

Wildlife Program

Week of February 27, 2012

SCIENCE DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE



Western Gray Squirrel Project/Citizen Science: Forty students from the New Market Skills Center joined WDFW staff in setting out hair-snag tubes as part of our research efforts on western gray squirrels on Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM). The Skills Center's Craig Baker brought the students to the site having trained them in the basics of orienteering. The students then participated in laying out tubes in a 100m x100m grid on a site that we are monitoring for squirrel use as part of a pilot study on the impact of forestry

activities on this state-threatened species. For most of these students this was their first exposure to wildlife fieldwork. The Center for Natural Lands Management and the Forestry and Wildlife staff on JBLM are cooperators on the pilot project.



Washington White-tailed Deer Project: To date, a total of 22 deer have been captured using Clover traps with 18 deer fitted with radio collars; 2 previously radio marked deer have been recaptured once each, plus 2 capture mortalities. All deployed GPS radio collars except for 1 have been functioning properly.

Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Ecology Seminar: On 29 February Mike Schroeder (WDFW Research Scientist) conducted a seminar for students at Washington State University and the University of Idaho on "Sage-grouse and Sagebrush Ecology." The seminar took place in Pullman and focused on the successes and failures of modeling efforts to accurately describe the relationship between sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat.

Publications

Wildlife Program staff are coauthors on recently published manuscripts. These publications are now available online:

Integrating diet and movement data to identify hot spots of predation risk and areas of conservation concern for endangered species:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01368/>

Harbor seal foraging response to a seasonal resource pulse, spawning Pacific herring:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01369/>

Other Publications

Mike Schroeder (WDFW Research Scientist) coauthored a chapter titled “Criteria for Determining Sex and Age of Birds and Mammals” in the newest edition of “The Wildlife Techniques Manual.” The 2-volume manual is the 7th edition of a book that was last published in 2005. The book should be available online shortly.

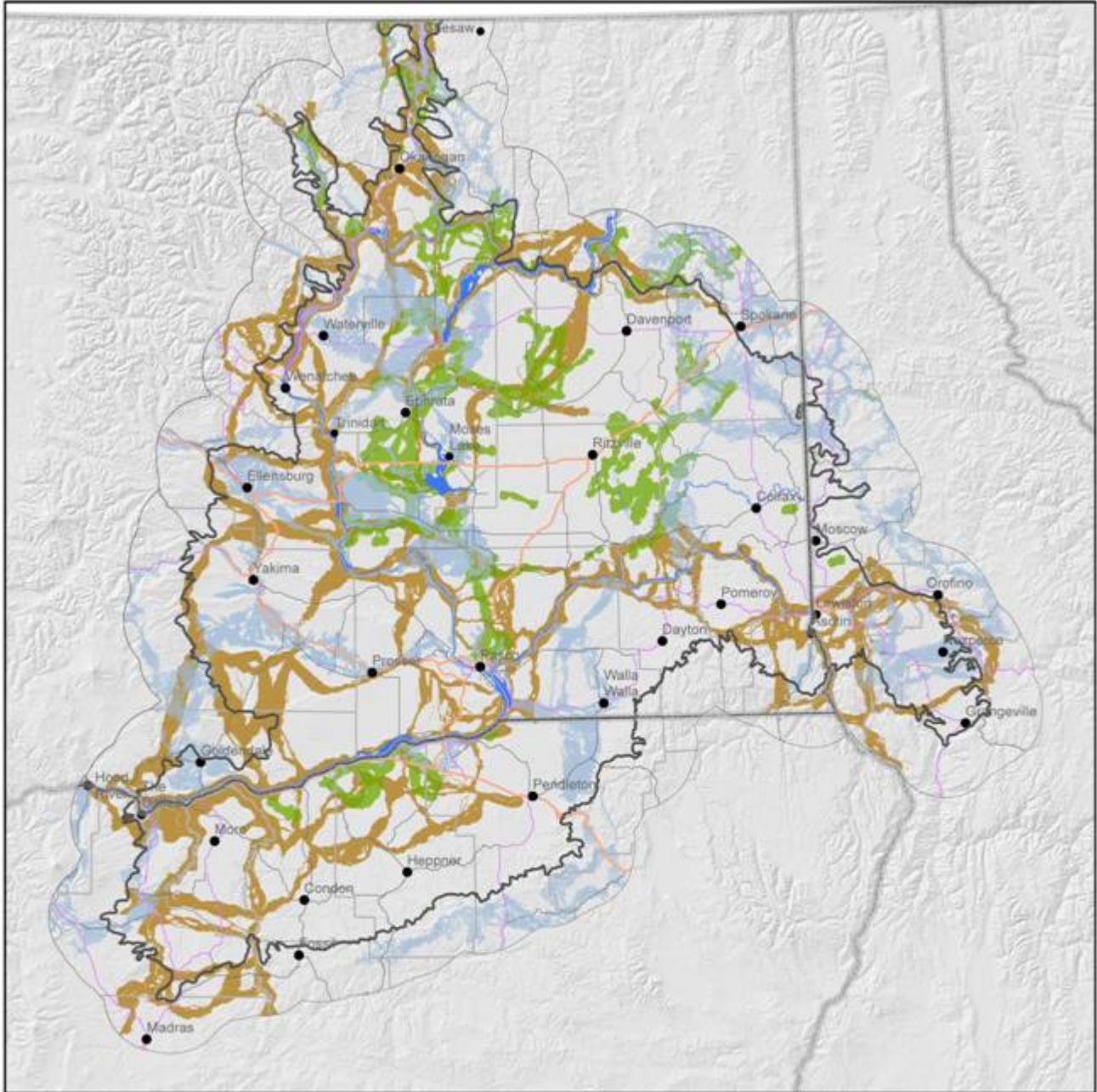
WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

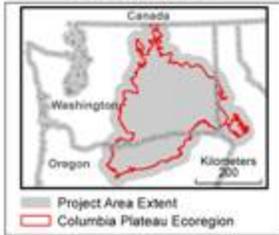
Wildlife Management

Regional Coordination of Butterfly Conservation: Region 6 and Headquarters staff, facilitated by Mick Cope and Bruce Thompson, conducted a 7-hour coordination session regarding at-risk butterfly conservation throughout Region 6. Session actions included review background actions, verify critical conservation questions, examine prioritization and information needs, and establish communication and coordination networks. The session was completed with a stronger understanding by all of near-term actions and timing, need for more coordinated advance planning in advance of 2013, and ways that the anticipated District State wildlife action plans and ongoing implementation of the Activity Tool can aid butterfly conservation judgments.

Habitat Connectivity Project: Joanne Schuett-Hames, Chris Sato, Brian Cosentino, Brian Hall and others on the Columbia Plateau project have been working hard to complete the final report this week. The image below is one of the graphics from the document, the "Drainage/Aquatic and Canyon Network," which is quite interesting as it provides broad connectivity network patterns focused on the aquatic systems and cliff, canyon, and talus areas. The focal species: beaver (author Mark Teske, WDFW), tiger salamander (author Karl Halupka, USFWS), and Western rattlesnake (author Steve Spear, Orianna Society), provide the comprehensive modeling results used to describe this composite connectivity network. This network is a strong complement to patterns based on upland shrubsteppe and generalist species, and landscape integrity.

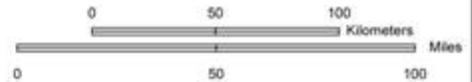


Drainage/Aquatic and Canyon Network Composite



WASHINGTON WILDLIFE HABITAT
CONNECTIVITY
WORKING GROUP

- Beaver 20 km Network
- Tiger Salamander 5 km Network
- Western Rattlesnake 20 km Network
- Columbia Plateau Project Area
- 25 km Buffer
- County Line
- Freeway
- Major Highway
- Secondary Highway
- River
- City or Town



REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

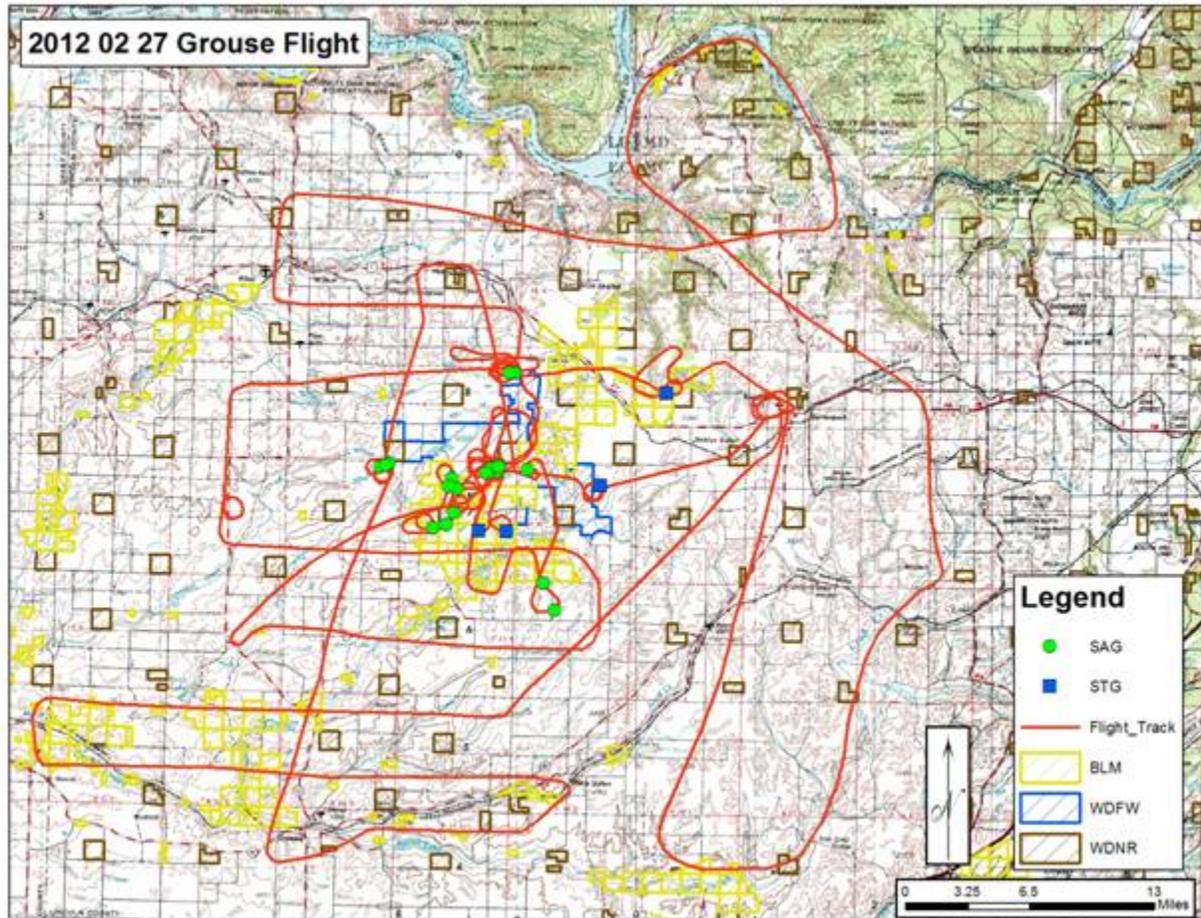
Gray Wolf Monitoring Northeast Washington: Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Shepherd collected remote cameras with Department of Defense (DOD) personnel in the Smackout Meadow U.S. Air Force Survival School instructors camp. No wolves were detected in the area after tracks were observed in the camp the week before and the cameras were re-deployed. A discussion occurred with DOD about avoiding wolf habituation to the U.S. Air Force Survival School activities. Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Shepherd investigated canine tracks with WDFW Officer Dan Anderson at a ranch near Laurier (see photos). Tracks were observed along the road by the house and within the electrified calving pasture although no calves were lost. This ranch has had wolves in the general vicinity in October 2011, and in the immediate vicinity in mid-February 2012, as well as last week (late February). Discussions of hazing and wolf management were extensive and inconclusive.



Wolf track in calving pasture from which all photos above were taken.

Gray Wolf Monitoring Blue Mountains: Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Vekasy discussed recent wolf sightings with 2 local landowners. One involved large set of canid tracks along the edge of wheat fields. The owner was concerned with his cows grazing in the area. He also reported and showed photos of a pair of large tracks from the same area one year ago. He has had no cattle problems to date. Biologists Vekasy and Rasley visited the area and saw nothing other than coyotes; however, the tracks are not from a coyote. Biologist Rasley also responded to a deer predation in the same general area, all sign indicated coyotes are responsible. A 2nd landowner saw 2 large canines in a wheat field behind her house. She has sheep and trains dogs, and has had coyote problems in the past, so was positive they were not coyotes. The sighting was in an area of recent wolf activity, but the landowner also indicated it could possibly have been large dogs.

Lincoln County Prairie Grouse Project: Biologist Atamian flew a radio tracking flight with graduate student Kourtney Stonehouse. They located 25 birds (21 sage and 4 sharptailed grouse). Two of the sage grouse and one of the sharptail collars were in mortality mode.



Topic 3:

Wildlife Areas

Agricultural field mapping at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Mike Finch and Private Lands Biologist Todd Baarstad have been working with Jason Lowe, Wildlife Biologist for BLM. Jason provided an arc view digital map after he acquired the data from the USDA showing all the historical existing agricultural field within all the public ownership. With this data Todd and Mike can identify each parcel with the USDA's CRP grass stand classification and assign a code describing the current field condition. This will also allow us to determine what fields could be good future candidates for native restoration. We have also since learned from telemetry data that our grouse have been using several of our restored fields 2 years after restoration.

Private Lands/Access

Farm Bill technical assistance provided: Baarstad contacted a farmer with a DNR lease adjacent to BLM land. He confirmed that he will enroll his 236 acre agricultural lease into a SAFE contract. Baarstad wrote a plan outline and guidance document detailing field operations for stand establishment and sent copies to DNR and the lessee for review. We will be meeting soon to discuss details of the contract. Baarstad contacted Private lands Biologist John Cotton to inform him of the acres allocated to this contract as he will be using the acres remaining in the

shrub steppe SAFE program (~239 acres) for a contract in Grant County. Two more producers contacted Baarstad this week with interest in SAFE contracts due to current CRP contracts expiring on October 1, 2012. Farm Bill Coordinator Don Larsen is going to try to get more acres allocated for SAFE contracts in Lincoln County.

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: Highs in mid-40's lows in low-20's. Generally windy conditions.

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 will commonly nest in the short grasses that occur in the Seep Lakes Unit.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE



Washington ground squirrel:

Biologist Finger began entering and summarizing data from the translocation effort last week. This is a cooperative project with Sage Hills Golf Club and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Squirrels were captured on the golf course and released on other areas. This data will be provided in a final report which Finger is in the process of preparing. The report will not be finalized until follow-up monitoring is concluded to determine reproductive status of the translocated females. Thus

far both sites have retained ground squirrels on site. Most burrowing activity observed is in association with the artificial tunnels created by the Verminator, a commercial device for creating tunnels. All enclosures that were not breached by squirrel tunneling have now been breached by hand to ensure that ground squirrels are able to feed on native grasses and develop natal dens. All evidence suggests that things are proceeding well.

Finger began comments to the USFWS Species assessment and Listing Priority Assignment Form. Finger will finalize these comments by next week and submit them to Gary Wiles in Olympia. Wiles will write final comments based on input from Finger, Watson, and potentially others.

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

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

Bighorn Sheep: Five GPS collars were placed on bighorn rams in the Swakane area north of Wenatchee this week. Biologist Volsen worked with Leading Edge Aviation and State Wildlife Veterinarian Mansfield on the collaring effort. The rams were captured using a netgun fired from a helicopter (picture below). Sheep were processed at the capture site and samples taken to assess the health of the individuals. In an effort to document long distance movements by young rams, these sheep will be monitored over the next two plus years. The collars will return 5-6 locations per day, allowing us to monitor the movements of the rams relative to domestic sheep grazing allotments in the district. The data gained will be used to ensure the health of bighorn sheep into the future.



Citizen Science-Mule Deer Winter Range: Biologist Gallie took a science class from WestSide High School into the field, beginning a citizen science project to collect data on bitterbrush stands occurring on the winter range on our Wildlife Areas. This outing was a training of teachers and students on data collection protocols, identification skills, and other

methods they will use. This data will be able to look at the browsing pressure on bitterbrush in a given winter, but also provide a stand assessment by categorizing the age class and density of bitterbrush along transects. The class plans on 5 field trips for data collection this spring, primarily on the Chelan Wildlife Area.



Interesting observation: Biologist Gallie watched as several magpies landed on some bighorn sheep and picked around on their fur for several minutes, methodically working from sheep to sheep. I assume they were searching for and eating ticks. The bighorns paid little attention to their groomers.



SPECIES RECOVERY

Pygmy Rabbit Recovery - Penny Becker

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Large Enclosure Rabbit Assessments: Research Scientist Becker, Biologists Eidson, Volsen, Peterson and Winters, along with volunteer veterinarians and trappers worked Friday and Saturday (3/1 and 3/2) trapping and performing exams/sampling on rabbits they could catch in the large enclosures. Estimates thus far indicate that survival over winter was roughly similar to those reported in Oregon (Crawford et al. 2010). In addition, signs of weasel presence in and around the enclosure were found. Although no weasel-related mortalities were found, additional predator trapping and bolstering of the enclosure will be done to protect the young to be born in the coming months.

Weather Conditions: Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area received about 2 inches of snow early this week but warm daytime temperatures resulted in all the snow melting by the end of the week.

WILDLIFE AREAS

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

Weather Conditions: Overcast, highs in the 30's and lows in the teens and 20's.

Weekender Opportunities: The valley snowpack is starting to fade on south facing slopes but skiing conditions at Big Valley are still first rate!

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Winter Range Restoration: On Wednesday Methow manger Tom McCoy met with USFS staff at the Loup Loup ski area to begin stand exams for a potential thinning/burning project that would extent from the ski area, west to the boundary of the Frazer Unit of the wildlife area. This block of USFS and WDFW lands represent what may be the highest density mule deer winter range in the state of Washington. While implementation may be years away this project has the potential to make a truly significant improvement to this critical winter range.

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

Weather Conditions: Tuesday night the area received 4.5 inches of heavy wet snow and a welcome addition to our relatively dry winter. By weeks end temperatures in the 40's had reduced the snow to a few lingering patches in the Bridgeport area.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Pygmy rabbit conservation: Friday and Saturday staff traveled to the Sagebrush Flat unit to assist Research Scientist Penny Becker's efforts to trap pygmy rabbits within the two pygmy rabbit enclosures. Also assisting were veterinarians from the Oregon Zoo and Northwest Trek. The intent was to collect genetic samples, weigh and PIT tag each captured animal. Friday, 5 rabbits proved to be more elusive.

Pygmy rabbit prior to capture





Volunteer Angel Hastings preparing trap



Biologist Ann Winters with pygmy rabbit

Grouse observations: Saturday morning while in route to Sagebrush Flat, volunteers Angel Hastings and US Army Corps of Engineers, Chief Joseph Dam Biologist Bob Fischer and biologist Peterson encountered sage grouse displaying in a stubble field west of Mansfield. At one point, several of the birds decided to walk across the road prompting the obvious question from the observers. The humor quieted down somewhat as a car came into view and finally came to a stop as the birds on the road flew off and several more from the field followed suit and flew over the road. The passengers in the car certainly had better views of the birds than us.



Sage grouse, ambling and flying across road as car approaches.

Volunteers repair wood duck boxes: Long-time volunteer Rick Hendrick made repairs to wood duck boxes on the Bridgeport Bar unit. Rick put up two additional boxes plus an old kestrel box that he hopes will be used by saw-whet owls.



Volunteer Rick Hendrick putting up nest box for saw-whet owls while Meredith Spencer watches song sparrows on the Bridgeport Bar unit.

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

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

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 (CBWA), Vegetation Management Specialist Roger Nelson continued the annual treatment. The residual herbicide needs some moisture to carry it onto the soil surface and prevent germination of annual weed seeds such as Russian thistle and kochia, keeping the roads and parking areas clean and reducing the possibility of wildfires. Despite equipment problems, occasional snow and low temperatures, Nelson has sprayed 122.4 acres on all units of the CBWA since starting February 10.

Aerial Herbicide Application Contract: Wildlife Area staff finished the technical specs for the annual aerial herbicide application contract and sent it and the estimate of cost off to Financial Services for approvals and development of the Request for Quotes by Mr. Scott Geist, Contracts Specialist for the Office of State Procurement. An estimated \$41,500 will be required for the 1,480 acres of application we are requesting, most costs are covered by contract with the BOR.



PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski
Weekender Opportunities: Watchable Wildlife opportunities abound. Bald Eagles, Otters and Mule Deer all spotted this week along Banks Lake in Grant County.



Mule Deer Bucks



Otter – Banks Lake Unit CBWA

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

2012 DOUGLAS COUNTY State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)

SIGNUP: Private Lands Biologist Braaten 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. This signup was very successful signing approximately 12,000 acres into SAFE. Private Lands Biologist Braaten worked with Jo Wisniewski on SAFE data management. Many old files were deleted and final SAFE documents were added to my computer.

Biologist Wisniewski finally aligned WDFW and Farm Service Agency (FSA) SAFE data and agreed on an additional 11,887 acres available for a third offering to landowners in Douglas Co. Biologist Wisniewski assisted Biologist Braaten with SAFE data management at his Grand Coulee office.

REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Burrowing Owls: District Wildlife Biologist Mike Livingston developed a database and GIS project to organize location and monitoring data related to the burrowing owl artificial burrow mitigation project. Eighty-eight burrows comprising 29 clusters have been installed since 2010. Burrows are installed in clusters of three. Each cluster of three is intended to support one nesting pair. Where forage is abundant and burrows are scarce we have had as many as three pairs take up residence in one cluster (one pair per burrow).



WDFW's Rocky Ross and volunteers install an artificial burrow.



A burrowing owl defending an artificial burrow.

Burrowing Owl Web Cam: Fans of WDFW's burrowing owl web cam had a week of excitement and disappointment. A single owl has remained at the burrow throughout the winter. People have been eagerly waiting for the mate (presumably the female) to arrive at the burrow for a couple weeks now. On Tuesday she made her appearance. Unfortunately, on Wednesday the connection to the cam was lost, so many people were disappointed. Fortunately, by Friday the web cam was back on line with live streaming.



WDFW's web cam captures the reuniting of a pair of burrowing owls, Pasco, WA



Some of the ducks and geese sitting on Windmill Lake lift off. The far shoreline is packed with mallards where we mowed a strip to trap and band ducks last summer.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

People for Puget Sound-Friends of Edmonds Marsh-Edmonds Community College-WDFW Great Blue Heron Colony Monitoring: Biologist Anderson met with representatives from People for Puget Sound (PFPS), Friends of Edmonds Marsh (FEM) and Edmonds Community College (ECC) Biology program and LEAF program (Learn and Serve Environmental Anthropology Field School) to dry run a collaborative heron colony monitoring protocol and field data collection sheet. Anderson has been consulting with the group to develop a program involving citizens in the Edmonds area, as well as students from ECC, to track heron occupancy and activity, as well as document other features used over time, such as heron staging areas during the pre-courtship season. PFPS will be restoring Edmonds Marsh to some form of the former tidally influenced wetland that it once was. This pilot project is part of baseline pre-project monitoring, as well as long-term collaborations with ECC to provide for student field study. Data will be shared with WDFW. The group counted 9 nests from previous years and witnessed 7 adults staging in the regular area of the marsh. This is promising for colony use this year as it has been abandoned the last two due to regular eagle incursions. However, in one of

those years, two pairs of herons attempted nesting on the Edmonds Marina breakwater pilings – only to have their young end up in the drink.



Citizens in the Edmonds area and students from Edmonds Community College tracking heron occupancy and activity.

Wildlife Health: Biologist Anderson received word from WDFW Veterinarian Dr. Kristin Mansfield regarding the dead beaver obtained from Meadowbrook Pond in Seattle. Citizens have been concerned over the death of these individuals due to it occurring seemingly about the same time. Dr. Mansfield confirmed that it was not related to disease. The beaver perished due to natural causes including predation injury and starvation in one case, as well as likely injury to another due to the built environment it resides in – a stormwater facility. These are common factors in the lives of urban beaver. Luckily, community members report other beaver still alive and well in the area.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study: Technician Lapsansky and Volunteer Smith continued to conduct surveillance for dead and dying swans, focusing their efforts in Whatcom and Skagit Counties. Lapsansky recovered two more dead swans in Whatcom County, while Smith continues to monitor a couple of suspect birds in Skagit County. The number of dead swans documented by this study to date is 166. This is slightly lower than the previous three years, when the average number of dead swans was 204 (range= 175-241).

Oregon Spotted Frog Survey Training: Biologist Bohannon led two Oregon Spotted Frog egg mass survey trainings for Whatcom Land Trust and Skagit Land Trust volunteers. A total of 16 people attended the two trainings including Biologist DeBruyn and technicians from the Forest Service, who assisted with the trainings. After training, Bohannon and the volunteers surveyed Whatcom Land Trust property where Oregon Spotted Frog egg masses were located last year. Both red-legged Frog and Northwestern Salamander egg masses were found. Volunteers will continue to monitor this site to determine the onset of breeding activity. Once breeding activity

is confirmed, egg mass surveys will continue through the March-early April breeding season. In addition to the land trust properties, surveys will take place on a number of publicly and privately owned properties in Skagit and Whatcom Counties where suitable breeding habitat has been identified.



Biologist Jennifer Bohannon teaches volunteers how to identify egg masses at Barney Lake, Skagit County.

Port Susan/Skagit Bay Nomination: District Biologist Milner submitted the nomination forms for recognizing the Greater Skagit/Stillaguamish as a site of Regional Importance in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) www.whsrn.org/. Sites in this category support at least 20,000 shorebirds annually. This project represents 3 years of aerial and ground-based surveys to count shorebirds in Skagit and Port Susan Bays. It has been a partnership between Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Pilchuck Audubon Society, with grants obtained from the Pacific coast Joint Venture, Boeing Corporation, and Washington State Audubon Society.

Wildlife Areas and Private Lands/Access

Ecological Integrity Monitoring on Wildlife Areas: Wildlife Area Managers participated in an Ecological Integrity Monitoring on Wildlife Areas webinar with the WDFW. The department wants wildlife area managers to look at their wildlife areas as a whole and grade their lands

based on an ecological site description. Once managers know their ecological grade they can plan their habitat improvements.

Farming for Wildlife: Private Lands/Access Biologist Roozen and Region 4 Wildlife Area Managers attended The Nature Conservancy's Farming for Wildlife Annual Meeting. The meeting highlighted 1st year results from the moist soil management project put on by Washington State University and The Nature Conservancy. Landowners, researchers, and managers addressed impacts and benefits of flooding private ground in part to benefit wildlife, but also how flooding ground impacts soils and crops in this area.

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

Wildlife Management

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary: Biologist Anderson developed a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Volunteer Clerical Assistance project using the Wildlife Program's new volunteer registration software, Community Event Registration Volunteer Information System (CERVIS). Anderson oriented a new volunteer, Cassandra Menzel, to the CERVIS system and Backyard clerical needs. Cassandra has been a huge help in just her first week of volunteering. Thanks and welcome aboard Cassandra!

Anderson also worked with Public Information Officer Luers and other biologist staff to review and finalize the new Crossing Paths News Note regarding feeder management and disease consideration. This note is now out and can be found here:
http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/crossing_paths/

North Cascades Elk Trap and Radio Collar Project: Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn worked with tribal partners to relocate traps onto private property. The group of elk being targeted had become been avoiding the trap on the adjacent property, so Danilson had negotiated permission from private property owners over the weekend. Relocating the trap proved to be a good move as an adult cow was successfully captured, radio collared and released. Radio collared elk within this population will facilitate state and tribal biologist's ability to accurately estimate population size and structure for management purposes.



Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn worked with tribal partners to relocate clover traps.

North Cascades Elk Damage Advisory Committee: Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn participated in the second North Cascades Elk Damage Advisory Committee meeting in Burlington. This committee is comprised of representatives from the state and tribal co-management partnership and is coordinated by Region 4 Enforcement Captain Hebner. The committee's focus is dealing with elk conflicts in agricultural settings, which are on the rise as the North Cascades Elk Herd continues to rebound. The broad agenda included updates on current damage and enforcement efforts, a proposal to conduct habitat suitability modeling, a Geographic Positioning System (GPS) collar study, and discussion of private property acquisition that may influence elk conflicts in agricultural settings.

Snow Goose Rocket Net Capture: Biologist Roozen and technician Otto began continued the District 14 snow goose trapping effort. Both rocket net and net gun strategies are being used. Biologist Joe Evenson assisted in the project and delivered the net gun to the area.



Close up of a lesser snow goose (captured March 1st) with new neck collar.

Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program Outreach: Biologist Roozen met with Western Washington Agricultural Association (WWAA) and began work to include an article about private lands programs in Region 4 in the WWAA's quarterly newsletter. WWAA has verbally endorsed private lands programs in this area for some time, and now would like to put that in writing in their next newsletter for growers throughout the state (private landowners) to read about.

Wildlife Areas

Skagit Winter Conditions: Rain and snow mix occurred in the low lands again this week. Waterfowl are distributed around the Skagit valley as field flooding conditions continue to provide feeding areas. Spring migrants beginning to occur in greater numbers as bird watching activity is also on the increase after waterfowl hunting season closure.

Tennant Lake Unit: Manager Kessler worked on the Tennant Lake Wetland Boardwalk Renovation project that will be submitted for RCO funding this year. He met onsite with Dept Engineers to check out the current condition of the boardwalk and start formulating a plan to renovate it. He coordinated with Dennis Conner of Whatcom County Parks for the history of the

project, and also contacted a contractor who did major repair work on the boardwalk after a flood event in 1990.

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

Wildlife Areas

Corson Natural Area: Manager Paulson and Property Management Specialist Iris toured the Corson Natural Area and discussed future use of the property. Paulson and Iris talked to neighbors about the history of the property and current issues of the area, specifically flooding. Flood frequency has increased, but there seems to be multiple reasons why.



Flooding on the Corson Natural Area.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.

Wildlife Management

Field Season Activity Matrix Planning: Manager Link met with District 13 and 14 Biologists to finalize 2012-2013 matrix work plans, discuss ongoing work and emergent district topics.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Western Pond Turtle Management: Regional Wildlife Program Manager Jonker, along with Biologists Anderson and Holman attended the annual meeting to discuss western pond turtle management in Washington. Also in attendance were WDFW Staff from Olympia as well as

Region 6 and representatives from both the Oregon Zoo in Portland and Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle. The meeting featured a review of all 2011 activities in both the Columbia River Gorge and Puget Sound recovery zones, a summary of animal health and husbandry information from the two zoos, a discussion of the shell-rot issue, rollout of the PHVA (Population and Habitat Viability Assessment) effort initiated by the Woodland Park Zoo, a summary of the effects of soil moisture and temperature on egg/hatchling success, a discussion of the numbering system used to identify individual turtles, and a review of the current status of WDFW's pond turtle database.

Oregon Spotted Frog Egg Mass Surveys: Biologist Bergh joined Biologist Schmidt from Region 6 to conduct Oregon Spotted Frog egg mass surveys in Thurston County. These frogs have been reported in Wahkiakum County and with better knowledge of egg mass identification and survey protocol; we can attempt to identify their presence in the County.



Oregon Spotted Frog egg mass

Upcoming Surveys: District Wildlife Biologist Miller began the coordination of the Lower Columbia River goose survey for 2012. This year's survey requires 3 times the days, manpower, and vessels to examine all the islands in the Columbia River within District 10. Biologist Miller contacted local RMEF volunteers regarding the upcoming elk mortality survey. WDFW is fortunate to have a crew of people that come every year to help with this survey; this increases data quality and reduces errors.

Wildlife Areas

Oak Habitat Retention Project at the Klickitat Wildlife Area: A project was undertaken on the Sondino Unit to preserve a valuable Oregon white oak community within the western pond turtle conservation area. Ponderosa pines had become established under an existing stand of mature oaks. The pines formed a dense understory and were presenting intense competition for light, water, and soil nutrients. Pines are known to overtop the slower-growing oak trees and eventually kill them. Biologists Anderson, Holman, and Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven worked together to design and lay out the project in the field. The Larch Corrections forestry crew performed the project work, assisted by a private chipper operator. Approximately 3 acres

of mixed oak-pine forest was thinned by removing the small, un-merchantable pines and chipping most of the slash (see photos). Some of the slash was piled for burning next winter. The larger diameter woody debris will be distributed on site to improve upland hibernation habitat for turtles as well as provide cover for other small species such as western fence lizards.



Before Thinning



After Thinning

Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area: Potential Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study and Spillway Raise Environmental Assessment: Wildlife Program Manager Jonker and Wildlife Area Manager Calkins attended two meetings to discuss partnering with the Army Corps of Engineers in studying potential actions to improve conditions for Fish and Wildlife in the Toutle River and Lower Cowlitz Watersheds. Concurrently the Corps has issued a draft Environmental Assessment addressing raising the spillway of the Toutle River Sediment Retention Structure by 10 feet. Separating the two issues is one of the concerns as those involved are concerned that impacts associated with the spillway raise are not being considered. Regional staff will continue to work together on these issues and opportunities.

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 will conclude this Wednesday 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 March 3rd, 89 hunting parties have aided landowners in their hazing programs and successfully harvested 199 geese. There have been 3 duskies harvested during the late program leaving two birds in the quota and one hunt remaining. 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. Enrollment for next season can take place at any time throughout the year.

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

Wildlife Areas

Jenny Creek Access Rehabilitation: Natural Resource Technician Pyzik began rehabilitating the parking area on the Jenny Creek Unit which, due to a shortage of available resources, had fallen into a condition rendering it unusable for the public. The Jenny Creek Unit was once a popular Band-tailed Pigeon hunting site. As the initial step, Pyzik began pulling scotch broom which had covered most of the parking lot. The parking site is currently the only location where this weed had taken hold and removing it now will help prevent it from spreading through the rest of the Unit, not to mention adjoining properties. More work will be required to complete this project but it has already improved accessibility. This project is the first of many where Discover Pass funding will help to upgrade conditions for public access as well as fish and wildlife habitat on WDFW lands in Region 5.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.

Wildlife Management

District 10: District Wildlife Biologist Miller met with Biologist Bergh, who started working for WDFW in January 2012, for a 2 month interim evaluation, review of expectations for next year, and training matrix. Stefanie is doing a great job and is quickly becoming a critical member of the district team.

Wildlife Areas

Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area: Natural Resource Technician: Dean Pyzik has been hired to fill the new position of Natural Resource Technician 2 in Region 5. Dean will spend 50% of his time each year working on maintenance and enhancement projects on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area and satellite units. The other half of his time will be spent working on private lands access programs within District 10. Dean has several seasons of experience working with private lands access programs and also has skills that will give him a head start on many of the Wildlife Area tasks he will be working on. We welcome Dean and look forward to working with him.

OTHER:

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area: Homicide investigation: A dead body was found at the end of the Erwin O. Reiger Memorial Highway along the east side of the Shillapoo Wildlife Area South Unit and is being investigated as a homicide. Based on local news reports, a suspect is in custody and is being held without bail.

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, including some low elevation snowfall at the end of the month.

Short-Term Forecast: Weather over the next week is expected to be cool and wet with some snowfall below 1500 feet. Valley temperatures will range from the low 30's to mid 40's. 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 probably having some impact on forage availability in the mid to lower elevation winter range areas.

Snow Depths: Over the past several days snow has accumulated in the lower elevations. Snowpack is now near average in the Southwest Cascades. See spreadsheet below for detailed information ([05March2012-MSH_Sno-Depth.pdf](#)).

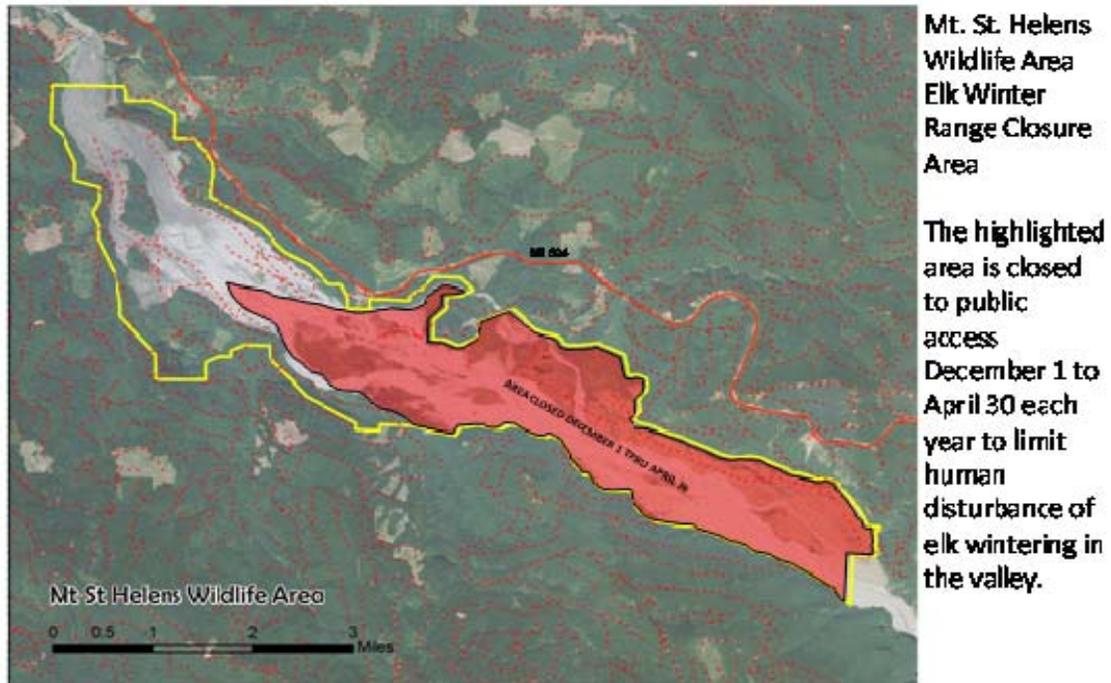
Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. Counts on the Mudflow Unit Survey area remain low. The next monitoring count will occur next week assuming visibility is adequate. 120 elk were on the Mudflow monitoring area during the February count. Previous counts include 176 elk January 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: Heavy snow returned this week to the South Cascades. Snow levels came down to 500 ft with accumulations of 12-14 inches above 2000 ft.

Winter Severity: Mild early season weather kept overall severe winter conditions from big game at a minimum. Snow pack in the Cascades is now considered at normal levels due to the late season weather patterns. 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 has had periodic snow but currently there is no concern for big game in those areas.

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

Illegal Hunting Camp

Bio Harris located an illegal hunting camp reported by a landowner last fall. The camp, originally located by County foresters following quad tracks, is within the Wynoochee Cooperative road closure on private forest lands. All the garbage and information found at the camp indicates that this camp is obviously used as a hunting camp. Fortunately one of the hunters who use the camp left his harvest history on the wall. Enforcement was able to use this information to find the name of one of the possible users of this camp.

This land manager is very receptive to public recreation on the 20,000 acres of land he manages. All of these lands are open to passive public recreation and a good mix of motorized and non-motorized access is allowed during hunting seasons. However, the land manager is very frustrated with the level of abuse and disrespect he has been experiencing (for example, all of the locks on the gates to the property were super-glued during the MF elk season.) and is considering more restrictive access rules. We suspect that the individuals of this hunting camp may be responsible but, there is no way we can prove it.

Since this camp is obviously used for hunting, and WDFW is developing a good working relationship with the landowner, Bio Harris assured the land manager that WDFW and volunteers will spearhead site cleanup. The landowner did request that WDFW attempt to contact individual of interest and if they admit to the camp, suggested that they should clean up the camp.



Illegal hunting camp on private forest lands in Region 6.



Peregrine Falcon Management:

Biologist Tirhi continues to work with the City of Tacoma to place two peregrine falcon boxes on buildings in the downtown Tacoma vicinity. The boxes are necessary to provide an alternate location for the peregrines that normally nest on the 11th Street Bridge, which is undergoing complete retrofit thru 2013. Tirhi and city personnel have been able to secure one building location and are working on a second. The peregrine pair returned to their traditional nesting location as of Feb 23.



Potential Peregrine Falcon box location, TruBlue Building, City of Tacoma