seven inches as of Friday, December 28.



Earth cellar at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area headquarters, December 18, 2012.

REGION 2

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wolverine Research: Santa came early this year as we had our first wolverine capture of the season on Christmas Eve! Biologist Fitkin and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wolverine crew placed a satellite collar on a young, healthy 26 pound male. Unexpectedly, it appears that this is a different animal than the other unknown individual caught on camera at the same site a couple of weeks ago. What a great start to the capture season; and with a dry spell in the forecast, we should have all our traps operational this coming week, setting the stage for a promising season in 2013. A couple of days after the capture, our remote camera recorded another charismatic carnivore helping himself to the remains of the bait at the temporarily inoperable trap.



Dasher, a young and healthy 26 pound male, was the first wolverine capture of the season and was collared on Christmas Eve. Scott Fitkin photos.

Lynx Research: Biologist Fitkin and USFS staff radio-tracked and successfully downloaded GPS location data from one of last year's collared lynx. This gives us close to a full year's worth of locations on three of the four remaining collared animals with just one female left to go before the collars stop transmitting later this winter. Data will contribute to the ongoing graduate student projects associated with the project.



Lynx tracks above Mazama (left) located within lynx country (right). Scott Fitkin photos.

Pygmy Rabbit Snow Surveys: Research Scientist Becker, Biologist Eidson, Technician Hastings and a small crew continued surveys in the snow on Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area. As of now, approximately 1,800 acres have been covered. Approximately 90 active burrows were located with an estimated 40 different pygmy rabbits using those burrows. This suggests at least 40 percent of this year's released rabbits are surviving today and there is a potential for many of these rabbits to reach the breeding season. Genetic analyses completed before the holidays have already identified 23 individual pygmy rabbits that were released in 2012, with many new samples awaiting analysis. In addition, laboratory analyses confirm that rabbits released in the area in 2011 had offspring in the wild and some of them are surviving today.



An active pygmy rabbit burrow located on the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area.



Pygmy rabbit tracks in the snow (left). A reintroduced pygmy rabbit spotted in the wild (right).

Weather: Hard core winter in the Okanogan. We've got one to two feet of snow all the way down to the valley floor in the Methow with somewhat less in the Okanogan. Temperatures dropped to single digits on several nights.



Wintering Sharp-tailed grouse: The high-count this week on the Scotch Creek unit was 18. They are utilizing their winter habitat, primarily the water birch trees along Scotch Creek.



REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Half Mile of Elk Fence Demolished: In response to landowner complaints near the former West Valley feed site, Deer and Elk Conflict Specialist Anthony Novack visited the area and found 350+ elk below the fence on DNR Section 36. Approximately a half-mile of elk fence had been removed with heavy equipment. Fence posts were uprooted and piled up. Recently established survey markers were seen on the private property bordering the fence, along with three pieces of heavy equipment that had installed new roadbeds and, presumably, removed the fence. Appears the long ago established elk fence did not exactly follow the newly surveyed section line. Specialist Novack and Officers Peterson and Scherzinger made several attempts to herd the elk toward the Cowiche feed site. Investigation of the fence removal and the prospects for replacing the missing portion are underway.

Other

Winter Conditions: Weather was cold this past week with lows in the teen's and 20's and highs around freezing. Scattered snow occurred all week with some new accumulation. Temperatures

this coming week are expected to be cold with lows in the teen's and 20's, days will be mostly sunny and no significant snowfall is expected. There is good snow cover over most of the area and feed site counts are still increasing. Elk are in good condition.

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 preliminary photo counts of snow geese from the aerial survey that took place on December 21. The results from these counts are being compared to photo counts from a separate survey conducted by Dr. Sean Boyd of Environment Canada. The objective of this “paired” survey is to evaluate efficacy of new survey methods in developing an estimate of this wintering population of lesser snow geese. In the past several years, this population is becoming increasingly fragmented, forming more and smaller groups and expanding its wintering distribution to include more inland areas throughout Whatcom, Skagit and Snohomish counties.

Danilson also coordinated with Dr. Boyd and the fixed-wing contractors to schedule additional snow goose flights (and other scheduled waterfowl surveys) for the week of December 31.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Project: Technician Anderson continued to respond to hotline calls reporting dead, sick and injured swans. Anderson and other District 14 staff collected dead swans from Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom counties and surveyed known roost sites and feeding areas (see table below). The number of calls from people reporting dead, sick or injured swans has increased over the past couple weeks and more swans suspected of lead poisoning were encountered this week. Citizens who see dead, sick or injured swans are reminded to report these to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) swan and nutria hotline at (360) 466-4345 ext. 266.

Swan mortalities 12/29/21	Skagit	Snohomish	Whatcom	Sumas	TOTAL
Power line suspect	17	2	22	2	43
Pb suspect	7	1	8		16
Unknown or Trauma*	8		4	1	13
Feather Pile			2	1	3
TOTAL	32	3	36	4	75

Gateway Pacific Terminal Project Review: Biologist Danilson provided text to Environmental Specialist Williams to address wildlife issues in the draft scoping comments letter related to the Gateway Pacific Terminal project. Williams is drafting up the initial internal review draft scoping comments letter on behalf of WDFW.

Wildlife Areas

Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Projects: Restoration Projects Coordinator Brokaw reviewed 10% Design Reports for Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Projects (PSNERP) proposed within Region 4. The PSNERP program is designed to improve our understanding of changes to nearshore ecosystems, significant ecosystem problems, and potential solutions to those problems. Ultimately, the goal of PSNERP is to implement the highest priority projects identified in Puget Sound.

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

Skagit County Brant Hunting Season Inquiries: Biologist Danilson responded to several inquiries regarding the January Skagit County brant hunting season. As usual for this time of year, the question of whether there will be a season or not piques hunters' interests. While there appears to be a decent numbers of brant in Skagit and Whatcom County bays, surveys to determine whether the proposed season will occur **must be conducted from January 1-10**. A minimum count of 6,000 brant in Skagit County bays is the current threshold for not cancelling this season.

Revision of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) for Mountain Goat Hunting: Biologist Danilson continued to play a supporting role to Section Manager Harris in revising the WAC for mountain goat hunting. Danilson worked with Harris and Information Technology Specialist Talmadge to draft new maps of proposed hunt units and revise legal descriptions. Danilson also provide harvest recommendations to Harris and discussed rationale for tag allocations and results from the 2012 goat surveys of the Mount Baker Area.

Private Lands/Access

Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program: Region 4 private lands staff continued scheduled surveys of waterfowl quality hunt units and attended to unit repairs as needed. Hunting success varied with the weather, but with the holiday season upon us, hunter use of the Waterfowl Quality Hunt units was again up for the week. Region 4 private lands staff also monitored and noted hunter use in the snow goose quality hunt units. Several flocks of geese continue to be spread out throughout the region which appears to be limiting both the use and success of the Snow Goose Quality Hunt units.

Wildlife Areas

Island Unit: Natural Resources Technician Curran Cosgrove and Natural Resources Specialist (NRS) Meis monitored water levels and adjusted water control structures on the Island Unit of the Skagit Wildlife Area.

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

Wildlife Management

Swan Release: Biologist DeBruyn replaced the band and neck collar of a rehabilitated trumpeter swan and assisted with its release at Lake Terrell at WDFW's Whatcom Wildlife Area.

This swan garnered media attention in early November when it was found in urban Snohomish County having been shot. The swan had originally been banded and fitted with a radio collar as part of the study of lead contamination in Whatcom County in 2001. The bird was outfitted with a new (lighter) collar and band. Over the past several weeks, Sarvey Wildlife Center successfully rehabilitated the swan, while the



Trumpeter Swan Society coordinated this release effort and media attention resulting in the release being featured on King 5 news that evening.



Biologist DeBruyn outfits a rehabilitated trumpeter swan with a new neck collar prior to release (directly above). A rehabilitated trumpeter swan takes flight after being released at Lake Terrell on the Whatcom Wildlife Area (top of page).

Wildlife Areas

Leque Island and Samish River Units: Manager Belinda Rotton and NRS Greg Meis met with Loren Brokaw, the new Region 4 Restoration Projects Coordinator. Loren came up to the Skagit for a quick site visit and to discuss some of the project background information for the sites. Other site tours are planned for later in January.

Bow Hill Road Pheasant Release: Manager Rotton prepared a draft Excel spreadsheet summarizing comments received regarding the Bow Hill road hunting site.

Headquarters: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove continued to repair the entry road and parking area. Cosgrove also pruned trees that were beginning to block the entrance to the boat launch. Wildlife Area staff continued to prepare budgets and cost estimates for the upcoming agriculture leases for the Swan Reserve, Snow Goose Reserve, Leque Island, Samish and Padilla Bay Units.

Restoration Planning: Restoration Projects Coordinator Brokaw, Planner Williams, Biologist Rotton, and Natural Resource Specialist Meis met to discuss WDFW lands in the Skagit Wildlife Area. There are several ongoing and potential future habitat restoration efforts in the area.

Restoration Projects Coordinator Brokaw reviewed the Region 4 Restoration Pathway, which is a framework designed to guide restoration projects on WDFW lands in Region 4 to ensure that projects are a collaborative effort between all proponents.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Black-tailed Deer Research Project: Biologists George and Holman followed-up on a mortality signal associated with the Region 5 portion of the black-tailed deer research project. Coweeman doe 171 issued a mortality e-mail on December 23 and was confirmed a likely cougar predation mortality on December 27. 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.



Black-tailed deer 171 discovered after a follow-up on a mortality signal.



The habitat at the site of the mortality (left) and the severely broken neck (right) of black-tail deer 171 was confirmed a likely cougar predation.

Sandhill Cranes: Biologist Anderson is currently working on a summary of sandhill crane nesting data from surveys conducted in the spring and summer of this year. This information is being used for a collaborative paper with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the current status of breeding sandhill cranes in Washington.

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

Wildlife Management

Southwest Washington Management Area 2A and 2B Goose Hunt: The southwest Washington Area 2A goose hunting season continues to be open in all zones. The numbers of harvested geese continues to be lower this year, with technicians having identified over 800 geese from November 10 through December 30 as compared to over 1,000 harvested during this period last year. Harvest rates were approximately 2.22 geese per hunter and seven dusks were harvested during this period.

There is less than one month remaining in the regular season, however hunters interested in participating can refer to pages 16, 20 and 21 of the migratory waterfowl pamphlet for further details regarding requirements for participation.

As a reminder for those planning on participating, Management Area 2A hunts take place on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The season remains open on those days until January 27 unless zone closures occur due to an over-harvest of dusks.

Winter Conditions:

District 10 and Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area

Past Weather: December temperatures were average and precipitation was above average for the month. Snow levels this past week were 1,500-3,000 feet. Most areas above 2,000 feet are snow covered.

Short-Term Forecast: The 6-10 and 8-14 days forecast both predict 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, while most areas above 2,000 feet currently have snow cover, and areas above 2,500 feet have significant snow cover.

Snow Depths: Several inches of snow fell this past week, with snow levels briefly lowering to 1,500 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 to report.

Public Contacts: None to report related to winter conditions.

The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit 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

Past Weather: Snowfall moderated this week bringing winter conditions to normal levels for this time of the year in the South Cascades.

Winter Severity: The Klickitat Wildlife Area is mostly open. 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 normal snowpack for this time of year 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: Two contacts were made this week from concerned citizens about deer in deep snow conditions in Klickitat County.

Snow Depths:

MOUNT SAINT HELENS ELK HERD
2012/2013 WINTER CONDITIONS - SNO-PARK SNOW DEPTH,
NRCS SNOTEL DATA, AND SNOWPACK

From web <http://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/giffordpinchot/recreation/wintersports/?recid=31178&actid=91>
pages: http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/sno_narr3_pl
<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/snotel/Washington/washington.html>

SNOWPARKS:						
Name	Elevation		12/07/2012	12/14/2012	12/21/2012	12/28/2012
TRAIL OF TWO FORESTS	2,200'		No report	Trace of new snow	2ft of snow	More than 2ft of snow
MARBLE MT	2,700'		No new report	5" new snow	4ft of snow	More than 4ft of snow
WAKEPISH	2,800'		No snow	5" new snow	42" of snow at the sno-park	More than 42" of snow

SNOWTEL STATIONS:						
Name	Elevation	Stats	12/1-12/7	12/8-12/14	12/15-12/21	12/22-12/28
JUNE LAKE	3,340'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	12.3	26.8	68.8	103.3
		Min Temp (F)	30.9	27.5	25.7	27.5
		Max Temp (F)	43.9	37.8	35.2	34.5
		Avg Temp (F)	36.6	32.7	29.9	31.1
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	68	72	82.9	84.6

Name	Elevation	Stats	12/1-12/7	12/8-12/14	12/15-12/21	12/22-12/28
SPIRIT LAKE	3,520'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	1.1	9.6	19.1	27.8
		Min Temp (F)	31.5	19	19	22.3
		Max Temp (F)	48.4	41.9	44.4	35.6
		Avg Temp (F)	37.9	32.7	30.2	31.6
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	34.4	37.6	42.2	45.2

Name	Elevation	Stats	12/1-12/7	12/8-12/14	12/15-12/21	12/22-12/28
PEPPER CREEK	2,140'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	0	0.17	14.7	24
		Min Temp (F)	32.4	30.4	30	30.4
		Max Temp (F)	48	43.2	36.9	36.9
		Avg Temp (F)	40.2	35.4	33	33.8
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	22.2	23.7	29.9	31

Name	Elevation	Stats	12/1-12/7	12/8-12/14	12/15-12/21	12/22-12/28
SHEEP CANYON	3,990'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	12.6	25.7	61.3	96.3
		Min Temp (F)	29.1	21.9	23.4	25.5
		Max Temp (F)	42.6	36.5	33.8	33.6
		Avg Temp (F)	35	30.7	28.2	30.2
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	60.4	63.8	69.6	77.3

Name	Elevation	Stats	12/1-12/7	12/8-12/14	12/15-12/21	12/22-12/28
CALAMITY	2500'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	0	0	13	22
		Min Temp (F)	33.8	32.5	29.1	31.3
		Max Temp (F)	47.7	41.2	40.3	36.3
		Avg Temp (F)	40.2	35.6	32.8	33.4
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	42.1	44.5	52.2	54.6

Snowpack % of Avg Snow Water Equivalent	12/07/2012	12/14/2012	12/21/2012	12/28/2012
JUNE LAKE	no data	no data	180%	134%
SPIRIT LAKE	no data	200%	410%	134%
SHEEP CANYON	86%	91%	151%	165%

REGION 6

None