

Wildlife Program

Week of February 6, 2012

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Gray Wolf Monitoring: Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Shepherd deployed remote cameras in the Barnaby Creek drainage in the Kettle Mountain Range with a member of the public who saw 2 wolves and heard possibly 3 howl. Tracks were observed after snowshoeing from the snowmobiles. Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Shepherd spent a day with Todd Foster, U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), deploying cameras and looking for wolf tracks near a recent howling observation in Ruby Creek, Pend Oreille County.



Possible wolf track observed in the Barnaby Creek drainage in the Kettle Range.



Todd Foster (DOD) deploying a remote camera in Ruby Creek, Pend Oreille County.

Asotin Bighorn Sheep: District Biologist Wik spent one day in the field with Idaho Fish and Game Research Biologist Cassirer and WSU Researcher Tom Besser to discuss monitoring needs during this pneumonia outbreak. A monitoring protocol was developed that will best inform researchers on how the disease is spreading through the herd. District Biologist Wik and Assistant DB Vekasy spent one day in the field monitoring bighorn sheep in Asotin. One adult ewe was removed this week after a cougar killed her. We are still awaiting necropsy results from WSU on a health assessment for this animal. Wik was able to visually verify that 30% of the rams in the herd do not appear to have contagious ecthyma at this time, although a small amount of coughing was observed in 3 of the rams. The remaining animals were not observed.



WSU Research Professor Tom Besser helping recover an ewe.

Wildlife Areas

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (SLWA) Grouse Population Numbers: All three grouse trackers are reporting regular sightings of sage and sharp-tailed grouse without radio signals, on and around SLWA. Sightings are of individual and groups. There is some excitement among the trackers and SLWA staff who suspect these sightings may signify increasing populations of two prairie grouse species in the area. Come March and April, grouse mating ground (lek) counts should put more solid numbers on these populations.

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area – USFS Burning project: Bob Dice was contacted by Tara Hanger from Pomeroy Ranger District about burning projects near the wildlife area. The burns are planned in the Round Prairie and Dark Canyon areas and USFS would like to burn some WDFW land along with their lands in the fall of 2012. Besides fuel reduction, the primary benefit of the project is improvement of wildlife habitat. All burning is required to avoid riparian areas such as S. Fork of Asotin Creek and Dark Canyon. USFS is paying for the project. Dice approved the project for WDFW add-on acres.

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

Wildlife Management

Proposed Master Hunter Season Changes in District 2: As follow-up to last week's public meeting, Biologist Ferguson and Regional Wildlife Manager Robinette met with an interested Master Hunter and Landowner for a couple of hours discussing the proposed Master Hunter season changes in District 2 as well as the newly proposed Landowner Hunting Permit Proposal. Ferguson, Atamian, and Robinette also discussed these proposals with numerous other callers and through email correspondence with others.

Wildlife Areas

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area – Shooting Range: Use has been on the rise at a primitive shooting range near Asotin Creek. Word seems to have gotten around that we have one and use of the range by Idaho residents and others who are not displaying Discover Passes or Vehicle Access permits is now common. Cuevas Winegeart posted additional Discover Pass signs on Thursday and Officer Brendan Vance began issuing citations on Friday.

Private Lands/Access

Landowner Input received on Initiative for Private Lands Habitat and access: Along with other Private Lands staff, Biologist Merg attended a meeting of Conservation District staff and influential landowners to gather input for the Habitat and Access Initiative in southeast Washington. The meeting was facilitated by Ray Ledgerwood of the Conservation Commission and Pheasants Forever provided a lunch for participants. Staff received consistently positive contributions, even from individuals that have been reluctant to endorse WDFW habitat and access activities in the past. Outcomes of the meeting include the raw material for a program to improve especially CRP habitat for pheasants in southeast WA, and to expand access for hunters to that improved habitat. WDFW staff was also invited to speak to additional groups of landowners that will be interested in this program. Staff is writing a summary report of the workshop.

REGION 2

Region 2 – Okanogan, Douglas, Chelan, Grant and Adams Counties

Regional Wildlife Program Manager: Matt Monda

DISTRICT BIOLOGISTS

District 5: Grant / Adams District - Rich Finger / Brock Hoenes

Weekender Opportunities: Waterfowl numbers have greatly increased on the Columbia Plateau with the warming weather. Large numbers of field feeding ducks can be observed throughout the basin. Mansfield Pond at the Gloyd Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area is currently holding 10,000-15,000 ducks consisting mostly of mallards and pintails. This is currently a great area to observe waterfowl moving in and out of a nearby cornfield about 0.5 miles to the northeast. We are hopeful that ongoing wetland management work on this pond will ensure that it will continue to draw large numbers of waterfowl into the future.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Washington Ground Squirrels: Biologists Finger coordinated with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff on efforts to reintroduce Washington ground squirrels to a site on Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. The USFWS has been extremely cooperative and has taken the lead on site preparation (artificial burrow construction, enclosure installation, and nest box construction). This cooperative partnership will help the sustainability of this project which has been ongoing since 2006. Finger continues to coordinate with volunteers in charge of pre-baiting traps and with those who will be attending the capture event. Though the start was slow, traps are now being cleaned out of bait which suggests levels of activity similar to what we've experienced in the past. Fortunately, we have enough volunteers to cover all of the trapping and relatively little WDFW staff time will be needed to complete the effort.

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

Middle Crab Creek Habitat Enhancement: Finger attended a meeting with the Bureau of Reclamation and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Office of Columbia River biologist Davidson and Wildlife Area Manager Fitzgerald to coordinate on efforts related to the Supplemental Feed Route project (<http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/ea/wash/potholes/index.html>). Timeline of water delivery, weed control, and bank stabilization were the major topics of discussion. Though specific dates with regards to water release cannot be predicted at this time and much work has yet to be completed, we were told that we should plan based on a spring 2013 water delivery. The Russian olive trees (grey-green colored trees) in the photo below shows just one of the challenges ahead with dealing with invasive vegetation in this area. Additional water will mean a rapid invasion of undesirable species.



Gloyd Seeps Farm Unit with Non Native Russian Olive and Elm in the Background.

District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen

Weather Conditions: Warmer temperatures and a small amount of rain in lower elevations of the Okanogan valley continue to melt snow on south facing slopes throughout deer and Bighorn sheep winter range exposing available forage. South facing slopes in the Methow are also beginning to open up. Wintering deer have enjoyed fairly mild conditions for much of the winter thus far and better than average over-winter fawn survivorship is anticipated.

Weekender Opportunities: The Bighorn sheep on Mt Hull just south of Oroville in Okanogan County are visible at the lower elevations foraging on the south facing slopes. Both the larger rams and ewe-lamb groups can be viewed at the same locations. The first early neotropical bird migrants are returning to the area.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

North Cascades Wolverine Research Project: Wildlife biologist Fitkin and USFS staff worked on two wolverines caught in separate traps simultaneously. The first turned out to be a new male (nicknamed Special K) that is completely resistant to our primary immobilization drug (Ketamine) and eventually had to be released uncollared. We have already geared up with an alternate drug and hope to recapture this tenacious critter – game on! The second capture went very smoothly and we fitted Mallory, an adult female from last year, with a new satellite collar. This effort continues to expand our knowledge of the status, distribution, and general ecology of this elusive species in the North Cascades. Given their dependence on cold, snowy environments, wolverines are a bell weather species for climate change, making the data from this initial study effort even more valuable.



Wolverine - Mallory



WDFW biologist Scott Fitkin and Mallory



Wolverine - Special K

North Cascades Lynx Research Project: Assistant Wildlife Biologist Heinlen, WDFW Enforcement Officer Cal Treser and USFS staff successfully immobilized and radio collared the



first lynx of the season for this project, a healthy adult male (Gary) weighing 22 pounds (picture to the left). We fitted the animal with a GPS radio collar scheduled to last one year. This lynx should provide valuable data on habitat selection in a naturally fragmented and largely unburned landscape. This is the third study animal successfully captured and fitted with a radio collar in the Methow portion of the project area since January 2011.



Wildlife Biologist Jeff Heinlen and Gary

Bighorn Sheep Surveys: Wildlife Biologist Heinlen conducted a classification survey of the Mt Hull Bighorn sheep herd from the ground. A total of 77 Bighorn sheep (38 ewes, 8 lambs, 31 rams) were observed for a ratio of 82Rams:100ewes:21Lambs. This is the highest ratio of rams to ewes in this herd since 1999. With 58% of the observed rams being $\geq 3/4$ curl the 2012 permit winner should have a good chance at a very nice ram.



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

Ross's Gull Sighting: Wildlife Biologist Heinlen picked up the "guest book" he placed at the Loomis Quicky Mart for visitors to sign and comment in when they came to view the Ross's Gull observed at Palmer Lake. The book was placed there to get an idea of how many people would come to view a rare bird. One hundred and six people signed the guest book from December 21, 2011 through December 30, 2011. The majority of people who signed were from Washington and many people wrote how great it was to see this gull.

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

Weather Conditions: Snows continue to accumulate at higher elevations along the crest of the Cascades. Warmer temperatures and rain have reduced snow levels in Douglas County and at low elevations in Chelan County.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wolves: Does Chelan County have wolves? There is a very good chance that Chelan County is occupied by wolves, however, under our current definitions of resident, pack and breeding pair, we have no evidence to support their presence. To date, we have not been able to record any images of wolves, nor identify any scat or tracks that were confirmed as wolf. Other than a migratory mule deer herd, the prey base in Chelan County is somewhat limited. Elk, at numbers adequate to support wolves, are limited to the northern extent of the Colockum herd in GMUs 251 and 249. For a large portion of the winter these two GMUs have snow depths that preclude ungulate occupancy. North of Hwy. 2, there are a small number of dispersed elk bands, and an even smaller number of moose. It appears that in order for wolves to establish themselves they will have to occupy areas of mule deer winter range, and we do not have the evidence to confirm their presence. Mule deer winter range in Chelan County has, in general, higher road density and human use than the majority of the rest of the county. The general consensus is that when a pack becomes established, it makes itself known, and wolves have not shown themselves within the winter range yet. These areas have the fewest reports of wolves, yet have the highest prey densities in the county. So, can Chelan County support wolves, we don't know, but in time, the wolves will eventually reveal the truth.

Biologists Gallie and Frame conducted exploratory surveys and put out remote cameras in upper Chelan County looking for signs of wolves. These areas contain the majority of our public wolf reports/sightings. After covering roughly 50+ miles of back country roads and snowmobile trails over two days, no evidence was found of wolves using these areas in winter. Evidence of ungulate prey was scarce, with only tracks of a few moose (three; including cow and calf pair), and snowshoe hare being detected. A small number of wintering mule deer were observed at lower elevation near the fringe of developed areas. The only carnivore sign encountered was of a few coyotes. These areas would be suitable for wolves during late spring/summer when migratory mule deer and elk once return.

Biologist Frame places a remote camera in Chelan County



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

Chelan Warehouse Plan: Biologist Volsen attended a community open house meeting in Chelan that focused on a proposed warehouse industrial district for the city. The city of Chelan contacted WDFW seeking information about bighorn sheep populations in the area and how the development of the warehouse district might impact sheep. Chelan is bounded by two California bighorn sheep herds, the Manson herd to the north and west, and the Chelan Butte herd to the south. Bighorns from the Chelan Butte herd have been documented moving north across developed areas in order to access the Deer Mtn. area, and as such, have been getting struck by vehicles along a short stretch of highway just outside Chelan. The sheep have been moving between deer Mtn. and Chelan Butte for several years and are showing fidelity to the area, indicating that it is unlikely that this behavior will stop. Male sheep especially are willing to make these movements during the fall rut when they are pursuing females. The city is interested in accommodating the bighorn sheep under this action and values their presence in the community. Additional meetings will be held with the city to explore options.

The Industrial Warehouse District proposed by the City of Chelan.



Falconry: Biologist Volsen banded a gyrfalcon captured by a local falconer in Chelan County. The bird was a passage female, a young wild bird less than 12 months old that has not yet molted into its adult plumage. Gyrfalcons are the world's largest falcon, and one of five North American falcon species. Gyrfalcons are prized by falconers for the incredible speeds they achieve in flat level flight when pursuing prey. In the wild, they occur in three common morphs (plumage colorations); gray being the most common, a less common dark morph and a white morph, which constitutes roughly 10% of the gyrfalcons. While the gyrfalcon appears calm in the image, she took exception to us trying to put a band on her leg.



A juvenile female gyrfalcon waits in the Wenatchee District office for banding. A falconer's hood is placed on the gyrfalcon to keep the bird calm.

SPECIES RECOVERY

Pygmy Rabbit Recovery - Penny Becker

Weather Conditions: Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area continued to have temperatures above freezing in the daytime, which has melted more than 60% of the snow cover that remained from weeks ago. The area also received some precipitation, making roads into the wildlife area muddy and difficult to travel.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Pygmy Rabbit Husbandry: Research Scientist Becker spent time on Sagebrush Flat wildlife area monitoring and providing supplemental feed to the pygmy rabbits in large enclosures. No mortalities have occurred in the last month.

Winter Survey Results: Upon returning from leave this week, Becker met with District Biologist Volsen to discuss the results of the winter surveys that he organized while she was away. Approximately 1/3 of Sagebrush Flat wildlife area was covered in the brief time snow conditions allowed surveys. Four potential new burrows were found and fecal pellets collected at each site to perform genetic species identification analyses. This will verify whether the pellets are from pygmy or cottontail rabbits.

Non-invasive Fecal Sampling: Results from the University of Idaho laboratory confirmed that at least one burrow site was actively being used by pygmy rabbits, while other sites were determined to be cottontails and another sample needs further processing.

Spring Translocation Preparation: Research Scientist Becker focused much of her time this week planning for trapping in other range states this spring. Dates for trapping in Utah and Nevada have been set for March 6-22. Becker corresponded with state agencies in Utah and Nevada, planned with potential trapping crew members, and started to deal with other travel logistics.

WILDLIFE AREAS

Methow Wildlife Area Complex - Tom McCoy / Rob Wottlin / John Haegan

Weather Conditions: Foggy and overcast, highs in the 30's and lows in the 20's

Weekender Opportunities: Skiing is in full swing in the Methow.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Long-term vegetation monitoring: John Hagan has been working on analyzing the Statewide Range Survey data he collected over the past two field seasons. Preliminary results show a similar trend through nearly all sites. Succession is proceeding to a fairly predictable, and stable, end-state regardless of land use. This information allows us to look at current plant communities and, with a reasonable degree of certainty, determine what affect differing land uses will have on succession, and what the late successional community will look like. A more detailed statistical analysis will be completed as time and resources allow.

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

Weather Conditions: Above freezing temperatures most of the week. Friday and Saturday the Bridgeport area had rain and fog while the local higher elevations just had wet sloppy snow.

Weekender Opportunities: Area bird watchers have been having regular sightings of 3 long-tailed ducks west of the Washburn Island unit's parking site. Bald eagles are seen every day in the local area. This coming weekend, Presidents Day weekend, the Washington Ornithological Society is offering a 3-day field trip to the Waterville Plateau and the Okanogan Highlands.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Grouse Observations: Thursday morning, biologists Ann Winters and Dan Peterson found 12 sharp-tailed grouse feeding in water birch trees on the West Foster Creek unit. Later that

morning they also located 13 male sage grouse, some of which were displaying, west of Mansfield.

Banding Records: Biologist Ann Winters assisted volunteer Rick Hendrick with the entry of his 2011 banding records into the U.S. Geologic Survey's Bandit web site. This year Rick, who has been a licensed bander for a decade, banded nearly 350 kestrels at approximately 150 kestrel boxes located in Douglas and Chelan counties. In addition to this kestrel banding program, begun, incidentally by now retired Enforcement Officer George Brady more than 25 years ago, Rick maintains all the wood duck and bluebird boxes on the Wildlife Area.

Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex – Greg Fitzgerald / Brian Cole / Roger Nelson

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE

Herbicide application: With recent wet, warm weather driving the frost out of the ground conditions are prime for residual herbicide applications to roads and parking areas on the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, Vegetation Management Specialist Roger Nelson started the annual treatment. The residual herbicide needs some moisture to carry it onto the soil surface and prevents germination of annual weed seeds such as Russian thistle and kochia, keeping the roads and parking areas clean and reducing the possibility of wildfires.

Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Complex - Jim Olson / Brian DuPont / Mike Nelson

Weather Conditions: Low temps ranged from 18 – 30, Highs ranged from 30 – 44. No new snow recorded, with about 6" remaining on the ridges and valley bottoms of Scotch Creek.

Weekender Opportunities: Winter wildlife on Scotch Creek. One hike this week revealed over 80 white-tailed deer, a dozen Hungarian partridge, several Northern Harrier hawks, one owl, one coyote, and one Sharp-tailed grouse on the Scotch Creek unit.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Pogue Mountain Thinning: Double A Logging finished cutting on the Pogue Mountain project this week. One more week will be needed to haul the decked logs to market. To date over 100 loads have been removed. The next step will be to contract with hand crews to cut and scatter the dense non-merchantable pole thickets, followed by prescribed burning if funding is available.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex - Dale Swedberg / Justin Haug

Weather Conditions: For the week daytime temperatures ranged from a low of 30 to a high of 39, nighttime temperatures ranged from a low of 11 to a high of 32. Wind averages ranged from .0 to .7 mph with gusts ranging from 2 to 8 mph. Warmer daytime temperatures continue to contribute to melting and sublimation of the snow. North slopes and shaded areas still have snow but no more than 6" average with south slopes bare. Roads are getting soft and mudding with warmer daytime temperatures, however cold nighttime temperatures are freezing the roads.

Weekender Opportunities: Bird watching – most common wintertime birds, e.g., Bird watching opportunities include species previously listed in weekly reports - Red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers, ring-necked pheasant (see photo), American robin (see photo), northern shrike, northern harriers, pine grosbeak, redpolls, trumpeter swans, Bohemian waxwings, Clark’s nutcrackers, black-capped chickadees, northern flicker - red-shafted variety and hooded mergansers. A few early migrants are appearing such as bluebirds which were heard and red-winged blackbirds that were seen.

Ring-necked pheasant (below)



Copyright - Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Photo by Justin Haug



Copyright - Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Photo by Justin Haug

American robin (above)



White-tailed deer are quite visible in early morning and early evening (above).

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Machine Thinning - Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP) Phase 1 & 2: For the week machine thinning concentrated in the area east and southeast of Forde Lake. About 30 loads of logs have been hauled out.





The self-loading forwarder on the right is what is used to gather the cut-to-length logs and haul them back to the deck, where the logs are sorted and then loaded when a truck shows up. There are 4 log sorts – one sort each goes to Boise Cascade in Kettle Falls, Vaagen Bros. in Colville, Boise Cascade in Arden and Colville Precision Pine in Omak.

Chelan Wildlife Area Complex - Ron Fox

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

White River: Ron Fox, Chelan Manager, met with Jason Lundgren, Cascade Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group (CCFEG), and Peter Jenkins and Bob Parrish, US Fish and Wildlife Service to discuss their recent success in acquiring a grant to install log jams on the White River on WDFW property. This year they plan to complete the engineering and design work and conduct additional geotechnical and hydrological analyses with the desire to complete the logjams in 2013. They are also in process of developing concepts for floodplain restoration for future grant applications.

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

Beebe Springs Natural Area: Ron Fox, Chelan Manager, reviewed commented on draft permits prepared by consultant J.A. Brennan Associates for Beebe Springs Phase 4a. Phase 4a work will focus habitat restoration trail construction west of Highway 97 and adjacent to the Chelan Fish Hatchery. Permits will be needed for invasive plant removal from wetlands and along Beebe Creek and trail crossing of Beebe Creek and two other spring-fed wetlands. He also contacted Chelan County and Corps of Engineers concerning the status of permits for phase 4.

Both agencies had “misplaced” permit applications for several weeks but they are now back in the review path.

PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski

Weekender Opportunities: Predator Hunting is strongly underway on private and public lands in Douglas and Grant counties. Coyote and Bobcat hunters are out and about trying to call in these elusive animals.



GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

LIP: Private Lands Biologist Braaten assisted landowner in completing final reimbursement paperwork. Private lands biologist Braaten began installing raptor deterrents on wooden corner posts on all new fence installed on LIP projects this week. This will hinder raptors from perching in areas where sage grouse frequent.



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

Private Lands Access: Private lands biologist Braaten began annual task of contacting landowners, collecting and tabulating Hunting by Written Permission (HBWP) and Register to Hunt (RTH) slips of private land cooperators in northern Grant and Douglas Counties. Last year approx. 2000 slips were collected and tabulated.

Corn Stubble Retention Program:



Picture of a successful hunt supplied by a local hunter.

REGION 3

No regional highlights for the week.

Winter Weather: Cold mornings in the 20's, with some rainy days and several sunny days in the 40's were present. Snow continues to melt and winter range hillsides are opening up. Elk are ranging off the feed sites daily and coming back at feeding time.

Weather for this coming week is going to be mild with lows in the 20's and highs in the 40's. No new precipitation is expected.

Elk are in good condition, with counts on the feed sites holding steady. One bull shed his antlers on Feb 12th, which is the earliest ever recorded on Oak Creek.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

WDFW-Woodland Park Zoo Citizen Science Amphibian Monitoring: Biologist Anderson worked with Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Shoreline Parks, and Shoreline Surface Water Management staff to examine and gain access to local public properties for citizen science amphibian monitoring. These are sites requested by the volunteer participants due to

being close to their residence rather than participation in the University of Washington study sites.

Wildlife Health: Biologist Anderson worked with Dr. Kristin Mansfield, WDFW veterinarian; and staff members of Seattle Public Utilities to respond to a request regarding dead beaver at Meadowbrook Pond in Seattle. A second specimen has been retrieved and will be examined for cause of death. With all the winter weather a few weeks back along with colder temperatures than normal and resulting snow melt combined with rain, the beaver very likely dealt with conditions that were difficult. These harsh weather factors and flooding events associated with this weather may have resulted in their death.



Biologist Anderson provided an interview to Nathan Hale High School journalist students regarding the two dead beavers at Meadowbrook for the school newspaper, *The Sentinel*. Anderson emphasized watching wildlife from afar – never approach wildlife inappropriately or touch wild animals – let them be and let them go about their business. Keep them wild. Also, he relayed WDFW is working with SPU and Seattle King County Public Health to examine the two dead beavers retrieved. Anderson explained that there are many natural factors, including the harsh winter weather, limited foraging habitat immediately around the Meadowbrook pond, commonality of beaver in the Lake Washington system (lake and tributaries), as well as specific case of a beaver colony that uses a well known stormwater pond that functions as a water management system firstly and wildlife habitat secondarily that offer many other likely explanations for the demise of the two beaver rather than various wildlife health concerns. That said, WDFW will be examining the two specimens for any health issues.

Great Blue Heron Management Assistance to city of Seattle: Biologist Anderson continued to provide assistance to ongoing heron management efforts in Seattle, as well as review new site-specific management plan requests and send out management plan recommendations for specific

projects. More information on WDFW Priority Habitats and Species, which are recommended by WDFW for consideration at the local government level (such as Great Blue Herons, Bald Eagles, Pileated Woodpeckers and more) can be found at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/>

North Cascades Elk Damage Advisory Group Presentation: At the request of Manager Link, Biologist Kertson prepared a PowerPoint presentation for the North Cascades Elk Damage Advisory Group on modeling elk habitat suitability and connectivity. Mitigation dollars from Seattle Public Utilities are currently available to purchase land within Skagit county to benefit elk, but there is currently no formal strategy in place to target the parcels with the greatest value. Westside GIS Analyst Duff developed rigorous models for quantifying elk habitat suitability and connectivity in North Bend to guide land planning, zoning decisions, and minimize risks to public safety. Similar models that identify high quality habitat and assist with limiting elk damage to private property in Skagit county could be of great benefit to the Nooksack elk herd. Biologist Kertson's presentation provides damage group members with an introduction to model methodologies and applications.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study: Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn flew a search mission to look for swan carcasses in inaccessible areas in Whatcom and Skagit. Technicians Lapsansky and Otto and Volunteer Smith collected more carcasses during the week. Four ducks that died without apparent cause were shipped to the USGS Wildlife Health Center in Madison Wisconsin for necropsy. These ducks were found near the "hot spot" where several swans have died without apparent cause over the past month.

Oregon Spotted Frog Project Biologist Bohannon started contacting landowners regarding Oregon spotted frog surveys and received permission to survey some key properties in the Samish and Skagit watersheds, as well as for sites surveyed last year in Whatcom County. Bohannon also worked with Puget Sound Energy, Seattle City Light, and the Skagit Land Trust to coordinate survey efforts and volunteers. Puget Sound Energy and Seattle City Light will be conducting Oregon spotted frog surveys on property they own, and the Skagit Land Trust is recruiting volunteers to help with surveys on their property.

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

Wildlife Management

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Presentation to The Mountaineers Naturalist Study Group – Bat Ecology, Promoting Bat Habitat, Reducing Conflicts and Urban Bats of Seattle:

Biologist Anderson provided a presentation covering various aspects of bat ecology and stewardship activities to a crowd of 65+ folks with The Mountaineers Naturalist Study Group.

Seattle Parks and Recreation Wildlife Sanctuary Management Group: Biologist Anderson met with Seattle Parks and Recreation staff and Heron Habitat Helpers members at the first 2012 quarterly meeting of the Parks Natural Areas Wildlife Management Group. Topics discussed included working with HHH to obtain a grant to examine wildlife viewing opportunities at Kiwanis Ravine, timing of habitat work in natural areas given wildlife presence, working with Seattle Audubon to monitor restoration sites under their already ongoing Neighborhood Bird Count effort, and working with WDFW Watchable Wildlife group to install a television at

Discovery Park for increasing viewing opportunities of the local heron colony at Kiwanis for the public, as well as provide interpretive opportunity at the learning center. The current management group effort is focused on Kiwanis and Discovery Park as a model for wildlife management efforts that will be extended to other appropriate Seattle Parks properties.

Northwest Flower and Garden Show Outreach: Biologist Anderson provided Living with Bats, Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary habitat advice, general wildlife conflict reduction, and urban wildlife ecology information in a collaborative effort with Bats Northwest and National Wildlife Federation at the 2012 Northwest Flower and Garden Show. Bats Northwest and National Wildlife Federation had adjacent booths which provided a nice collaborative forum for working at either booth and assisting with providing collaborative outreach. The show had great attendance and both booths were very popular.

Nooksack Elk Herd Trap and Collar Project: Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn worked with tribal biologists to set up two collapsible clover traps and to monitor bait and motion-triggered cameras at the sites. Images of other wildlife including coyotes, deer and a cougar were also obtained. The traps were fixed open for prebaiting of the animals. Danilson put together supplies and refined the protocols for the trapping effort. A meeting/orientation session was held to go over trapping and handling protocols and procedures for WDFW staff, tribal participants, and volunteers who will be working on the project. It is anticipated that the traps will go live on Sunday night. Danilson and DeBruyn also worked at arranging more trapping locations as it is their intention to target different groups of elk so as to distribute the collars throughout the herd to better assess the population.

Biologist Danilson flew with a member of the Upper Skagit tribe to determine the absence or presence of previously collared Elk in the traditional survey area in preparation for the annual mark/resight surveys planned for March. The flight was generously funded by the tribe.

Citizen Science Shorebird Project: District Biologist Milner met with Pilchuck Audubon Society's volunteer coordinator to discuss the shorebird over ocean flying project. Snow in January kept volunteers from getting out during the ideal tides, so additional time has been added for them to go out and watch the birds. Interest among volunteers is very high, and a phenomenon has been observed (see photo below).



Wildlife Areas

Skagit Headquarters/Wylie Slough: Wildlife Area Manager Belinda Schuster met with Skagit Watershed Council Chairperson Shirley Solomon at the Swadabs Park on the Swinomish Reservation to look at the format of the new interpretative signs used on the site. Ms Solomon has been coordinating with the Puget Sound Partnership and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board to develop an interpretative trail system of salmon habitat projects throughout Puget

Sound. The Wiley Slough Restoration project has been identified as one of the projects to initiate this educational opportunity.

Samish Unit: Wildlife Area Manager Schuster reviewed the Skagit Dike and Irrigation District #5 Maintenance Agreement for the Samish Drainage to prepare for discussions with the District Commissioners regarding the proposed Samish Wetland Enhancement project. Ducks Unlimited is partnering with WDFW to implement additional wetland enhancement on the Samish/Welts Unit.

Lake Terrell Unit: The Whatcom County Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association held a hunting blind clean up party at Lake Terrell. Bags of garbage were collected from the hunting blinds and adjacent areas.

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

Wildlife Areas

Voluntary Osprey Platform Assistance under Wildlife Interaction Rules: Biologist Anderson received an updated from city of Seattle regarding their collaborative efforts with Burlington Northern Sante Fe to erect an osprey platform near the Chittenden Locks in Seattle. Seattle produced a public flier that describes the project and the voluntary request to BNSF to examine possibilities of erecting a platform as mitigation for the nest site they had to remove due to safety issues.

In review and permitting BNSF to remove the inactive osprey nest outside of the nesting season under the state Wildlife Interaction Rules, WDFW voluntarily requested BNSF consider a platform as mitigation. Seattle is now examining converting the Commodore Park Annex area to a more natural habitat site along with installation of the platform. The Wildlife Interaction Rules provide property owners with greater flexibility to prevent and mitigate damage while maintaining healthy wildlife populations. More about state Wildlife Interaction Rules can be found here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/rules/>

Tennant Lake Unit: The Tennant Lake wetland boardwalk was not reopened due to the high water levels in the lake. Manager Kessler and a volunteer worked repeatedly to remove beaver dams on the south end of Tennant Lake to get the lake water level to drop. Although by the end of the week the lake level had fell about 4 inches, more work will need to be done in the coming weeks.

Private Lands/Access

Biologist Roozen and Technician Otto attended the Lynden Outdoors Clubs annual banquet to promote and discuss private lands opportunities in Region 4. Roozen and Otto fielded many questions from those in attendance and received a lot of positive feedback from the group.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.

Public Fishing/Access

Derek Hacker, Natural Resource Operations Supervisor is on board in Region 4. Derek's responsibilities include supervision of over 200 region 4 fishing and hunting access sites, and

direct responsibility for access sites primarily located in Snohomish County. Derek's office is currently located at Mill Creek 2, but will spend the majority of his time in the field in order to maximize Discover Pass resources.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Peregrine Falcons: Biologist Anderson, in cooperation with WA State Parks and Recreation and local rock climbers, organized the annual closure of the south side Beacon Rock climbing and peregrine falcon nesting area. This effort to manage recreation and peregrine falcon nesting has been ongoing for over 15 years. The closure to technical rock climbing starts February 1st. Representatives from the local climbing community volunteered to do one last climb before the closure to clean up the site and remove any unwanted vegetation or other debris left over from the past 7 months. This year two local climbers hauled in over 60 lbs of gravel to enhance the nest ledge (photos below). The peregrine falcons were at the site that day indicating that the spring nesting season is in its early stages. Although the seasonal closure is a hardship for many climbers, Beacon Rock is one of the most productive peregrine falcon sites in the Columbia River Gorge. WDFW and WA State Parks appreciate the efforts of those technical rock climbers that have assisted us with our management efforts through the years.



Beacon Rock

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

Wildlife Management

Late Goose Season: The late goose season in Management Area 2A opened on Saturday February 4th and will continue on Wednesdays and Saturdays until March 7th. The hunt is designed to assist agricultural landowners experiencing goose depredation on their properties.

Graduates of WDFW's master hunter program who are also certified to hunt geese in Management Area 2A/2B are assigned to hunt specific farms. Two landowners are currently participating in the program along with a pool of 59 master hunters. From February 4th through February 11th, 24 hunting parties have aided landowners in their hazing programs, successfully harvesting 49 geese.

Landowners suffering from goose damage in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties are encouraged to contact WDFW Region 5 if they are interested in enrolling in the program. Master hunters who also have authorization to hunt geese in Management Area 2A and 2B for the 2012 season may still participate by contacting WDFW. See page 19 of the 2011-2012 waterfowl regulations for further details involving the late season depredation goose hunt.

Private Lands/Access

Private Industrial Timberlands: Biologist Stephens and Technician White met with Western Pacific Timber foresters to review plans for work to be conducted on Western Pacific property prior to the next hunting season. Items discussed included updating signboards and replacing signs at access points, organizing a trash pick-up, and funding for a timber deputy.

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

Wildlife Management

Northwest Sportsman's Show: Biologist Holman represented WDFW in general and Wildlife Program specifically at the Northwest Sportsman's Show in Portland. The WDFW booth featured displays of many activities undertaken by the Agency. Popular topics for visitors to the booth included Spring Chinook fishing opportunities, reduced sturgeon populations, the draft three-year hunting season proposals, and wolf management.

Wildlife Areas



Cowlitz Wildlife Area and Access Sites Tour: Wildlife Program Deputy Assistant Director Schirato and Regional Wildlife Program Manager Jonker toured the operations of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. Wildlife Area Manager Grabski informed and discussed different habitat projects, general maintenance schedules, access issues, and common concerns on a majority of the different units. Highlights included stops at the Peterman Hill Unit discussing forest management, Davis Lake Unit for an update on capital projects, and Kosmos Unit access issues and maintenance standards. A design for vault toilets was unveiled. In addition, Schirato and Jonker met with Maintenance Mechanic Spangler to visit several access sites in the Kalama area and discussed resolutions to several maintenance issues.

Winter Conditions:

D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:

Past Weather: November temperatures were below normal and precipitation was slightly above average. Snow accumulated in mid and low elevations early in the month but was later melted

off by a major warm rainstorm. Most of the month of December was unusually dry with below normal temperatures except the last week, which was warm and wet. The first half of January was mild with relatively warm and dry conditions but was followed by a mid-month storm with significant low elevation snow and valley accumulations. The latter part of the month was relatively normal with occasional rain and snow elevations generally above 2500 feet. February began with over a week of almost spring like temperatures and very little precipitation.

Short-Term Forecast: Weather over the next week is expected to be typical for this time of year. Valley temperatures will range from the low 30's to mid 40's. Snow levels should range from about 2,000 to 3,500 feet but only moderate amounts of precipitation are expected. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks suggest normal temperatures and a slight chance of above average precipitation.

Long-Term Forecast: No Change. The longer term outlook maps still suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter, but Southwest Washington is now on the edge of these forecast zones.

Habitat: Slopes below 3,500 feet are snow free or very little snow is present. Observations to date indicate that forage resources in the most critical wintering areas have been only moderately utilized for this time of the winter.

Snow Depths: Still little snow in the lower elevations. Snowpack is 87% of average in the Southwest Cascades. See spreadsheet below for detailed information ([13Feb2012-MSH_Sno-Depth.pdf](#)).

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. Counts on the Mudflow Unit Survey area remain low. 120 elk were on the Mudflow monitoring area during the February count. Previous counts include 176 elk January 3, 2012 and 116 elk on December 5, 2011.

Animal Condition: Elk observed in or near the Hoffstadt Unit this week appeared healthy. A group of elk on Eco Park resort appear to have hoof rot based on the landowner's comments.

Mortality: No new observations reported.

Public Contacts: None to report related to winter conditions.

The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area lying East of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30 to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

District 9: Winter Conditions

Past Weather: A severe snow/ice storm hit this past week in the South Cascades. Snow levels came down below 500 ft with heavy snow throughout the Columbia River Gorge. Snowpack has returned to more normal levels for this time of year.

Weather This week: The weather continued to moderate this week and there has been a gradual melting of snow at lower elevations. Warmer weather has brought increased precipitation.

Winter Severity: The overall severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County is low due to the short duration of January's big storm. These conditions could change with additional snow throughout the winter, but it is anticipated that the worst of the winter is behind us.

Habitat: Snow continues to melt at the Klickitat Wildlife Area and forage is becoming increasingly available. South facing slopes are starting to melt with some grass available. In Skamania County snow conditions have improved at lower elevations and in eastern Klickitat County winter range is in good condition.

Animal Concentrations: None reported this week.

Animal Condition: Deer and elk appear to still be in generally good condition.

Mortality: None documented this week other than one or two road kills.

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

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Oregon Spotted Frog: Biologist Tirhi and staff from Pt Defiance and Northwest Trek held a citizen science training event for volunteer amphibian surveys in Pierce and Thurston County. This is the second year that staff held this training. Twenty three volunteers participated in this year's training. The goal of this volunteer opportunity is to enlist and train citizen scientists with surveys of Washington's most common western amphibians on public and private lands. Additionally, volunteers are provided specific training on two more vulnerable amphibians, state endangered Oregon spotted frog and candidate Red-legged frogs. Volunteers are encouraged to select water bodies of their choice to survey; if they have none in mind, Tirhi requests that they survey historic Oregon spotted frog locations during the spotted frog ovipositioning window. Volunteers are trained on seeking access permission to private lands and are provided paperwork that explains the project. The biggest hurdle to these volunteer events is the additional time for staff to answer phone and email questions. Additionally, volunteers have sought at least one outing with trained staff to educate them on application of the training in the field. Tirhi has elected to have one citizen science group survey at a historic Oregon spotted frog location that has not been thoroughly surveyed in several years.

Peregrine Falcons: Biologist Tirhi is assisting City of Tacoma with managing Peregrine Falcons on Murray Morgan Bridge. Peregrine have nested on the bridge since 1998. The bridge is undergoing maintenance that requires the city to draft a management plan outlining how peregrines will be managed during the course of renovations. Tirhi was sent a draft plan for review and has provided comments. Because the entire bridge is undergoing maintenance, there is no portion that is available to peregrines in 2012 that will not present a conflict. Therefore, the main management issue is having the city prevent peregrines from nesting anywhere on the bridge. Additionally, Tirhi has requested that two alternate nest platforms be positioned on nearby buildings that the peregrines often perch and feed. The city has successfully negotiated the box placement on one building and is working on a second. Tirhi has provided one nest box

while the city will have the second built. Tirhi is anticipating that she and city employees will install the box this week. Schematic attached.

(A schematic of the Murray Morgan Bridge showing where Peregrine Falcons have nested over the years can be seen in attached document.)

Conservation Award: The Pierce County Biodiversity Alliance (PCBA), of which Biologist Tirhi is a founding member and represent WDFW, last week received the Pierce Conservation District's 'Wildlife Stewardship Award' for its continued work on Biodiversity protection in Pierce County. John Garner, Tacoma MetroParks member, received the award on the PCBA behalf.

Wildlife Areas

Davis Creek WHIP / Oak Planting

Wildlife Area staff nearly completed all aspects of the Davis Creek Oak woodland enhancement project. The crew successfully planted approximately 1000 plants and installed plant protectors and weed matting around each individual tree. This project will nearly double the size and extent of the existing oak woodland that stretches along the Chehalis River floodplain bluff for approximately one mile.



Oregon White Oak Planting - Davis Creek Unit