

Wildlife Program

Week of February 20, 2012

GAME DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

- Implementation of the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan: After the Diversity Division delivered a great conservation plan (under the leadership of Harriet Allen and primary authors Gary Wiles and Gerald Hayes); many aspects of wolf plan implementation are transitioning to the Game Division. The transition is designed to leverage commonalities of management expertise for large carnivores, the continuing development of wildlife conflict management within the game division, and a sense of urgency within the department for implementing the wolf plan on an accelerated timeline. To accomplish that, we have developed an implementation team representing the key staff within the agency that together will be responsible for ensuring the plan's success and shepherding the recovery of wolves in the state. This team has a standing conference call every Friday to keep actions in motion for the coming year. The first major action is a depredation training scheduled for March 13, 15, & 16 in Spokane, Ellensburg, and Ephrata, respectively. This training will be lead by wolf depredation expert Carter Niemeyer for key WDFW staff as well as Wildlife Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tribal, and affected Sheriff Office staff.
- Selkirk Elk Herd Plan: The public comment period has been completed for the draft plan with the recent completion of three public meetings and a comment period. The greatest concerns are from landowners concerned about increased crop damage from elk and from hunters who like the current season structure allowing either sex elk harvest. The most significant decision is to phase into increasing this herd's distribution and numbers into the west half of the herd boundary (GMUs 204, 101, 105, 108, & 121). The management direction has been incorporated into our 2012-14 hunting season recommendations being presented to the Commission on March 9-10.
- Legislative Update: The Game Division is working on several bills that are still alive and moving through the legislative process after initial cutoff dates. The most important is the agency's carnivore conflict management bill that is making its way through the Senate. The current version (E2SHB 2365) continues to focus on: classifying wolves as big game which also increases the fine for illegally killing them by \$4000; authorizes funding to pay for livestock (cattle, sheep, horses) losses caused by cougars, bears, and wolves; and makes it illegal to intentionally feed large carnivores; has modified the payment of damage claims to any owner of cattle, sheep, or horses rather than those who are in business to sell livestock and directs the Commission to allow a livestock owner to kill a wolf in the act of attacking their livestock without a permit from WDFW. Experience in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming suggests that during recovery phases of re-

introduction (in our case re-colonization) wolves killed under these conditions are negligible and are unlikely to impede population growth.

- Mount Saint Helens Elk Project: Deer & Elk Specialist McCorquodale, and Region 5 Biologists Holman, Bergh, and Miller conducted an elk capture/radio collaring operation in support of the Mt. St. Helens elk population study, which is in its final year. In two days, the capture team helicopter darted and handled 30 elk (22 adult cows and 8 branch-antlered bulls). The crew was assisted by frequent collaborator Dr. Rachel Cook and UC Davis wildlife veterinarian Dr. Joe Gaydos. Elk were captured across GMUs 520, 522, 524, 550, and 556. There were no elk mortalities or capture-related injuries among the elk captured by the crew. The 30 elk captured and radio collared brings the total number of elk captures during the 4-yr study to 154 (150 unique elk have been radio collared).

Captured, radio collared, then released.





Captured, radio collared, then released.

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

- 2012-14 Hunting Season Recommendations: The new hunting season proposals were available for public comment through February 21. The issues where we received most comments included:
 - Changing most Master Hunter hunts to on-call type permits managed by a hunt coordinator and the proposed elimination of two MH general season hunts in the area from Spokane south to the Snake River (GMUs 127-142). As a result of the comment, we are modifying our recommendation to retain an antlerless elk hunt from December 9-31 for MH in GMUs 127 & 130. We have also place permit levels on all hunts rather than an unlimited number and will retain the hunt choices at four on the permit applications for MH permits.
 - Neither the issue nor the WAC(s) were open for consideration as part of the regulation process, yet non-toxic shot restrictions received the second highest number of comments. Most comments were suggesting backing off the recently enacted requirements for pheasant release sites; this regulation was adopted by the Commission in 2009 which included a phase in period; and we are not considering this issue for 2012-14.

- Electronic decoys came in at number three with most of those commenting opposed to allowing them. This continues to be contentious and will likely have many hunters coming to testify at the March Commission meeting.
- The proposed restrictions on night hunting for small game also received a significant number of comments. All were opposed to the change. We will no longer be recommending that the Commission take action on this proposal.
- Even though allocation issues were not on the table for discussion as part of the 2012-14 hunting season package, we received quite a number of archery proposals to change the early elk season dates. We are not considering this request at this time. This issue came up several years ago related to the disproportionate harvest of five point or better bulls being killed by archers (mainly in western Washington). We elected to start the early season on Tuesday after Labor Day which slowly shifted the season away from the peak of breeding. The calendar date adjustments for 2012-14 are the furthest from the peak and should begin to reduce/equalize the harvest of older bulls among the users.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.

- Game Division Staffing:
 - The Division has vacancies created by the promotion of two staff members, one is the small game section manager and the other is the game division business operations manager; we will pursue filling the small game section manager and the operations manager positions in the near future;
 - The hiring of several biologist positions located in multiple Regions across the state associated with expansion of the hunter access program are nearly completed with new permanent staff added to Regions 1, 4, 5, and 6;
 - In addition, we are looking to utilize increased federal and state funding for hunter access and wildlife conflict to create a new section manager position responsible for policy development and direction on these issues in headquarters;
 - We are looking to split some of the past duties from the carnivore, furbearer, and special species section to create two positions, one that would focus on carnivores including the new duties for wolf plan implementation and one that would deal with special species management (mtn goats, big horn sheep, moose, and pronghorn) and with furbearer management;
 - The Division is also adding a mid-level management analyst position to work with Licensing and field staff to improve management of the special permit hunt drawing process; management and coordination of hunter harvest reporting and data; hunting pamphlet development, and coordination and development of Division publications and web content.

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Gray Wolf Monitoring (Northeast Washington): Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Jay Shepherd met with Travis Fletcher and Brandon Weinmann, Colville National Forest personnel who administer the livestock grazing program. Items discussed included the wolf population status, livestock grazing in wolf-occupied areas, the WDFW Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, and up-coming meetings with USFS grazing allotment holders for this year's livestock grazing season.

Also this week Shepherd discussed wolf sightings with residents near Malo in Ferry County and Wildlife Officer Severin Erickson in Pend Oreille County. Finally, Shepherd investigated potential canine tracks near the Little Pend Oreille Lakes and on Rocky Creek Road west of Highway 20 where a resident reported seeing a wolf near her home and a neighbor who reported that there were wolves near his horse coral.



Two wolves from the Salmo Pack photographed by a self-activated camera in the same spot early this month by Bart George, Biologist with the Kalispel Tribe.

Wolf Surveillance Southeast Washington: DB Wik coordinated with Wolf Biologist Frame on a visit to the Blues early in the spring. ADB Vekasy checked 3 trail camera sites around district. Cahill Mountain area camera had video of 2 different wolves. No wolf sign or video from the Tucannon or Biscuit Ridge area, although lots of wildlife activity on Biscuit (deer, elk, cougar).



Cahill Black



Cahill Gray

Wildlife Areas

Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Habitat Restoration Project: The project Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (SLWA) submitted for 120 acres of shrub-steppe habitat restoration, using an RCO grant, survived WDFW's preliminary vetting process. Now the project application must be entered into RCO's on-line project management program, PRISM, for evaluation and, hopefully, funding. Toward that end, WDFW GIS Manager Shelly Snyder confirmed that the maps attached to the pre-application will work for the RCO application, and Anderson started entering project data into PRISM this week.

Private Lands/Access

Farm Bill Technical Assistance provided: Biologist Davis prepared 2 brief outlines of technical assistance provided to private landowners in Walla Walla County, describing potential habitat improvement projects to benefit wildlife (with an emphasis on pheasant brood-rearing habitat) and identifying potential cost-share incentive programs to accomplish proposed habitat objectives.

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

Wildlife Areas

WT Wooten Wildlife Area – Lake Inlet repairs: Kari Dingman reported to Bob Dice that the Last Resort Campground and Store near the Wildlife Area has set out a collection jar asking for donations for the agency to “fix the lakes”. Apparently the jar indicates WDFW needs \$3,500.00 for the repair. On Friday Dice began gathering cost estimates to have a rental excavator delivered to the Wooten. So far, rental of a Cat 220 excavator for 5 days will cost \$2,000.00, which includes delivery from Lewiston. The rate may be less if we can complete the job in less time. On Thursday, Debby Flynn delivered 3 cattle guards to the lake sites. One of the cattle guards was placed over a small stream ford known to have salmonids in it. The cattle guard will function as a bridge that will prevent vehicles from having to drive through the water. The other two cattle guards will be used to protect wet areas near the beaver inlet when repairs commence.



Cattle Guard placed over small salmonid bearing stream on Wooten Wildlife Area.

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

Weather Conditions: High temperatures lower-50's, low temperatures lower-30's; the week was very windy, which has helped to open up the large lakes. Banks Lake has opened up from Million Dollar Mile on north, there is still a considerable amount of ice on south end and in all the bays (see pictures below).



Steamboat Rock, Banks Lake.



Martin Falls, Banks Lake.

Weekender Opportunities: With these warm conditions we are experiencing we can expect to see Sandhill Cranes arriving any day now curlews will be shortly behind the cranes. Around 35,000 lesser Sandhill cranes migrate through the Pacific Flyway. Many of these birds travel through eastern Washington during their spring and fall migrations. These cranes winter in the southern portion of California's Central Valley and pass through on their way to nesting sites in the Matanuska River Valley and Bristol Bay areas of south-central Alaska. The greatest concentration of lesser sandhill cranes arrives in March and can be found frequenting areas such as the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Marsh Units, Frenchmen Reserve, Potholes Reservoir, Scootney Reservoir, and Winchester Reserve. Long-billed curlews are typically observed during March-June in agricultural fields such as alfalfa and hay or in large expanses of very short vegetation. Farm fields near Othello, Moses Lake, George, and Quincy all have potential to support curlew. Long-billed curlew nest commonly in the short grasses that occur in the Seep Lakes Unit.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Caddyshack 2012: Biologists Finger conducted Washington ground squirrel translocations at the Sage Hills Golf Course. Trapping went very well when the wind wasn't blowing 40 mph. The biggest issue with the wind was the damage it caused to the enclosures and considerable effort was expended mending enclosures during and after the wind event. Eighty-eight pregnant females were moved to small enclosures and will be monitored in about 1 month to determine the minimum number of individuals remaining on site and minimum proportion of those individuals producing litters. Moving pregnant females is a very efficient means to reduce damage issues on the golf course because each of these females is capable of producing ~8 pups ($88 \times 8 = 704$ pups) in ideal conditions. Based on teat size, timing of the translocation was

perfect, probably 7-10 days earlier than last year when we had one lactating female on the last trapping day.

Two of the areas we've trapped heavily in the past now have relatively low squirrel densities, allowing us to focus all efforts on two high density sites that we've been working at for several years. The golf course manager was appreciative of the work and was able to provide some assistance this season. This effort involved considerable volunteer assistance from individuals trying to get their foot in the door with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Please consider this when you see the following names in your applicant pool: Warren Becker, Chad Eidson, Brandon Rossi, and Mariah Sterner. Their assistance was very valuable and much appreciated.



Volunteers collecting squirrels from traps at Sage Hills Golf Course. This area supports a very high density population. We believe we removed the majority of females from the patch.

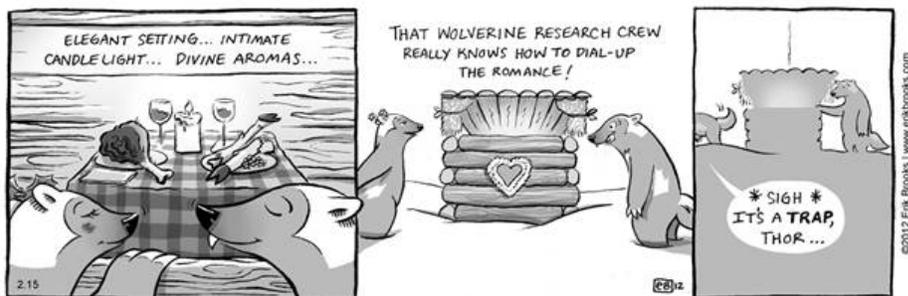
District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen

Weather Conditions: We experienced a few inches of snow at valley levels followed by days in the 40s. Single digit temps expected for the beginning of this week with a chance for more valley snow means winter isn't done yet. Snowpack along the West edge of the District is about 10 feet, with around average water content for this point in the season.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

North Cascades Wolverine Research Project: Once again a holiday weekend meant a wolverine in a trap. Wildlife biologist Scott Fitkin and USFS staff successfully immobilized and collared the fourth wolverine of the season, just ahead of an impending storm with increased avalanche danger that prompted the closure of 4 of our 7 traps in the short-term. This animal turned out to be our old friend Rocky (aka Thor), now a six-time capturee that we first radio-marked back in 2006. Our data suggests that Rocky is the dominant male in our study area, and he appeared as healthy and robust as ever. We speculate that he showed up to give us the what-for after his recent, less than flattering depiction in the Hart's Pass comic strip in the local paper (see below). It will be very interesting to see how he has adjusted his home range this year, which may give us insight into the presence/absence of other known females in his territory. The data

set for this animal is now likely one of the longest for an individual wolverine in the lower 48 states.



Rocky the Wolverine, Scott with Rocky, wolverine snowshoe

North Cascades Lynx Research Project: Victory is ours! The crew finally succeeded in capturing the lynx that had been marauding our trap-line for several days, and Wildlife Biologist Fitkin and Heinlen successfully outfitted him with a new GPS collar. The trouble maker turned out to be animal 311 (now named Harry), an adult male from last year. In general, lynx activity is picking up in the study area with the onset of breeding season and we are anticipating additional captures in the next month, hopefully including a female or two.



Harry the lynx, Jeff with Harry, lynx snowshoe.

Wolf Monitoring: Monitoring of the Lookout Pack continues in the Okanogan District. So far this winter we have detected wolf use of the pack's traditional winter portion of the territory (see photos). The number of animals in the pack is still unknown, but the best guess remains 2-3. We currently have cameras deployed in an attempt to document individuals. Monitoring efforts will intensify later in the spring as we try to ascertain reproductive status. In addition to activity in the Lookout territory, Biologist Beausoleil recently found a single set of wolf tracks outside of the known Lookout Territory east of the Methow River for the second time this winter. The status of this individual and relationship to the Lookout Pack is unknown. We will be following up on this observation in the coming week.





Lookout wolf – day, Lookout wolf – night, unknown wolf tracks

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

Weather Conditions: Melting snow can cause access problems along gravel roads during spring. Road restrictions are in place in Douglas County, primarily to minimize road damage at this time of year.

Weekender Opportunities: Birding opportunities are picking up in those areas not locked in snow. Look to riparian areas along the Columbia River and its tributaries for some of the first spring arrivals. Sage grouse are being seen in northern Douglas County as they begin spring lek attendance.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Golden Eagle: BLM staff accompanied Biologist Gallie on what was a training exercise for their staff to get acquainted with techniques and protocols for monitoring golden eagle nest sites. 14 Golden Eagle territories in Douglas and Chelan Counties were visited. BLM will be visiting numerous golden eagle sites throughout Central Washington on and adjacent to their lands. Of the sites visited, we detected 2 active territories in Douglas County; one is a known site, but not active since 2005, and another a new nest site in the Jameson Lake territory area. In Chelan County, we found eagle activity at the Entiat and Rocky Reach Dam territories.

Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse: Biologist Gallie coordinated preparation efforts for the monitoring season beginning in March. Specifically, responding to landowners responses to the letter notifying them of our monitoring efforts. Of the 80+ landowners, we had 16 responses, most of them very supportive of our effort and a few of them even provided sighting information. We did have one landowner that was adamant about WDFW staying off their land. Most respondents wished to be notified on the results of our monitoring, both on their property and the Douglas County population as a whole. Those wishing to know the survey results on their land stated that it will help them make decisions on retaining CRP/SAFE fields in the future.

WILDLIFE AREAS

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

Wildlife Area Units: Wells: Bridgeport Bar, Okanogan River, Washburn Island, Indian Dan, Central Ferry, and West Foster Creek. Sagebrush Flat: Bridgeport, Chester Butte, Dormaier, Sagebrush Flat

Weekender Opportunities: Long-tailed ducks (1-3) can still be viewed west of the [Washburn Island](#) unit's parking site. Flocks of geese are using the grain fields on the [Bridgeport Bar](#) and Washburn Islands units.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Pygmy Rabbit Conservation: Wildlife area biologists Ann Winters and Dan Peterson traveled to Ephrata for an afternoon meeting with Research Scientist Penny Becker and District Biologist Dave Volsen to discuss pygmy rabbit management issues on the Sagebrush Flat unit. Thursday and Friday wildlife area staff traveled to the Sagebrush Flat unit and assisted with the installation of drip irrigation lines in the smaller of the two pygmy rabbit enclosures. US Corps of Engineers - Chief Joseph Dam Biologist Bob Fisher volunteered to help with the effort on Friday. He was a great help and excellent company as always.



Biologists Volsen, Winters and volunteer Rosanne unrolling drip line under the direction of Research Scientist Becker.

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

Weather Conditions: Nights continue below freezing, daytime highs into the lower 40's. One day of highs into the 50's with warm winds and major melting. We still have patches of snow on the valley floor, north slopes and on ridge tops in the Scotch Creek area.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Pogue Mt thinning: Double A logging crews have stopped hauling logs to mills due to warmer weather, road restrictions, and muddy haul routes. Crews will resume hauling when conditions allow. Approximately 25 loads are decked to be hauled to Zosel mill and the Tribal Sort Yard. Ten great grey owl nest platforms have also been constructed, and ready for placement as weather allows.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex - Dale Swedberg / Justin Haug

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, American goldfinches, pine grosbeak, American robin, northern shrike, northern harriers, redpolls, trumpeter swans, Bohemian waxwings, Clark's nutcrackers, black-capped chickadees, northern flicker - red-shafted variety, sharp-shinned hawk, and hooded mergansers. A few early migrants are appearing such as western bluebirds (see photo) which were heard and red-winged blackbirds that were seen. Okanogan County birds include rough-legged hawk and prairie falcon (see photos).



GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Machine Thinning - Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP) Phase 1 & 2

Machine thinning continued in the Sinlahekin Creek alluvial fan area has been completed. The project continues to move on sporadically as temperatures fluctuate. Numerous nails and spikes are being discovered by the harvester's saws in areas adjacent to traditional camping (see picture). This hardware reduces or eliminates any value of the log. When possible portions of

logs with “hardware” are removed. The Phase 1 harvesting of timber for this season should wrap up by the end of the month.



The progress continued to be hampered by road restrictions brought on by warming temperatures, making harvesting/hauling impossible in the thawing conditions. Due to County Road Restrictions, hauling of timber has been restricted to early morning hours and harvesting has ceased until current cut-logs are off the landscape.

Chelan Wildlife Area Complex - Ron Fox

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

WSDOT Right of Access Permit: Chelan Manager, Ron Fox, received a Right of Access Permit from Terrie Preston, Real Estate, submitted by WSDOT for access to Department land along Highway 97A. The permit application requested to establish a construction storage area and helicopter landing and refueling area to support a slope stabilization project occurring this spring. Included in the request was a onetime access up an incredibly steep slope with a tracked hydraulic drill to place two anchors for work being done below. Ron completed a site visit and a mitigation/restoration plan for the two staging areas and a route up the hill. Included the plan were weed control before, during and after use of the area, reseeding, and erosion control on the steep slope. All of the areas being used are dominated by annual and perennial weeds from previous disturbances.

PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski

Weekender Opportunities:

Winter thaw – Devil’s Punchbowl – Banks Lake Unit Columbia Basin Wildlife Area



GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

2012 DOUGLAS COUNTY State Areas for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) SIGNUP:

Private Lands Biologist Braaten and Cotton spent most of the week meeting with landowners, discussing CRP take out methods, expectations and explaining our cooperative effort to put quality grouse habitat on the ground. Biologist Wisniewski continued to try and correlate Farm Service Agency (FSA) contract records with our working data. Pending final verification from FSA of acres that were pulled from the SAFE program, we believe we have finally agreed upon the number of acres available for a third sign up. Wisniewski also spent a large percentage of time incorporating new field boundary changes into the ArcMap project and revising contract documents.

Private Lands Biologist Braaten went out to look at field work done on SAFE contract and spotted a few male Sage grouse out strutting in a wheat field in North Central Douglas County.



REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Burrowing Owls: District Wildlife Biologist Mike Livingston, Wildlife Area Worker Rocky Ross and two volunteers from DNR and one from Richland Rod and Gun Club installed 27 artificial burrows in Pasco. Nine burrows were installed on DNR land, nine burrows on private land and nine burrows on Port of Pasco land. Burrows were installed in locations where development threats are minimal and therefore will provide alternative sites for owls impacted by development in the ever expanding Tri-Cities.

Winter Weather: Temperatures have been ranging from the 20s to near 50 degrees. High winds and a couple of small snow storms came through during the week. Snow continues to melt and most winter range is open. Elk are ranging off the feed sites daily and coming back at feeding time. Cheat grass is continuing to emerge, but warmer weather is needed.

Elk are in good condition, with counts on the feed sites holding steady or dropping.

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 and Seattle Parks and Recreation to provide field training for 40+ participants in the new citizen amphibian monitoring program. The field training was held at Carkeek Park. Seattle Parks Naturalist/Ranger Brian Gay led half the group around the wetland and immediate upland areas to discuss history of the park, ecology of the local wetlands, management needs and issues regarding an urban park – including human impacts, and general amphibian biology.

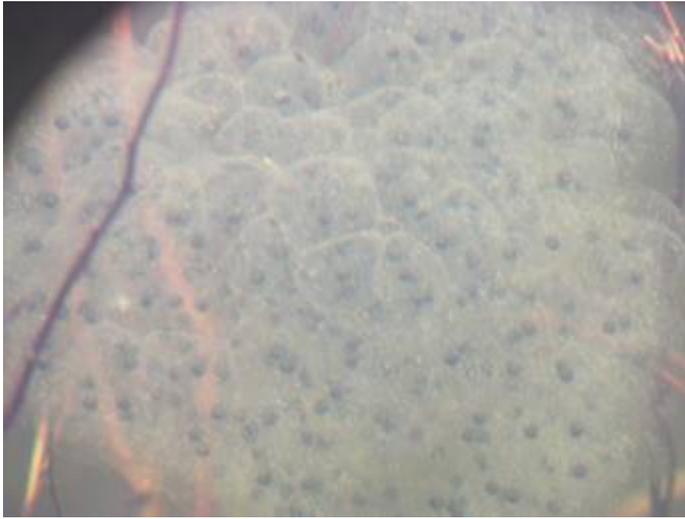
Meanwhile, Biologist Anderson and Woodland Park Zoo staff Dr. Jennifer Pramuk, Katie Remine, and Jenny Mears led teams to separate areas of the main wetland to dry run protocol, field data collection, decontamination procedures and look for egg masses overall. Long-toed salamander and Northern Pacific tree frog egg masses were observed, as well as male Long-toed salamanders patiently waiting at the edge of the wetland, near the major egg mass area, for a few late females to meet with them and go about business.

One of the interesting finds was a small child's stuffed frog – which has now been appropriately decontaminated and will become the effort's mascot. The opportunistic find was a nice segue into dialog regarding degradation of urban wetlands, stormwater impacts, invasive species (both animal and plant) impacts, and general dumping of trash in to wetlands in urban areas. Pictures from the event can be found here:

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/picturethis/2017598685_pondwatch.html

Biologist Anderson continues to work with Woodland Park Zoo staff and a related University of Washington graduate study effort to assist citizen participants in site access and field I.D. of egg masses.

Amphibian Joint Monitoring: Biologist Anderson met with city of Issaquah staff Margaret MacLeod and Matt Mechler to examine amphibian breeding activity at Tiger Mountain and vicinity. At one site, the crew had 367 Northern red-legged frog egg masses (and one adult), 90 Northern Pacific tree frog egg masses, and 4 Northwestern salamander egg masses. All of these were along the north end of a fishless lake, with good south sun exposure. Issaquah has been monitoring these sites for a number of years, beginning with King Co.'s past efforts coordinated by Dr. Klaus Richter. They will continue to monitor these sites and share data with WDFW. See attached picture of example Northern red-legged frog egg mass from survey.



Northern red-legged frog egg mass

Townsend's big-eared bat Monitoring: Biologist Anderson, Salzer and Falxa met to examine a King County natural winter roost for Townsend's. One individual was observed, in approximately the same location as seen last year by Anderson, around the same time. Temperature data was collected regarding microclimate conditions and other areas in the vicinity were also checked. This data will be used to update state information on this winter roost site. See picture of same site from last year (no picture was taken this year to limit observations and potential disturbance of the bat roost – once seen and confirmed use for a consecutive year, biologists left the roost area).



Townsend's big-eared bat

Great Blue Heron Management: Biologist Anderson, after the field training with Woodland Park Zoo, stopped by the Commodore/Kiwanis Ravine colony. Birds were in the Commodore colony site, as well as 16 birds in one of the major staging areas on the George Broom's and Son dock, above the locks. WDFW heron cameras are in the Kiwanis Ravine and will soon be showing increased heron activity based on these recent observations of DFW and local volunteer monitors with Heron Habitat Helpers. Stay tuned! WDFW heron cam and other wildlife cameras can be found here:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildwatch/>

Biologist Anderson is working with People for Puget Sound and Edmonds Community College to develop a pilot heron colony monitoring program. A draft citizen survey has been developed that incorporates regular observations and standardized data entry. This will be ran on a trial basis at a heron colony this season and determined if methodology would be fitting for a more landscape-wide colony monitoring effort.

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/>

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study: Biologist DeBruyn and Technician Lapsansky surveyed Judson Lake by boat and ATV and located a few feather piles. The District 14 “swamp boat” was removed from the lake since the swan project is now winding down to make this boat available for nutria surveillance.



Technician Lapsansky removing the District 14 swamp boat from Judson Lake

Port Susan/Skagit Bay Nomination: District Biologist Milner completed the nomination forms for getting the Greater Skagit/Stillaguamish Delta recognized as a site of Regional Importance in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN). Sites in this category support at least 20,000 shorebirds annually. The forms were sent to a member of the WHSRN science team who for comments before submitting the final nomination to the Council who will make the final determination on designating the site.

San Juan Islands Species Lists: District Biologist Milner continued assembling information from various non-Department of Fish and Wildlife sources regarding historical species occurrences in the San Juan Islands in preparation for surveys scheduled for the spring and summer.

Winter Marine Waterfowl and Marine Bird Aerial Surveys: Efforts continue to complete the flights necessary for the detectability study portion of the winter marine bird effort. Determining correction factors for aircraft disturbance of birds and observer misidentification will lead to more accurate calculations of marine bird numbers and distribution. Equipment

repair and preparation was performed this week, but survey efforts were hampered by continuing poor weather.

Joint Venture Winter Marine Waterfowl and Marine Bird Aerial Surveys: Assistant District Biologist Cyra worked with Marine Bird Specialist Evenson and Assistant District Biologist Murphie to schedule staff availability and the Canadian vendors in the hope of proceeding with these Joint Venture funded surveys. These surveys are part of a bi-coastal effort to survey the outer coasts using a uniform survey methodology. Last winter the team flew the coasts of Oregon and Washington, and this year the waters of the Strait of Georgia and the southern Inside Passage of British Columbia will be flown. WDFW was funded for these flights due to our expertise in marine aerial bird surveys methodologies, techniques, and species identification

Pigeon Guillemot Data Reconciliation: Work continues to reconcile data delivered to the USFWS from the 1999-2003 surveys of Puget Sound breeding locations with the remainder of the survey database to insure that all data is captured correctly. The nearly 6,000 colony visits over the four years were performed by a large variety of cooperators and data was input on a time permitting basis by a number of temporary and intern staff resulting in a large volume of quality control. This survey remains the only complete inventory of Pigeon Guillemots, a species identified as an indicator of Puget Sound health, in the inner marine waters of Washington.

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

Wildlife Management

Nooksack Elk Herd Trap and Collar Project: Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn conducted trap checks and baited the several sites that are being targeted at this time. Over the past week, there was no activity at the trap that is currently deployed. Danilson made contact with landowners to obtain permission for future trapping.



Biologist Danilson demonstrates Clover trap operation to WDFW employees, Tribal employees, and volunteers from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Snow Goose Rocket Net Capture: Biologists Danilson, DeBruyn and Roozen met with Russian Snow Goose Biologist Vasily Baranyuk, who provided instruction on various morphological measurements for snow geese. District 14 personnel were on hand for an initial capture attempt on Fir Island at dawn on February 23rd. While no geese were captured, this served as a dry run for future capture attempts.



Visiting snow goose research Vasily Baranyuk provides instruction to Biologists Danilson and Roozen and Volunteer Mike Smith

Landscape Integrity Mapping Draft Process Review: Biologist Anderson provided review and comment regarding a draft process testing protocol and instructions regarding a mapping

system which examines landscape integrity based upon map interpretation query of professionals and paired with GIS modeling of similar landscape integrity factors. Overall, the draft query process was straightforward and seems to potentially be a nice pairing to more rigorous GIS landscape metric analyses.

Wildlife Areas

Corson Natural Area Beavers: Manager Paulson toured the Corson Natural Area and assessed beaver activity. Water level on Catherine Creek is high and most of the beaver dams are submerged. Woody debris from the last winter storm is being cleared from the trails and plans for possible beaver trapping are being discussed.

Crescent Lake Ag Lease: Manager Paulson met with the Lessee of the Crescent Lake Unit and discussed the spring planting. The east and west fields will be planted the same as last year while the center field will be planted to corn and barley mix.

Leque Island: Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Belinda Schuster and Natural Resources Specialist 2 (NRS2) Greg Meis performed a field check on Leque Island. WSDOT representative working on the Highway 532 road widening project voiced concerns about flooding conditions and the status of the dike and dike repairs on the site. Ray Berg, Environmental Engineer and Terry Ellison, Construction Supervisor toured the site and provided recommendation regarding additional dike repair. Proposed repair is scheduled to occur the week of March 5th.

DeBay Slough Swan Reserve: A proposal will be developed to include the DeBay Slough Hunt Unit in the 15-shell limit restriction. In recent years, the 35-acre site has experienced high hunter numbers. To improve hunting access, opportunity, and safety, a shell limit restriction will be proposed to the waterfowl program for review.

Intalco Unit: Manager Kessler coordinated with the Custer Sportsmen's Club on the Archery Course on the Intalco Unit. The club worked over the weekend to set up a container for storage of targets and to improve a rutted roadway.



Tennant Lake Unit: Manager Kessler coordinated with the Friends of Tennant Lake group on the design of interpretive materials to be used at the Tennant Lake boardwalk.

Private Lands/Access

Waterfowl Quality Hunt Programs: Technicians Otto and Deyo continued to remove and clean up waterfowl and snow goose quality hunt program sites.

Whidbey Island Private Lands Access: Biologist Roozen continued preparation of a private lands wildlife-viewing program and Whidbey Island deer hunting.

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

Wildlife Areas

Lake Terrell Unit: Manager Kessler met with students from the Bellingham Technical College who will be doing data collection related to the Lake Terrell dam repair project. The history and scope of the project was discussed.

Skagit Headquarters/Wiley Slough: Manager Schuster assisted Ray Berg, Environmental Engineer with monitoring water levels in Wiley Slough at the tide gates and pump station locations. A new pump was installed on Wiley Slough at the end of January. The Wiley Slough Adaptive Management group is working to develop a monitoring protocol to determine the effectiveness of this pump system.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.

Wildlife Areas

Washington Waterfowl Association Meeting: Manager Paulson attended the Seattle Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association monthly meeting. This organization is going to be placing new and maintaining current wood duck nesting boxes on the Stillwater Unit. They will also help construct handicap accessible blinds on the Spencer Island Unit.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Dark Geese: Biologists Miller and Bergh searched for radio-collared resident dark geese in western Wahkiakum County. Signals were heard from six of the radio-collared birds and one was sighted. These radio-collared birds will assist us in locating larger flocks of resident geese for banding this summer.

Elk Organ Scoring: Regional Wildlife Program staff along with volunteers and students from the University of Alberta participated in the evaluation of hunter harvested elk organs. The organs were given a score based on the amount of fat surrounding them, which can be correlated to overall body condition. Teeth were also collected in order to determine age. This information

will be used to look at the potential relationship between body condition and habitat characteristics on a landscape level. We are extremely thankful to the hunters who took the extra time to search through gut piles to provide these organs for analysis.



Elk parts bags



Elk organ scoring

Assistance to Habitat Program: Biologists Anderson, Miller, and Holman provided written comments for inclusion in the WDFW response to a proposed exploratory mining operation in northwestern Skamania County. Potential impacts from the proposed activity include potential damage to riparian zones, elk disturbance, mountain goat disturbance, spotted owl, bald eagle and goshawk impacts as well as broader impacts including weed transmission and habitat fragmentation. Habitat Program has the lead on generating the official WDFW response to the proposal.

Biologists Anderson and Holman provided written comments and were involved in multiple correspondences regarding a proposed forest management activity in an area known to be occupied by western pond turtles. The proposed forest thinning can potentially benefit the species if done with turtle habitat enhancement in mind. Positive outcomes of the project could include things like daylighting the south aspects of wetlands, removing trees that are encroaching on meadows, adding basking trees and logs to wetlands, developing debris and slash piles for overwintering, etc. The project will involve coordination with USFS, the lessee of the property, and DNR.

Western Pond Turtle Data Management: Biologist Holman compiled field data from the 2011 pond turtle season. Data sheets representing hundreds of capture events at three sites in the Columbia River Gorge were organized and labeled. Copies were submitted to Olympia Data Management Staff for entry into the pond turtle database.

Wildlife Areas

Tree Planting at Shillapoo Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald and Scientific Technician Fox have planted over 3,000 trees at six sites this past week in the North and South Units. All of the sites are ongoing plantings to create and enhance Oregon White oak forest habitat, Blue Heron rookery sites, and riparian habitat. They will now be spending the next several weeks placing tree tubes and weed barriers around all of the trees.

Private Lands/Access

Coordinated Resource Management: Biologist Stephens attended a Coordinated Resource Management meeting hosted by the Lewis County Conservation District and the Washington State Conservation Commission. This start-up meeting provided an opportunity for landowners to provide input and ideas for restoring water quality and managing floods in the Upper Chehalis River and the South Fork of the Chehalis River.

Local Working Group: Biologist Stephens represented WDFW at a Local Working Group meeting hosted by NRCS and designed for stakeholders to provide input on natural resource conservation priorities. This is an annual meeting that plays a role in determining how much funding will be allocated to implement certain conservation practices on private lands.

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 issues 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. Four landowners are currently participating in the program along with a pool of 54 master hunters. From February 4th through February 25th, 67 hunting parties have aided landowners in their hazing programs and successfully harvested 153 geese. There have not been any duskies harvested during the late program so far this season.

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. Please see page 19 of the 2011-2012 waterfowl regulations for further details involving the late season depredation goose hunt.

Wildlife Areas

Cowlitz Wildlife Area: Natural Resource Technician Morris assisted the Region 5 Hatchery Division with the transfer and setup of net-pens at Mineral Lake. Once a year a large net-pen stored at the Cowlitz Wildlife Area is moved with the assistance of the Wildlife Area dump truck and trailer to Mineral Lake. The pen is used in the rearing of trout for the annual opening of the lowland lake fishing season.

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. The

month of February fluctuated between almost spring like conditions and cold and wet periods with no serious major storms.

Short-Term Forecast: Weather over the next week is expected to shift to cold and wet with a substantial chance of low elevation snowfall. Valley temperatures will range from the low 20's to high 30's. Snow levels could be at or below 1000 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks both clearly predict below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation.

Long-Term Forecast: *No Change.* Colder and wetter than normal through March and potentially into April.

Habitat: Currently snow is having little impact on forage availability below 3,000 feet but this could change over the next week. So far this winter observations in the most critical wintering areas indicate that desirable forages have been only moderately utilized.

Snow Depths: Still little snow in the lower elevations. Snowpack is 89% of average in the Southwest Cascades. See spreadsheet below for detailed information ([27Feb2012-MSH_Sno-Depth.pdf](#)).

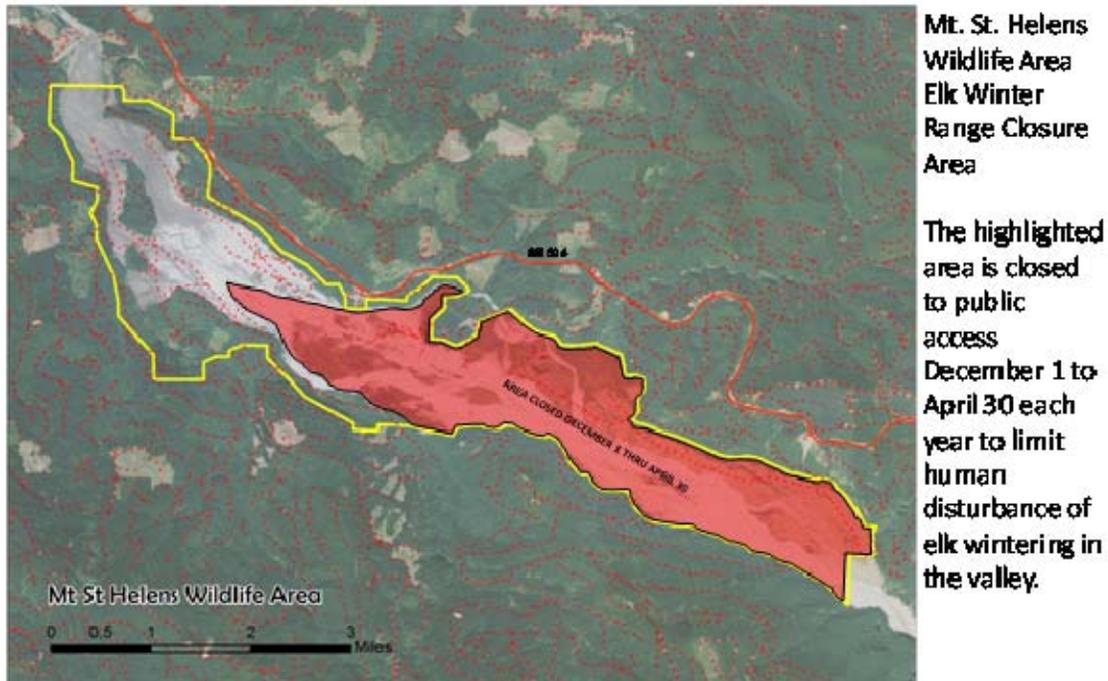
Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. Counts on the Mudflow Unit Survey area remain low. 120 elk were on the Mudflow monitoring area during the February count. Previous counts include 176 elk January 3, 2012 and 116 elk on December 5, 2011.

Animal Condition: To date only a very few animals have been seen that appeared to be in relatively poor body condition and these have typically been associated with apparent hoof rot. None observed in severe decline that could be linked to winter conditions.

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

Weather This Week: There was some new snow at higher elevations but warmer weather has continued this week and snow continues to slowly melt at elevations below 2500 ft.

Winter Severity: There is still little concern for the overall severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. Eastern Klickitat County is snow free and the winter has been mild.

Habitat: At the Klickitat Wildlife Area the majority of habitat is snow free and south facing slopes are starting to green up.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations reported.

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

Mortality: None documented this week.

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

Deer Capture

Bios Murphie and Harris assisted Research Scientist Dr. Rice with capturing deer in the Tahuya State forest on the 21 and 22. One adult doe was outfitted with a collar using a helicopter capture crew. Weather and vegetation conditions were a made capturing difficult.



Oregon Spotted Frog

Biologist Tirhi initiated the 2012 surveys for Oregon Spotted Frog at traditional breeding locations. Four known breeding sites are active as of Feb 21 including Salmon Creek (54 egg masses), Beaver Creek (3 egg masses), Dempsey Creek (unknown #), and Black River (USFWS, 26+).

Western Pond Turtle

Bio Skriletz worked on the habitat improvement project for the Mason County western pond turtle site.

Thurston County Species and Habitat Management

Biologists Tirhi, Rogers and Nation met with members of the Thurston County Planning Department to discuss private property surveys and management of Mazama pocket gopher and prairie under the Critical Area Ordinance. The two agencies are finalizing allowances and mitigation for single family residential building permits. Tirhi described the survey process WDFW is preparing for application to properties containing remnant prairie.

Mazama Pocket Gopher

Biologist Skriletz met with Mason County engineers at a future county project site to determine the likelihood of Mazama pocket gopher presence. Considering the time of year, it was surprising to see recent gopher activity at the site.

Taylor's checkerspot captive rearing and reintroduction

Biologists Linders led a team of staffs from WDFW, CNLM and JBLM who assisted with vegetation sampling in postdiapause larval habitat at Range 76 and in 2012 postdiapause release plots at Range 50, Pacemaker Airstrip and Glacial Heritage Preserve. Linders also worked with the Oregon Zoo to finalize how larvae coming out of diapause in captivity will be distributed between facilities, which animals will be released into the field and at what locations.

Weyerhaeuser Bald Hills and Butterflies. Biologist Tirhi, Potter, Whipple, and Bell met to finalize review of the Weyerhaeuser Taylor Checkerspot Butterfly management plan of the Bald Hills. The general impression was that the plan lacked the specificity needed to clearly define how checkerspot habitat was to be managed such that impacts would be avoided. WDFW intends to both present their review in writing and request a meeting to discuss. The goal is a plan that both organizations feel confident will allow timber harvest to continue without jeopardizing this vital, historically-occupied checkerspot location.

Blacktailed Deer Management. Biologist Tirhi checked two does and two fawns still on air at the Vail Tree Farm blacktail survey unit and all remain alive.

Wildlife Areas

Lower Dungeness Unit

Manager Guzlas attended a Lower Dungeness Levee Setback Meeting with restoration project partners to discuss the current status of the project. The Army Corps of Engineers are currently in process of designing the various setback alternatives in preparation for quantifying the cost/benefit ratio. WADOT recently closed on one of their four acquisitions that are currently in process. WDFW will be helping to prepare an MOA in relationship to the Section 106 consultation and possibly re-engage acquisition activities for the "Forbes" parcel since it currently sits within the consensus boundary for the levee setback.

Chinook Unit

Manager Guzlas participated in the "Intake Call" with Westside Lands Division Supervisor Warren and BPA staff to discuss the status of the BPA supported acquisition adjacent to the Chinook Wildlife Area. The appraisal for this potential acquisition is due in early March. Manager Guzlas also participated in meeting with WDFW Estuary MOA Team staff and headquarters personnel to discuss the next steps associated with the restoration project and the tide gate management plan. From a regional perspective it is currently unclear what role the wildlife area will take for the next steps that have already been planned and discussed with BPA by MOA staff. Manager Guzlas will be contacting the key local private landowner to discuss possible tide gate management experiments during the months of March, April, and May. The project will require additional management attention.

Scatter Creek Restoration

VanBlaricom and Gibbons continued prairie restoration efforts at the Scatter Creek Unit. Scot's Broom mowing areas were focused on the South Unit during the past week.

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

Wildlife Areas

Scatter Creek

Wildlife Area staff decommissioned a relic vault toilet located at the north unit of Scatter Creek along with removing a large garbage dump that was deposited at Scatter Creek.

Private Lands/Access

Biologist Skriletz attended the Jefferson County Chapter meeting of the WA Waterfowlers Assoc. in Chimacum. Our first attempt in District 15 at opening access on private property through the Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program was a rousing success. Hunters and landowners request expanding the program next year.

Other

Winter Conditions: No issues to report.

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

Wildlife Management

ALEA Grant

Bio Harris coordinated with Eyes in the Woods and the Elma Game Club on an ALEA grant to assist Region 6 in Private Lands Access and Cooperative Road management maintenance.

Joint Venture Meeting

Bio Skriletz represented Region 6 at the Pacific Coast Joint Venture meeting at Nisqually NWR.

Personnel Hiring

Regional Program Manager Cope, and Bios Tirhi, Linders, Guzlas, Skriletz, and Gerchak continued working on the hiring process for several temporary or career seasonal positions in Region 6.

Wildlife Areas

Wildlife Area Plan Updates

Wildlife Area staff finalized the first draft of the 2012 Olympic-Willapa Hills Wildlife Area Plan Update. This update will be reviewed first by the District Team (DT) on March 6th and finalized by the Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) on March 19th. Since there are several controversial regional topics included in the planning update staff is requesting attendance from personnel from all programs for the District Team meeting.

Staff is expecting to have a draft of the North Olympic and South Puget Sound Wildlife Area Plan Update finalized by early next week and DT and CAG meetings will occur near the end of March or early April.

Private Lands

Master Hunter Volunteer Opportunities

Bio Harris added Master Hunter volunteer opportunities to the Master Hunters Web Page. The need for volunteers and types of projects were also discussed with the Region 6 Master Hunter advisory group member.