

Wildlife Program

Week of January 2, 2012

LANDS DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

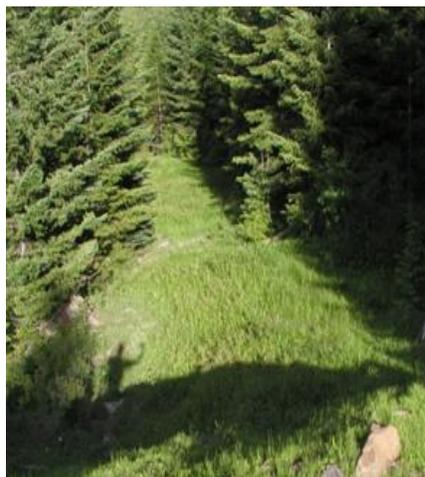
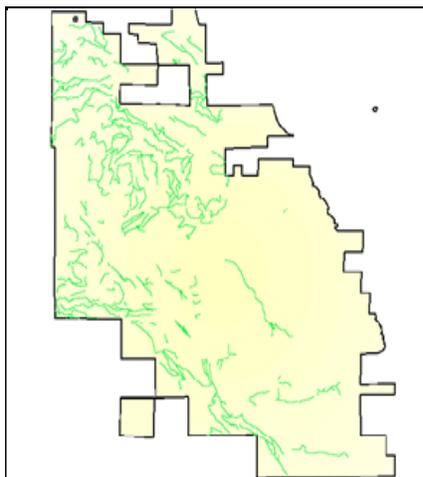
Private Lands/Access

Road Maintenance and Abandonment Planning: Restoration Ecologist Richard Tveten updated the wildlife areas road inventory. The update included adding roads and more thoroughly characterizing roads for regulatory compliance tracking purposes. The update was necessary largely due to acquisitions, land exchanges, and road abandonment activities. Presently there are about 1,850 miles of road on agency-managed portions of Wildlife Areas excluding DNR leased lands (Table 1).

Table 1: Roads on WDFW Wildlife Areas

Road category	Miles
Agency-owned forest roads (Used to haul forest products after 1974)	560
Agency-owned "Orphan" forest roads (Not used to haul forest products since 1974)	270
Agency non-forest roads on owned and managed lands (Never used to haul timber products)	640
Roads owned or managed by others (counties, DNR, the US Forest Service, the Washington State Department of Transportation or private entities)	380

All agency-owned forest roads must be brought up to DNR Forest Practices standards or be abandoned by 2016. Abandoning a road consists of removing all structures and grading when necessary to ensure that cars can no longer use the road and that the road does not pollute streams with sediment or block migrating fish. Since 1990 the agency has abandoned 168 miles of road. The LT Murray Wildlife Area provides the most striking example of agency road abandonment work resulting from extensive logging roads established before WDFW controlled the land. Figure 1 shows where roads have been abandoned. Figure 2 shows an abandoned road.



OUTREACH

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

Wildlife Management

Hunting Prospects -Began preliminary planning for next year's Hunting Prospects. Concerted effort will be directed toward map products and consistency of information. Posted to the agency website a new set of maps on [Western Washington Waterfowl Hunting on Wildlife Areas](#) for Region 6, produced by Kyle Guzlas.

WildWatchcams - Burrowing Owlcam: The solar-powered owlcam has been off-line due to the 'darkness of the season' and increased cloud cover in central Washington, resulting in low battery power. Solstice has passed and sunshine and day hours are increasing; consequently, battery levels are up. We also made equipment adjustments and decreased the length of time for viewing the owls. The burrowing owl cam is back on-line at the 10-second refresh rate; streaming will follow as battery power permits. WDFW Wildlife Biologist Mike Livingston reports owls in the area but no male owl standing watch at the burrow site as of early 2012.

REGION 1

Wildlife Management

Annual Winter LPO Refuge Bird Survey: Assistant District Wildlife Biologist Jay Shepherd participated in the annual mid-winter bird survey carried out on the Little Pend Oreille (LPO) National Wildlife Refuge. There were 23 participants on the count and 32 species were detected. No particularly unusual birds were observed for the LPO at this time of year.

Wildlife Areas

Blue Mountains Wildlife Area – Elk Fence: Bob Dice, Kari Dingman, and David Woodall all participated this week in checking the elk fence in the wake of recent high wind events and a complaint from a Peola Landowner of approximately 80 elk outside the fence south of Pomeroy. Dingman checked Ables Ridge and the Cummings Creek area and did not find any problems. Dice checked Tum-a-lum and fence along Mountain Road. Dice repaired 3 holes in the fence and removed a tree off the fence that had smashed the wire nearly to the ground (Photo). Woodall checked the Weatherly area fence and did not find any problems. Woodall and Dingman will return to the Mountain Road area next week to check the Baker’s Pond area. We did not find evidence of elk pressuring the fence.



Tree on Elk Fence near Mountain Road. Yes, it's steep here!



Bull Elk on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. Photo by David Woodall while checking elk fence.

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

Wildlife Management

Antler Shed Hunting “Season”: Northeast Washington Antler Shed Hunting “Season” is picking up now that it is early January. Moose and white-tailed deer bucks are currently losing their antlers while mule deer and elk will later in the season. The lack of snow this winter will certainly enhance “hunter” access into the backcountry and higher elevations. Shed hunters should avoid harassing wintering big game as it is important for them to conserve energy this time of year.

Wildlife Areas

Viewing Blinds at Reardan Audubon Lakes: Audubon member and local resident Ivan Lines has been involved in construction of roofs on the north and south side viewing blinds. The improvements were funded by a grant from the Spokane Audubon Society, and constructed by Mr. Lines and other residents of Reardan. While taking the attached photographs, WLA Manager WLA, Anderson ran into two couples, Spokane Audubon Society members, who had been out birding at the site that morning. And yes, both couples had their Discover Passes properly displayed in their vehicles.



North side blind, roof partially complete

South side blind, roof - complete

Blue Mountains Wildlife Areas: Upland bird hunters using wildlife area lands and adjacent lands have been having pretty good success lately. Though much walking seems to be the norm, there are chukars and Hungarian partridge out there for the taking.

Winter Conditions: *Northeast Washington:* Almost all of the snow is gone from the valleys now, and even in the mid-elevations most snow has melted off, especially on south and west facing slopes. This winter is beginning to turn into a non-event with a lack of snow and unseasonably mild temperatures. If precipitation does not turn-around to build up a snow-pack in the mountains by sometime in February, there could be drought problems in northeastern Washington this coming summer. *Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area:* No precipitation, no snow on the ground. Daytime temperatures into the upper 30's and low 40's, overnight temperatures down as low as the upper teens. *Blue Mountains Wildlife Areas:* Weather conditions across the wildlife area complex are spring like with very little snow and warm temperatures. Mt Misery junction, which is at 6,000' in the Blue Mountains, only has 2 feet of snow. On a normal year, there should be 6 feet of snow at Misery by now

REGION 2

Region 2 – Okanogan, Chelan, Grant and Adams Counties

Regional Wildlife Program Manager: Matt Monda

DISTRICT BIOLOGISTS

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

Weather Conditions: No snow on the Columbia Plateau. Small ponds frozen with ~6” ice cover. Larger water bodies remaining open. Potholes Reservoir islands are about 95% ice but main water body is open. Moses Lake open in large patches, about 65% open overall.

Weekender Opportunities: Waterfowl hunting is slow. Most mallards on the plateau are on north end of Moses Lake and in vicinity of Windmill Ranch and Bailie Youth Ranch.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Washington Ground Squirrel: Biologist Finger and Research Scientist Watson discussed the Washington ground squirrel survey design pilot project from last year and future direction to get the project implemented. Habitat patch size as a variable to predict occupancy was discussed as well as available data layers to describe patch size. The HCA (habitat concentration area) models developed by the Washington Habitat Connectivity Working Group are likely the best option for defining “patches” at this point but may not perform well at a small scale. Also discussed was the potential for using MODIS (Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer) data. MODIS detectors measure 36 spectral bands between 0.405 and 14.385 μm , and acquire data at three spatial resolutions -- 250m, 500m, and 1,000m. The many data products derived from MODIS observations describe features of the land, oceans and the atmosphere that can be used for studies of processes and trends on local to global scales.” Finger investigated the potential to use this data source to assess range condition during critical periods of Washington ground squirrels annual cycle. This process was begun by selecting a few sites and generating “greenness” outputs for those sites at various intervals. Further investigation on the utility of MODIS data is warranted before progressing further but the application shows some promise.

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

Waterfowl: Biologist Finger and Waterfowl Specialist Moore conducted the mid-winter inventory waterfowl survey for the north subbasin, including the Columbia River between Priest Rapids dam and the Grand Coulee dam as well as all significant water bodies in-between. Waterfowl counts will be summarized and reported early next week but preliminary observations are that waterfowl numbers are very low on the plateau. The north end of Moses Lake was open and holding thousands of mallards. The Sugar/Bailie and Eagle Lakes strata also were holding large numbers of mallards. In addition, Biologist Hoenes surveyed the Coulee Corridor via ground counts.

Mule Deer: Biologist Hoenes contacted Desert Unit permit holders that participated in the modern firearm seasons and had not responded to the questionnaire that was mailed to them prior

to the opening of their respective seasons. The questionnaire information is collected in addition to the mandatory hunter reports with the goal of determining harvest levels before the hunter report data is summarized in early spring. Additional objectives of the questionnaire include obtaining photos of each buck harvested as well as evaluating overall hunter satisfaction.

District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen

Weather Conditions: The winter continues to be quite dry with temperatures a bit above normal. No significant precipitation expected over the next week. Little to no snow exists on much of the deer winter range in the District which should result in healthy over-winter fawn recruitment this year.

Weekender Opportunities: Good eagle viewing continues in the Methow Watershed, particularly from the Winthrop bridges south. More open water than usual in the Okanogan Watershed means decent waterfowl viewing opportunities including some swans.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wolverine Research: Wildlife biologist Scott Fitkin and USFS staff continued wolverine capture efforts in the western portion of the District. Although we've had no captures to date this season, we have had activity near traps. The attached video shows five-time capture Rocky visiting the Hart's Pass trap, but not committing to the bait. Based on previous experience, we expect capture success to pick up as the winter progresses. In the interim, we've had some difficulty keeping martens from triggering traps; and although annoying, it makes for a good photo-op.



Pesky marten stealing bait from a wolverine trap in the Methow Watershed – photo, USFS.

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

Weather Conditions:

Snow accumulation in Chelan County differs drastically from West to East, often acting like two separate areas. Areas near the Columbia River, farther from the Cascade Crest, have little or no snow accumulation whereas; areas close to the Cascade Crest are experiencing heavy snowfall. This season, heavy snows did not arrive until roughly 29 December, when levels increased as much as 40 percent over a few days. While snows came to low elevation areas during the same period, the amounts were minimal and snow days were followed by warm weather and rain. Sixty percent of the annual snowfall occurs after 1 January, so the potential for heavy snowfall affecting wildlife is still high. It may look like an easy winter from the streets of Wenatchee, however, conditions in the heart of the Cascades is as tough as usual.

Compared to last winter, conditions in Douglas County are mild. No significant snows have accumulated and temps are relatively mild. As is the case in most years, wildlife in Douglas County respond to changes in available resources to make it through the winter. For animals such as mule deer, that means moving into areas where food is more abundant, with or without snow. This winter, the pattern of snow accumulation is on the mild side, and closer to a normal winter.

Weekender Opportunities: Look for concentrations of waterfowl along the Columbia River and in open water areas in the northeast corner of Douglas County. Bald eagles are congregating in traditional wintering areas along the Wells Pool and Rufus Wood. Mule deer have moved onto wintering areas and are visible in higher numbers than any other time of year. Remember that deer are under increasing stress as winter progresses, so use a spotting scope to observe animals and try not to disturb them.

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

Lake Chelan Wildlife Surveys: Biologist Gallie assisted Chelan County PUD staff with boat-based wildlife surveys on Lake Chelan. PUD staff conducts 12 surveys each winter along the lake, with surveys beginning in late November and ending in late March. The 108 mountain goats observed on the south shore (83 adults, 22 kids and 3 unclassified) equals the highest count recorded in a single day on the South shore. Counts on the North shore have been unusually low this year (high of 43 observed); most likely due to the lack of snow on south facing slopes, which allows them to occupy higher terrain out of view from the lake. Results from surveys have led the district to recommend the issuance of a limited entry hunting permit for mountain goats on the south shore in 2012.



Mountain goats observed from boat along the south shore of Lake Chelan.



Adult nanny and juvenile mountain goat observed along Lake Chelan.

District 7 Mule Deer Surveys: Aerial surveys for mule deer were completed in PMU 26, Chelan County, on December 23rd. Thirty three survey units were completed during 3 days of flying. Twenty eight hundred deer were observed in 2011, up from a count of 2,442 in deer 2010. These preliminary data will be used to construct a population estimate for Chelan County. Initial impressions are that the deer herd is in good shape with high fawn recruitment and buck numbers above our management objective of 25 bucks per 100 does. A number of bighorn sheep were observed during the deer surveys in both the Swakane and Chelan Butte areas.



Bighorn rams observed during mule deer surveys in GMU 250 in Chelan County.

SPECIES RECOVERY

Pygmy Rabbit Recovery - Penny Becker

Weather Conditions: Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area continued have temperatures above freezing in the daytime and received little or no precipitation. Only very little starts of green vegetation have appeared to date and most of the area remains dry and brown.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Pygmy Rabbit Husbandry: Research Scientist Becker spent time on Sagebrush Flat wildlife area monitoring and providing supplemental feed to the pygmy rabbits in large enclosures. One captive-bred rabbit was found with a likely broken leg and died soon after. Pictures below

feature a feeding station inside large enclosures and a pygmy rabbit inside the large enclosure under protective netting.

Informal Rabbit Burrow Searches: Research Scientist Becker and Wildlife Program Manager Monda conducted an informal survey of possible burrows on Sagebrush Flat WLA in an attempt to find recent signs of rabbits that were released last spring. Semi-fresh pellets (~2 weeks old) were collected for genetic analysis but no new active burrows were discovered.

Winter Surveys: Research Scientist Becker has been waiting for snow to fall on Sagebrush Flat WLA to conduct ground surveys for active burrows. She continued to prepare for surveys, including creating an information sheet for volunteer surveyors, developing transects of the area, recruiting volunteers, making fecal genetic sampling kits.

Diversity Planning: Research Scientist Becker outlined her request for district biologists' participation for the coming year to contribute to diversity planning.

Non-invasive Fecal Sampling Trial: Research Scientist Becker compiled the environmental data collected last summer for the fecal genetic sampling trial she is conducting with University of Idaho. Becker also corresponded with the genetics lab in Olympia and Dr. Kristen Mansfield to coordinate the organization and delivery of targeted pygmy rabbit tissue samples to the University of Idaho. The goal of the trial is to determine DNA extraction success over time in field conditions to be used for species and individual identification.



Aged pygmy rabbit pellets collected for genetic trial study.

WILDLIFE AREAS

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

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE

Weed Control: Roger Nelson organized a meeting scheduled for January 20, with weed control professionals from WA Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and USBOR to coordinate Phragmites control efforts in the Desert Unit. WDNR owns and manages a section of ground in the heart of the Desert Unit, with the Winchester Wasteway flowing through it, and that is highly infested with Phragmites. This section provides an infestation source for thousands of acres of wetlands downstream and has been a high priority control area for our efforts. WDNR has recently demonstrated a willingness to make that section one of their high priority control areas as well.

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

Weather Conditions: MILD. Very unusual warm winter weather this year, with no snow cover at lower elevations. Highs in Okanogan area are into the mid 40's, with lows predicted in lower 20's, and one night into the teens.

Weekender Opportunities: January is generally the best opportunity to view Sharp-tailed grouse on the Scotch Creek unit. However this year without the snow cover, the public is cautioned to travel too far. No birds have been observed to date in their traditional wintering areas. However with the lack of snow cover, the 7.5 mile Coulee Creek trail route is a good option from Hess Lake on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area to Fish Lake on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area.

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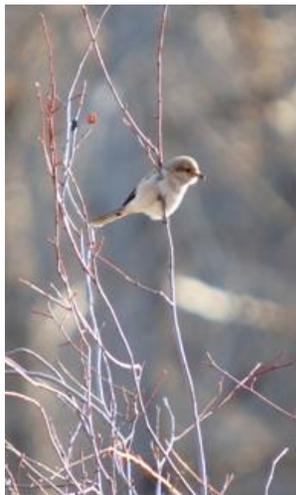
Pogue Mountain Timber Thinning: Contractor Tom Accord from Oroville started moving equipment onto the Pogue Mountain site (4 miles NW of Omak) on Wednesday, January 4. One feller processor has started cutting this week, with skidders and haul trucks arriving soon. Conditions are marginal but acceptable for winter logging. We have frozen ground with a skiff of snow, and colder temperatures arriving this weekend. The equipment operator is doing the best he can to operate on tops and limbs, thereby minimizing ground disturbance. Timber will be sorted into 6 sorts, and delivered to three mills for processing. Forester Doug Kuehn and Assistant Manager Dupont are on site and working with the operator.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex - Dale Swedberg / Justin Haug

Weather Conditions: For the week daytime temperatures ranged from a low of 47 to a high of 43, nighttime temperatures ranged from a low of 20 to a high of 38. Wind averages ranged from .0 to 3.9 mph with gusts ranging from 3 to 19 mph. Warmer temperatures have, for all intents and purposes, resulted in the ground thawing.

- Lakes and ponds frozen over.
- Received about some freezing rain, but no measurable precipitation.

Weekender Opportunities: Bird watching – most common wintertime birds, e.g.,



red-tailed hawks (photo), northern shrike (photo), pileated woodpeckers (photo), northern harriers, pine grosbeaks, trumpeter swans and Bohemian waxwings. Also pygmy owls and great horned owls can be heard calling as their breeding season approaches.



Ice skating on Conner's Lake.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project: Fuels and fire crew continue hand thinning dense patches of dog-hair Douglas fir and ponderosa pine for the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP) to reduce and reconfigure fuels. Crews cleared fire-lines in preparation for spring burning. SERP silviculturist Corso continued marking trees for logging and thinning on the SERP - Phase 2 area south of Blue Lake. Manager Swedberg received the final Cultural Resource Survey Report for SERP - Phase 2 from Central Washington University – Central Washington Archaeological Services and is preparing the reports and associated paperwork to forward to Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and the Colville Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for review, comment and concurrence that there will be no adverse effect to archaeological resources. Due to lack of snow and generally unfrozen ground mechanical logging has not been resumed on the SERP – Phase 1. The SERP-Phase 1 cultural resource survey was conducted and DAHP and Colville Tribal concurrence was given that there would be no effect from mechanical thinning based on the premise that all such activities would be conducted on frozen ground or 18” of snow or both. Additionally there is reluctance on the part of the contractor to spend \$4,000 to get his equipment here and not be able to operate continuously.

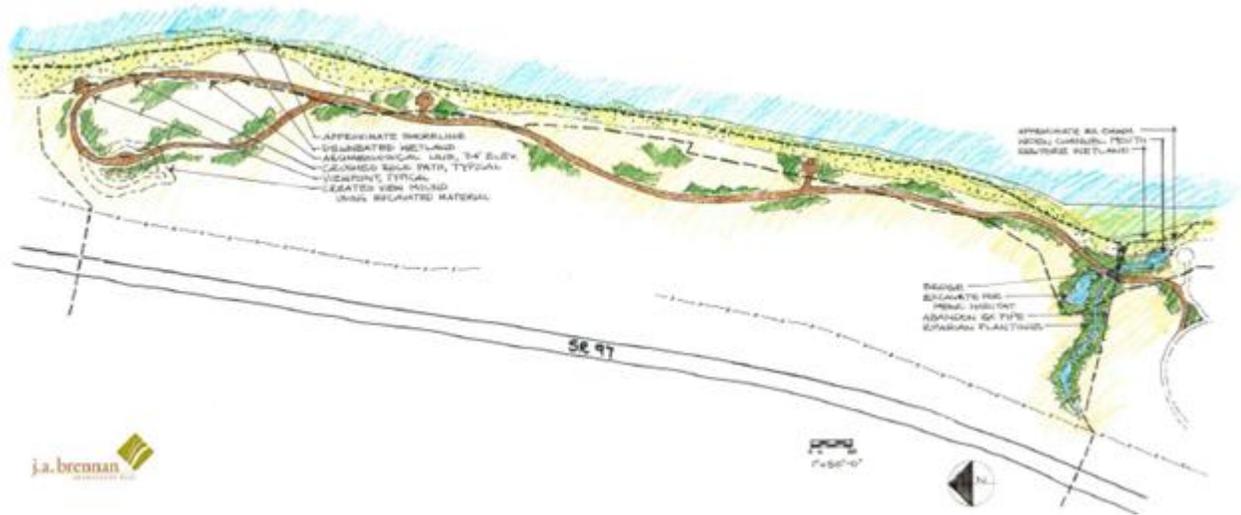
Chelan Wildlife Area Complex - Ron Fox

Weather Conditions: January is shaping up as very mild and snow free at lower elevations.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

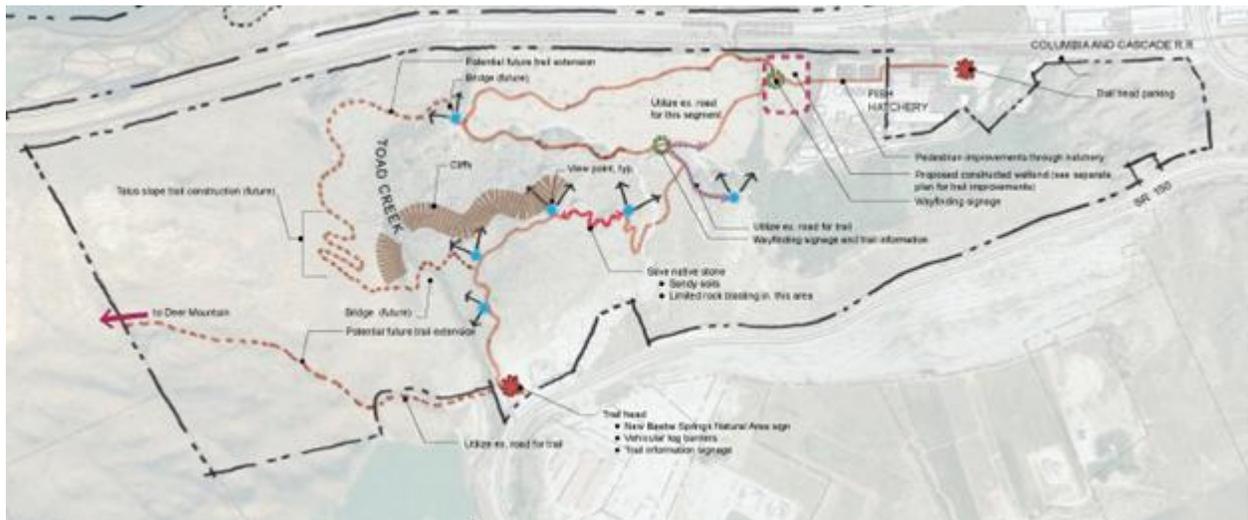
Beebe Springs Phase 4: Ron Fox, Chelan Wildlife Area Manager, spent considerable time with Mike Perfetti from J.A. Brennan Associates and Michael De La Cruz in WDFW Engineering Beebe Springs Phase 4 Planning. Phase 4 will include two segments: one is associated with an

ALEA grant and will complete restoration and development west of Highway 97 along the Columbia River. Ron and Mike made final revisions to construction documents that contained several major errors and many items that needed clarification.



Beebe Springs Phase 4 Segment 1.

The second segment of phase 4 will include additional trails, habitat restoration and interpretive signs on the west side of Highway 97 and include work at the Chelan Fish Hatchery. This segment is early in the design stage and will have very tight time line to obtain permits and meet in-water work windows this summer. Ron worked with Mike Perfetti and Michael De La Cruz on the early design work, permit application timelines, and construction scheduling to correspond with segment 1.



Beebe Springs Phase 4 Segment 2.

REGION 3

Waterfowl Surveys: Wildlife Biologists Mike Livingston and William Moore surveyed waterfowl in the south Columbia Basin as part of the Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey. Weather conditions were good for the survey other than a small portion of the Columbia River that was fogged in and prevented coverage. Most of the smaller sloughs, ponds and lakes were at least partially frozen. Overall, numbers were moderate compared with previous years (77,000 mallards; 106,000 total waterfowl). Highest concentrations of ducks were in the state reserves and federal refuges especially the Washington Islands in the John Day reservoir, Cold Springs in Oregon, Wallula (Sanctuary Pond), Badger Island, and the Hanford Reach. There were 13,000 mallards on the Hanford Reach. That was the highest count on the Reach since 2006. Otherwise distributions were normal for this time of year. Persistent stable weather conditions have permitted waterfowl to rest during the day in the reserves and sanctuaries and feed in the fields at night.



REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Winter Waterfowl Surveys: Biologist Kertson spent the week participating in the annual midwinter waterfowl survey. He surveyed areas and lakes throughout northeast, east, and south King County. Being that this was Biologist Kertson's first year participating in the waterfowl survey, Officer Richards and Officer Krenz graciously helped familiarize him with survey locations on the Enumclaw Plateau and within the Kent-Auburn valley. Overall, duck and geese numbers were lower than expected in many survey locations, which may have stemmed from a lack of winter storms and December rain. Swan numbers were strong throughout District 12 with 93 swans counted within the Snoqualmie valley alone. District 12 results will be submitted to Waterfowl Section Manager Kraege as part of the larger midwinter waterfowl survey effort that occurs throughout the state.

Annual Winter Waterfowl Survey: Biologist Anderson surveyed Lake Washington, Ronald Bog, Green, Haller, and Bitter lakes. Odd balls were Canvasback on Green Lake, which was a bit of a surprise to have this species on that particular smaller, urban body of water. Highlights were three Tundra with 15 Trumpeter swans in Union Bay; Redhead ducks in the Points areas of Lake WA; and a wintering Common Loon just outside of Juanita Bay. Customer Service Specialist Ericka Thomas assisted with Ron Bog, Green, Haller, and Bitter lakes. Highlights were Ruddy Ducks and Eurasian Wigeon, as well as taking a moment to watch ducks on Green Lake with a group of 25 nursery school children from the Wallingford Waldorf School visiting the lake to fish for "oak leaves". They all enjoyed using a spotting scope for the first time to observe American Coot behavior.

Common Loon Management: Biologist Anderson conference called with Dr. Jim Paruk of Biodiversity Institute to discuss banding efforts of King Co. loons, grant funding opportunities, and general planning.

Swan Morbidity and Mortality Study: Biologist DeBruyn shipped two swan carcasses to the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison Wisconsin for necropsy. The swans were part of a group of nine that were found dead with no apparent cause. DeBruyn also communicated with Center staff and WDFW Veterinarian Kristin Mansfield regarding the incident. Technician Lapsansky continued to monitor the area where the swans were found and searched for causes and respond to calls of dead or sick swans and assisted Mike Smith with keeping Judson Lake clear of swans.

Winter Waterfowl Counts: District Biologist Milner counted waterfowl on inland lakes and wetlands as part of the annual mid-winter waterfowl survey. In general, numbers were quite low, probably due to the very mild weather we have been experiencing.

Wildlife Areas

Lake Terrell Unit: Wildlife Area Manager Kessler cleared out woody debris from the Lake Terrell dam, making sure there was adequate flow into Terrell Creek. He checked on the area beavers had dammed in the past and made sure it was clear. Kessler reviewed and made comments on the draft designs for the Lake Terrell dam replacement project.

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

Wildlife Management

Brant Survey and Hunting Season: Biologists Davison, Danilson and DeBruyn flew brant surveys on January 5th and 6th. Weather precluded a complete survey on January 5th; however the entire survey was completed on January 6th. Sufficient numbers of individuals were observed in Skagit County justify opening a hunting beginning January 14th.

Winter Marine Waterfowl and Marine Bird Aerial Surveys: After a break due to the holidays and with the return of more normal unstable December weather, Marine Bird Specialist Evenson along with Assistant District Biologists Murphie and Cyra continued the annual winter surveys in the inland marine waters of the Washington. The southern and central reaches of Puget Sound, Admiralty Inlet and portions of Hood Canal are now complete as are most of the northeast bays, but high winds and computer issues this week limited surveys to only a few protected areas. Data transcription took place on non-aerial days. These annual surveys provide trend data on the health of marine waterfowl and marine bird populations wintering on the Salish Sea, and are also used in the annual harvest setting negotiations in the Pacific Flyway for waterfowl. The flexibility, professionalism, and support of the staff of Kenmore Air has been greatly appreciated and is integral to the successful completion of these surveys. Winter surveys are now approaching 65% completion.

Private Lands/Access

Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program: Biologist Roozen and technicians Otto and Deyo continued repair and maintenance of Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program units, parking and blinds. Biologist Roozen and Technicians Otto and Deyo continued public use surveys for Waterfowl Quality Hunt Units.

Whidbey Island Access: Biologist Roozen and Milner discussed options for possible private lands access for deer hunting on Whidbey Island. Roozen made visit to acreage and possibilities for access and began landowner contact process.

Diversity Private Land Access: Biologist Roozen and technician Otto continued discussions with landowners about potential access to their property for wildlife viewing.

Other

Technician Otto assisted technician Lapsansky on swan carcass collection. Otto continued showing Lapsansky new locations for surveillance and associated job procedures.

Wildlife Areas

Stillwater Pollinator Trail: Manager Paulson is designing a pollinator trail for the Stillwater unit. Manager Paulson received a pollinator seed sheet from a planting in Western Oregon by the Xerces Society. Manager Paulson also contacted the Washington Native Plant Society for information.

Tennant Lake Unit: Wildlife Area Manager Kessler cleaned up the hunter access at Tennant Lake and replaced the hunting blind sign in sheets.

Whatcom Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Kessler spoke with several waterfowl hunters using the units of the wildlife area. Most reported good success with birds finally moving into the area.

Waterwheel Creek Restoration – Cherry Valley: Restoration Coordinator Windrope worked with staff to improve adaptive management plan for Waterwheel Creek prior to sending it out for external review. The re-creation of Waterwheel Creek will result in WDFW ownership and the subsequent maintenance issues. Maintenance issues are expected to be minimal but Windrope will be working with King Conservation District and Wild Fish Conservancy to obtain a maintenance grant.

Wiley Slough Restoration: Restoration Coordinator Windrope helped update the inter-local agreement between WDFW and the Skagit River System Cooperative which will be extended for another year thereby continuing the insurance and liability protection for another year as we fix the tide gate.

Winter Conditions: Skagit Wildlife Area hunter numbers were down this week. Hunting conditions continue to be slow due to dry and warm weather conditions. Natural Resource Technician Hacker has continued efforts to improve sheet water flooding on the Island Unit maintaining water levels are a challenge due to low river condition and limited rainfall.

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

Wildlife Areas

Skagit Headquarters: Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Schuster reviewed agricultural lease files; three leases are scheduled to be renewed this farming season. The leases are Fir Island Farms, DeBay's Slough Swan Reserve and Samish Unit. Discussions regarding potential modification or improvement will begin early in January with Regional District Team members.

Crescent Lake AG Leases: Manager Paulson talked to the Snohomish County Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) about a list of farmers that would be interested in share cropping Crescent Lake.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Elk Survey: Biologists Miller and Bergh conducted the monthly winter survey for elk on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area on January 3, 2012. Elk were mainly using the eastern 2/3 of the valley floor with elk observed as far east as the Coldwater Creek ridge. This is indicative of average winter distribution with no unusually large groupings observed. There were 176 elk on the valley floor with a calf to cow ratio of 42:100. All elk observed were in reasonably good condition with normal pelage. Weather during the survey was mostly cloudy, but clearing with good visibility to the valley floor. Snow level was approximately 3,500 ft.

Mid-Winter Waterfowl Surveys: Biologist Anderson conducted waterfowl surveys from Bonneville Dam to John Day Dam along the Columbia River. Conditions were unseasonably warm with open water throughout the survey area. Preliminary results indicate overall waterfowl numbers are down although large rafts of scaup were seen in traditional areas of the Bonneville Pool, typical of this time of year. Of special note were several small rafts of redheads seen in Skamania County. These birds tend to be seen more on the east side of the Cascades in the winter and considered rare for Skamania County.

Biologists Holman and George conducted the midwinter waterfowl survey from the mouth of the Washougal River upstream along the Columbia to Bonneville dam. Winter conditions are extremely mild and lower than average numbers of waterfowl were found occupying these habitats. Specifically, just 3 tundra swans, roughly 1000 geese (mostly cackling and western Canadas) along with about 750 ducks were documented during the effort. These counts are roughly half of historic averages.

Post Season Deer Surveys: Biologist Holman and Fisheries Biologist Cady conducted a ground-based post-season deer survey in portions of GMU 382 (East Klickitat). Winter conditions to date are extremely mild, the East Klickitat GMU is almost entirely snow free and deer populations are scattered. Approximately 142 deer were observed during the effort. Buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios will be calculated and summarized in future reports. In addition, Technician White and Biologist Stephens conducted deer surveys on gated Hancock Forest Management lands in GMU 578 in the Glenwood area on January 3 and 4. A total of 32 deer were counted including 2 bucks, 18 does, 8 fawns and 3 unknown.

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

Wildlife Management

SW Washington Goose season: Harvest rates increased slightly this week to 1.86 geese per hunter. The first goose hunting week in the New Year had check stations checking in a total of 112 geese from 60 hunters. In addition, no duskies were harvested this week. As a result, all of the zones, with the exception of zone 1, will remain open to goose hunting in the coming week. So far this season hunters have checked in 1,298 geese harvested from Management Area 2 with

an overall harvest rate at 2.02 geese per hunter. That is an overall increase from 1.90 geese per hunter this time last year.

Private Lands/Access

St. Helens Land Access Program: Biologist Stephens supervised volunteers working on the St. Helens Lands Access Program on Weyerhaeuser property this week to facilitate weekday motorized access for hunters in the Coweeman and Winston GMUs.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.

Wildlife Areas

Pesticide License Recertification: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins and Assistant Manager Hauswald attended a two day pesticide license recertification course at Washington State University in Vancouver this week. The course was coordinated by the University and Washington State Department of Agriculture, and allows license holders to earn recertification credits and keep up to date with regulations regarding pesticide use. Other topics such as biological control and other innovative options are also included in the curriculum.

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. Early January has been mild with warm and dry conditions.

Short-Term Forecast: Mild conditions are expected to continue over the next week. We may see some lower elevation snow, but generally snow levels will be above 3000 feet. The 6-10 day outlook is for normal temperatures and precipitation. The 8-14 day outlook suggests below normal temperatures and precipitation in the normal range.

Long-Term Forecast: *No Change.* The longer term outlook maps suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter but it appears now that spring may be more moderate than previously forecast.

Habitat: Lower elevation areas currently have little snow cover making for reasonable forage availability.

Snow Depths: Areas below 3000 feet remain mostly snow free. Snowpack is well below average. See attached spreadsheet for detailed information (09Jan2012-MSH_Sno-Depth.pdf).

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. 176 elk were present in the mudflow monitoring area during a survey January 3, 2012. This and the previous December 5, 2011 total of 116 elk are below levels that would raise concerns.

Animal Condition: No reports of animals in poor condition that can be attributed to winter conditions. Animals observed to date appear to be in good condition.

Mortality: None to report.

Public Contacts: None to report related to winter conditions.

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

District 9: Winter Conditions

Past Weather: Very mild and warm conditions were seen this week. Snowpack is well below normal for this time of year and very little snow is found below 4000 ft.

Winter Severity: The Klickitat Wildlife Area is snow-free and forage habitat available. There is no concern for the current severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. The eastern portions of Klickitat County are snow-free and deer are reported to be in good condition.

Habitat: Habitat is open and forage habitat continues to be available throughout District 9.

Animal Concentrations: None to note

Animal Condition: Deer and elk appear to be in good condition and no winter stress/mortality has been reported except for a few road kills.

Mortality: None documented this week.

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

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Wintering Marine Waterfowl and Marine Bird Aerial Surveys:

Surveys continued apace this week. Bios Murphie, Evenson, and Cyra report surveying areas in southern and central Puget Sound and Hood Canal. These annual surveys provide trend data on the health of marine waterfowl and marine bird populations wintering on the Salish Sea, and are also used in the annual harvest setting negotiations in the Pacific Flyway for waterfowl. With this week's effort, surveys are a little more than 50% complete. So far this year, Bio Murphie has recorded 9,344 individual bird or marine mammal observations, comprised of 49,050 birds and 496 marine mammals.

Mid-Winter Waterfowl Surveys:

Bio Skriletz completed the mid-winter waterfowl surveys for Mason, Kitsap and E. Jefferson Counties with waterfowl numbers being a little down from previous years.

Biologist McMillan and Biologist Ament conducted mid-winter waterfowl surveys in District 16 from January 4 through 8, and plan on continuing into this week. The main concentration of waterfowl in District 16 is in the Dungeness Basin. The work in the Dungeness Basin is challenging due to the movement of ducks from the Bay (and beyond) into the inland wetland sites. This has been the first year that District 16 staff have attempted to synchronize the counts throughout the entire Basin, although they have been working toward that for years. In 2006 there were only two Priority sites assigned to District 16. Prior to 2006 Biologist McMillan had been assured that WDFW surveys conducted in the past showed that there were no other Priority 1 sites to inventory and monitor. It wasn't until Biologist McMillan secured outside funding (Coastal Wetland Grant funds) that there was some documentation of additional Priority 1, 2 and 3 sites, totaling more than 60. There are likely more Priority 1 & 2 Sites that need to be documented in District 16 and the staff are continuing to attempt to find the resources necessary to do the additional searching.

Bio's Harris and Michaelis aerial surveyed Willapa Bay for waterfowl. Numbers appear to be down compared to previous years.

Black-tailed Deer Study

Bio Murphie continued monitoring efforts of radio-tagged deer in the Satsop GMU. He spent a portion of this week downloading activity and location data from the GPS collars. He reports that no new mortalities were recorded this week. Biologist Loafman collected the collar from a dead fawn from the Dry Creek site in Clallam County. There were few remains of the deer so no direct cause of mortality has been determined.

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

Wildlife Areas

Acquisitions: Guzlas submitted a CAPs contract partnering with Forterra in the effort to acquire additional south Willapa Bay lands located along the mouth of the Nasselle River. WDFW will provide \$80,000 in support of this acquisition effort that has already been approved through the Lands 20/20 process.

Private Lands:

Waterfowl Quality Hunting Program:

Due to recent rains, the WQHP blinds have been available for hunting. Duck hunters are reporting good success. Biologist Skriletz worked on improving parking sites and blinds at some WQHP sites.

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

Wildlife Areas

Waterfowl Hunting Guide:

Bio Guzlas coordinated with regional staff to develop a comprehensive waterfowl hunting guide on wildlife areas in Region 6. The guide is already posted on the web on the waterfowl hunting access page at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/waterfowl/where_to_go.html .