

# Wildlife Program

Week of January 9, 2012

## **OUTREACH**

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

### **Wildlife Management**

**Citizen Science:** Wildlife Diversity Program Leads and the Outreach Team developed a Citizen Science concept paper describing a Citizen Science Initiative focusing on needs stated in the State Wildlife Action Plan and other conservation strategies. The concept paper describes two opportunities for citizen science volunteers to contribute to wildlife program science and natural resource management. In progress are plans for a statewide Washington Biodiversity Inventory and a wildlife area focused Ecological Integrity Assessment, engaging volunteers to provide data following training to WDFW citizen science project sponsors.



**WildWatchcams:** Chuck Gibilisco is working with citizen scientists from the Heron Habitat Helpers and WDFW Biologist Chris Anderson on making necessary repairs and adjustments to one of two remote operable tree-top cameras located in the Kiwanis heronry, which is a designated wildlife park managed by the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department. The two cameras have been used to observe and monitor nest disturbances by aerial predators occurring near the heronry. Another goal for 2012 is to include live video feed of the nesting herons at the nearby Discovery Park Visitor Center.



## **REGION 1**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**White-tailed Deer Project:** Wintertime deer trapping is set to commence this week with clover traps deployed at former Stevens County Commissioner Tony Delgado's property. Trap sites were pre-baited all week, and the first capture day occurred on Saturday morning, January 14<sup>th</sup>. Trained volunteers from the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council assisted Principal Investigator Woody Myers and Wildlife Technician Jim Kujala in capturing, radio-collaring, and collecting biological data from white-tailed deer.



**Moose Surveys:** Biologists Ferguson and Atamian completed the Mt. Spokane and Hangman Moose unit surveys this week. Conditions were not perfect, patchy snow and antler drop, but they had already delayed as long as possible hoping for snow fall that never came. Analyses of data and a summary report will be coming next week; overall though, calf numbers were low compared to previous years.



## Wildlife Areas

**Possible Lynx sighting on Sherman Creek Wildlife Area (WLA):** Within the last two weeks, two of the loggers working at Sherman Creek WLA have seen what they believe may be a lynx in a higher-elevation part of the WLA. Technician Christensen also reports large cat tracks in that area.

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

## Wildlife Management

**Wildlife Recreation Note:** Game bird hunting seasons are wrapping up this month with seasons ending for upland game birds (pheasant, valley quail, and partridge) on January 16<sup>th</sup> and for waterfowl (ducks, geese, coots, and snipe) on January 29<sup>th</sup>.

## Recreation Opportunities

*Chief Joseph Wildlife Area – Schumaker:* Bio Woodall spent a whole day at Shumaker riding into some of the far back reaches of the area he has not seen for a while. He checked gates and fences and found no issues. He looked for and found no trespass cows. There were quite a few whitetail deer spending the winter down there. He talked to three steelhead fisherman who said “although floating ice in the river was a little troublesome the fishing has been red hot!” One angler had caught three fish, two wild and one hatchery, in the first ten minutes being there. All three anglers had two fish apiece and the way things were going they were all hoping to limit out by the end of the day. Standing there talking to them and receiving a demonstration of “how it is done” Woodall said, “Well there goes your bobber under the water.” The angler looked over and saw this but could not set the hook quick enough and said, “And that’s all there is to it.”

## Wildlife Areas



**Chief Joseph Wildlife Area – 4-O Acquisition:** Wildlife Area staff spent two days this week removing 4-O “No Trespassing” signs and posting agency signs on the new acquisition. Manager Bob Dice continued working with Brian Trickel to finalize an accurate map of property purchased by the agency. There are still some mapping questions to be answered. Staff used maps and GPS units to locate and identify new property lines between agency land and 4-O which traverses some steep and

brushy terrain. Upper elevation property lines were difficult to access due to ice and frozen ground. We may have to wait for more favorable hiking conditions to complete marking new property lines.

## Winter Conditions

*Northeast Washington:* A cold front moved into northeastern Washington mid-week dropping overnight low temperatures into the single digits and daytime highs only up to the low 20's in degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures are predicted to moderate over the coming week-end with significant snowfall finally in the forecast.

*Swanson Lakes WLA:* One to two inches of snow fell the weekend of January 7, but the temperature later warmed up and melted nearly all of it. It rained overnight on January 10/11, then froze the next morning. Temperatures have remained below freezing since January 11, with clear skies and sometimes brisk wind. The only moisture on the ground, as of January 12, is frozen puddles from earlier rainfall.

*Southeast Washington.* Colder weather returned to southeast Washington with light snowfalls occurring throughout the district. Still no significant weather to date in the 2011-2012 winter.

*Blue Mountains WLA:* Inversion conditions continued across the wildlife area complex this week with cold temperatures and sunny skies. Snow conditions are light and where there is snow, it resembles one gigantic slab of ice covering the ground. The Grande Ronde River began icing up on Thursday with cooler temperatures.

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

**Wildlife Management**

**Blue Mountains Elk Conflict Resolution:** Officer John and Biologist Rasley met regarding the upper Patit Creek elk herd. They were able to gain access to all of the landowners in this area for the elk archery hunters. After 10 days of over 20 different bow hunters attempting to harvest an elk from this *problem herd*, the elk 20, bow hunter's 0, the pressure worked and the entire herd of 50-plus has now moved Southwest several miles over to Cahill Mountain.

## **REGION 2**

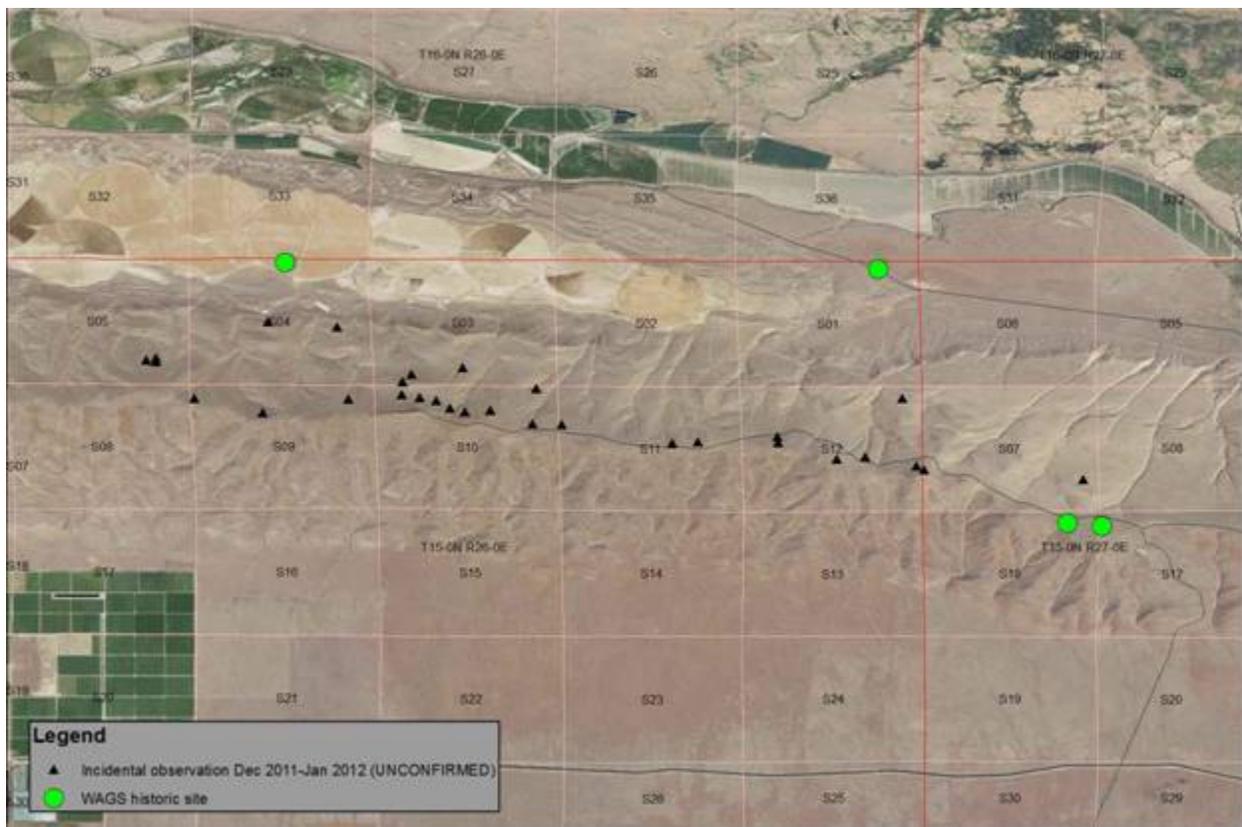
**Okanogan, Chelan, Grant and Adams Counties**

**Regional Wildlife Program Manager: Matt Monda**

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

#### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Washington Ground Squirrels:** Biologist Finger began coordination for the upcoming ground squirrel translocation from Sage Hills Golf Course. Based on current lack of snow, ground squirrels are probably just now emerging and we expect timing to be very similar to last year. The translocation is planned for Feb 9-10 and 13-14. Four volunteers have been lined up to assist with the effort, which should be plenty of help to accomplish the task. Finger also compiled incidental observations of 30 likely ground squirrel sites from the Saddle Mountains (see map) while recreating in the district. These detections occurred in an area having little historic ground squirrel data and shows that the area is likely to function as one large yet dispersed colony. Though these sites are unconfirmed, Finger feels confident that they were active ground squirrel sites in 2011.



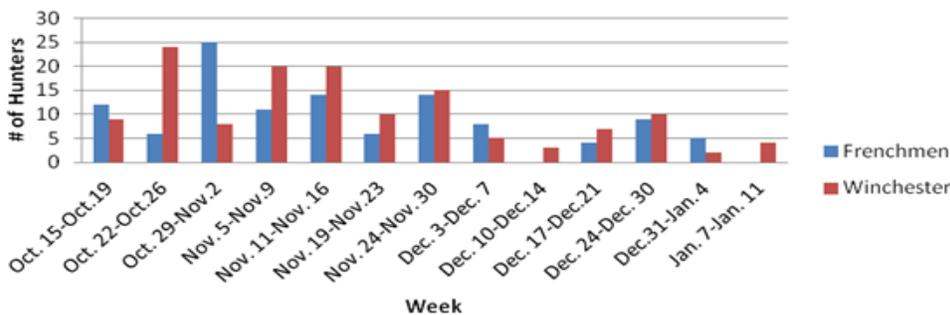
**Injured Barn Owl:** District Biologist Finger picked up an injured barn owl from a residence in Moses Lake. The owl was taken to the Gloyd Seeps Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area to determine the extent of its injuries. In the process of looking it over, and much to Fingers surprise based on its condition when picked up, it flew away showing only signs of an injured leg.

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

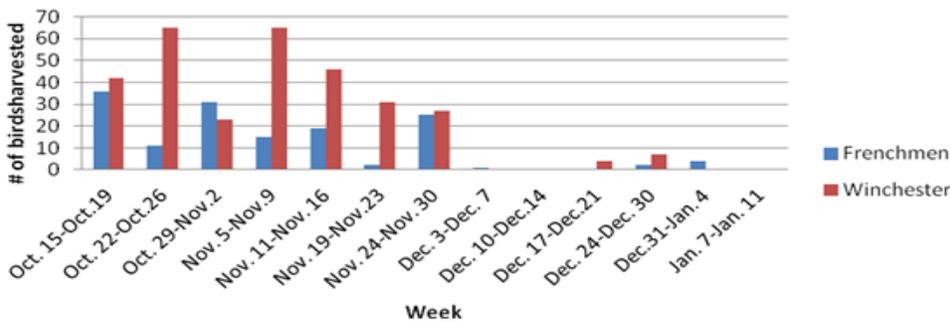
**Waterfowl:** Biologist Finger finished data entry for the midwinter waterfowl survey and submitted results to Waterfowl Specialist Moore. Biologist Hoenes assisted Waterfowl Specialist Moore and District Biologist Finger with the recovery of a satellite transmitter that had been attached to a small Canada goose last fall. The goose was tagged as part of Waterfowl Specialist Moore’s ongoing research that is evaluating migration corridors and nesting grounds of small Canada geese that nest in Alaska. Although biologists were able to locate the carcass, they were never able to locate the actual transmitter because coyotes had spread the remains over an area that was approximately 100 m×100 m in size.

Hoenes updated the Regulated Access Area (RAA) database with register to hunt information that had been collected since December 7. This information is being collected in an effort to better quantify that opportunity that is being provided to hunters at the Winchester and Frenchmen RAAs and identify how that WDFW can improve on those opportunities. Both hunter numbers and harvest have declined precipitously since most of the wetlands froze up in the beginning of December. Also contributing to these declines have been the stable weather patterns that have limited waterfowl movements to and from feeding areas during legal hunting hours. Unfortunately, biologists do not anticipate a change in these trends until a major weather event occurs in the Columbia Basin.

**Trends in Hunter Numbers**



**Waterfowl Harvest Trends**



*Hunter and Harvest trends for the Winchester and Frenchmen Regulated Access Areas.*

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

**Waterfowl Database:** District Biologist Finger began the process for importing the last 5 years of survey data from excel spreadsheets to an Access database. Unfortunately, since the survey data is fragmented by multiple excel files with multiple worksheets and about 30 strata, the import requires considerable effort to set up. Once this is completed, Finger and Moore intend to abandon the old excel spreadsheet file system for a modern Access database where forms and queries will be used to enter and share data from one source. This will greatly enhance the speed in which we can utilize the data when needed.

**Customer Service:** Biologist Hoenes and Finger worked on a document that highlights recreational opportunities (e.g. hunting, bird watching, rafting, etc.) that can be enjoyed on WDFW lands located in District 5. In addition, this document includes management guidelines, population status, and hunting prospects for game species that occur in this District as well as information on volunteer opportunities. The primary purpose of this document is to better serve the public by providing a place where information frequently requested by hunters and other recreationists is centrally located.

**District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen**

**Weekender Opportunities:** Bighorn sheep are often seen up close and personal this time of year in fields in or around the town of Loomis.



*California bighorn ram near the town of Loomis.*

***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Wildlife Coordination:** Wildlife Biologists Scott and Jeff Heinlen participated in an interagency field biologist coordination meeting set up by the Colville Confederated Tribe Wildlife staff. Personnel from the U.S .Forest Service and the WDNR also attended. Attendees shared brief summaries of ongoing wildlife projects being conducted by each agency, and we discussed data sharing needs and identified possible projects where partnership efforts may be appropriate. As a group we intend to make this type of coordination effort an annual occurrence. This should keep all parties informed and help improve wildlife management efficiencies.

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

**Publication Review:** Biologist Fitkin reviewed a draft of a wolf identification brochure being developed by GBOP, a regional non-profit dedicated to carnivore education. The finished product should help the public better differentiate between wolves and other canids during field encounters, which will hopefully result in more accurate and timely submissions of public wolf observations to agency staff.

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

Weather arrived this week, and there remains the possibility of snow next week.

***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Cougar Management:** Biologist Volsen spent two days in Ellensburg working on the development of cougar management recommendations with Olympia staff, district and research biologists, and species specialists. The group worked through various aspects of modeling harvest recommendations to develop a set of objectives that incorporate recent research on cougars. Results were incorporated into a set of regulations for submission to the Wildlife Commission.

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

**Weekender Opportunities:** This past week local birdwatchers have seen a snowy owl along the Cameron Lake Road on the Colville Indian Reservation, a gyrfalcon east of Mansfield and a northern hawk owl in the Chelan area on Union Valley Road. Local concentrations of waterfowl on Lake Pateros continue to provide opportunities for hunters.

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

**Wells Wildlife Area Hunter Registration Cards:** Ann collected cards and tallied December data. A total of 179 waterfowl hunters reported taking 431 ducks and 6 geese. Bridgeport Bar and Washburn Island are the primary waterfowl units here with Bridgeport Bar contributing 92% of the birds taken. Also in December, upland bird hunters (174) reported taking a total of 119 quail from all units.

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

## ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Habitat Development:** Manager Fitzgerald worked on several proposals to develop upland and riparian habitat in anticipation of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBOR) releasing irrigation water into the Crab Creek channel through the Gloyd Seeps. This “Supplemental Feed Route” will route up to 126,000 acre-feet of irrigation water from Billy Clapp Lake through the Gloyd Seeps Unit and Moses Lake and into Potholes Reservoir, easing the pressure on the East Low Canal to deliver that water. Several possible funding sources may be available for infrastructure (berms and water control structures) and habitat development on approximately 256 acres along and adjacent to Crab Creek. Fitzgerald worked on an RCO State Land Restoration grant application for upland waterfowl habitat development, met with District Biologist Rich Finger to coordinate with his larger NAWCA grant application, Private Lands Manager John Cotton, and Washington Waterfowler’s Association (WWA) representative Dick Price to assist Price with an ALEA grant application. Other funding sources include WA Dept. of Ecology through the Columbia River Water Management Program and USBOR.

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

**Frenchman Regulated Access Area:** Assistant Manager Cole continued monitoring and adjusting water into the wetland cells to increase open water, however recent cold weather has completely frozen the project. Cole pulled a ring packer along shorelines and over berms to create small depressions in the sand in the areas disturbed by excavations and berm construction. Fitzgerald broadcast a seed mix of Inland Saltgrass, Thickspike Wheatgrass and Indian Ricegrass over the packed sites. The depressions in the sand will provide suitable microenvironments for germination this spring and prevent the seed from blowing away with the normal spring winds.

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

## ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Timber Thinning:** Pogue Mountain timber thinning continued this week, with the addition of one processor, one log loader, and two rubber tired skidders. A few loads of timber were delivered to Zozel lumber in Oroville. The Colville Tribes chipper in Omak has been set up, but is not operational until January 15. All small chip wood or pulp wood will be delivered here. All is going well over frozen ground with snow predicted for next week.

### **Chelan Wildlife Area Complex - Ron Fox**

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

**Wenatchee Sportsman:** Ron Fox, Chelan Wildlife Area Manager, met with Bill Stegeman, Wenatchee Sportsmen Association (WSA), concerning their volunteer efforts. Bill and other volunteers contribute hundreds of hours of labor each year on the Wildlife Area. Ron has worked with Bill and WSA on other projects over the years and is thankful that he has a group of volunteers he knows he can really count on.

### **PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski**

**Weather Conditions:** Highs in the mid-30’s and lows around 20F. Temperatures were more in line with historical averages.

***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**SAFE:** Private Lands Biologists Cotton and Wisniewski met with Don Larson, NRCS and FSA staff in Waterville to discuss our new technical service contract for work on SAFE. Erin Kaczmarczyk is our new contact in Waterville, she was previously stationed in Ephrata and was our primary contact for EQIP/WHIP contracts. There are still SAFE acres available in Douglas County we discussed how to accomplish another sign-up.

**Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex - Dale Swedberg / Justin Haug**



**Weekender Opportunities:** Bird watching – most common wintertime birds, e.g., red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers, northern shrike, northern harriers (photo), pine grosbeak, redpolls (photos), trumpeter swans and Bohemian waxwings (photo feeding on fruit of ). Also pygmy owls and great horned owls can still be heard calling as their breeding season approaches.



## **REGION 3**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**



**Hanford Elk Survey:** District Wildlife Biologist Mike Livingston and USFWS Biologist Heidi Newsome conducted a day and a half of helicopter surveys to estimate the Hanford elk herd size and composition. The survey area included the Hanford ALE site, a portion of Central Hanford, the southeast corner of the Yakima Training Center, and several randomly selected quadrats on private land. Raw field counts yielded an estimate of 703 elk with ratios of 43 bulls and 40 calves per 100 cows. Digital photos will be examined and numbers will be crunched this week using the Aerial Survey program to calculate population estimates. The population objective for the Hanford herd is 350 elk.

#### **Wildlife Areas**

Wildlife and Enforcement staff from Region 3 hosted a public meeting in Ellensburg to provide updates on the Colockum Elk Herd Study and continuation of the motorized winter closure on the Quilomene and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas. Nearly 70 people attended the meeting, representing both the general public and local interest groups. We're proposing a fifth year of the seasonal closure to allow collection of the last year of field data for the Colockum Study. Members of the public expressed both support and opposition to the proposed winter range closure.

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

**Winter Conditions:** Temperatures last week ranged from the teens to the mid-30s and are predicted to remain about the same this week. There is still no snow on the winter range, but a winter storm is expected throughout the week. If the snow arrives as expected, we will likely begin daily feeding operations later this week. Condition of the elk appears to be good.

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## **REGION 4**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**SR 520 Bridge Replacement Consultation:** Biologist Anderson provided wildlife consideration recommendations to the SR 520 mitigation team due to a request for WDFW consultation from city of Seattle, as called for under Seattle Code and due to the State Growth Management Act. The consultation largely involved proposed mitigation efforts in the UW Arboretum, Union Bay, and Union Bay Urban Natural Area.

**Osprey Pole Mitigation Partnership:** Biologist Anderson, per State Wildlife Interaction Rules, met with Seattle Parks and Recreation at the Commodore Annex, near the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks. Burlington Northern Santa Fe needed to remove an Osprey nest during the wintering season, when the nest was inactive, due to it being atop an old telegraph tower on the railroad bascule bridge over the waterway. Burlington Northern, after discussion with WDFW, discussed working with Seattle Parks and Recreation to voluntarily erect an Osprey nesting platform. Seattle is initiating public outreach and comment on the proposed changes to the Commodore Annex. These include native plantings, leaving the area largely unmowed, as well as installation of the proposed Osprey pole.

**Great Blue Heron Management:** Biologist Anderson consulted with King County Dept. of Transportation biologists regarding status, upcoming season monitoring, and overall management consideration of the Cadman (Redmond) heron colony.

**Growth Management Assistance:** Biologist Anderson worked with Land Use and Environmental Planner Nation to develop next steps in providing WDFW consultation to King County regarding follow-up inquiry of the Species of Local Importance portion of the county Comprehensive Plan. Anderson will work with Regional biologists across programs to provide answers on marine taxa. Anderson will comment on King Co. terrestrial taxa.

**Bat Education Outreach:** Biologist Anderson represented WDFW in the annual Bats Northwest Bat Ambassador Training. This annual event covers many areas of bat education, including ecology, major issues such as information on rabies and white nose syndrome, techniques in presenting to adult and/or children audiences, providing and enhancing habitat through habitat plantings, alterations (such as retaining or creating Wildlife Trees) and artificial enhancements (such as bat boxes); among other topics. Anderson provided a lecture on enhancing natural habitat, providing bat-friendly native habitat, conflict reduction, resources for injured and orphaned bats, and legal considerations. This class offers continuing education credits for those interested, such as teachers and other instructors.

**Winter Waterfowl Surveys:** Biologist Kertson compiled and entered data from last week's annual midwinter waterfowl survey for submission to Waterfowl Section Manager Kraege. Data summaries revealed mallards, widgeon, and pintails were the most common dabbling ducks observed, whereas ring-necked ducks and buffleheads were the most frequently observed diving ducks. Canada geese were observed throughout the survey area with more than 1,000 birds counted. Swan numbers were also strong with 190 swans observed. Overall, Biologist Kertson counted 4,523 birds with the Kent-Auburn Valley and the lower Snoqualmie Valley yielding the largest numbers.

**Weather Conditions Update:** Weather conditions over the previous two weeks were mild with highs in the upper 40's and low 50's and low temperatures in the upper 30's and low 40's. Precipitation was minimal (with the notable exception of January 4) and fell in the form of rain in areas with elevations < 4,000'. These weather conditions are a continuation of weather patterns observed throughout December and represent the best-case scenario for elk residing within District 12 during the winter months. Consequently, weather impacts on elk are likely minimal. Biologist Kertson provides the December weather summary for the Seattle/Tacoma area below (source: National Climatic Data Center):

Average maximum temperature: 44.3  
Average minimum temperature: 34.0  
Total precipitation: 2.24"  
Greatest 24 hr total: 1.14" (12/27 to 12/28)  
Number of days with light rain: 15  
Number of days with heavy rain: 0  
Snowfall: 0.0"

**Mid-winter Waterfowl Surveys:** District Biologist Milner completed mid-winter waterfowl surveys in Island and Snohomish Counties and submitted the data to Olympia. Numbers were down in all areas surveyed compared to previous years, most likely due to dry and relatively mild weather conditions.

**Winter Marine Waterfowl and Marine Bird Aerial Surveys:** 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. With the completion of the Hood Canal, western Straits of Juan de Fuca, and southern Georgia Straits areas the winter surveys are approaching 90% completion, with only the inner San Juan Islands and a few open water transects remaining. Unstable weather with high winds and snow forecasted will limit survey opportunities this week. Data transcription of flown surveys will occupy non-aerial days as will resolving computer issues.

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. As always, 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.

**Bald Eagle Management:** Biologist DeBruyn met with representatives of The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Whatcom County Parks, and the Whatcom Land Trust to discuss planned park developments at the Lily Point Marine Park at Point Roberts. A new parking lot and restroom facilities were viewed and planned trail developments were discussed in relation to their effect on bald eagles that roost and nest in the park. Everyone except the park staff stayed to document eagle usage as they came in to roost in a forested area of the park that is slated to have a trail cut through it.

**Swan Morbidity and Mortality Study:** Technician Lapsansky continued to monitor areas of known swan use, including roosts and collect carcasses and tissue samples. Ongoing coordination with Puget Sound Energy personnel and the Trumpeter Swan Society as well as assistance from Technician Otto is providing much needed assistance during this peak period of swan mortality.

**Oregon Spotted Frog Survey:** Biologist Bohannon reviewed a list of potential Oregon spotted frog survey sites in the Samish watershed and printed out parcel maps of the area. Bohannon contacted the Forest Service and Seattle City Light partners in the project to set up a meeting in the next month in preparation for the surveys.

### **Wildlife Areas**

#### **Waterwheel Creek Restoration – Cherry Valley**

Restoration Coordinator Windrope worked with all partners this week on refining the draft adaptive management plan. Based on feedback received, the project continues to move forward and there are no blocks to progress at this time. Windrope is also reviewing a draft Land Agreement with Elyse Kane that will lay out key responsibilities between the three partners: Wild Fish Conservancy, Drainage District #22, and WDFW.

#### **Wiley Slough Restoration Project Update**

Skagit River Systems Cooperative provided a draft adaptive management plan for the Wiley Slough Restoration Project that is being reviewed by the Wiley Work Group. Windrope is coordinating WDFW input into that plan. Windrope is also coordinating the WDFW response to the tide gate alternatives produced by Northwest Hydraulic Consultants. The next meeting is Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup> of the Wiley Work Group where the contractor will provide a presentation and answers to questions raised by the Wiley Work Group. Windrope received a signed continuation of the inter-local agreement between WDFW and Skagit River Systems Cooperative – the agreement will continue through the end of 2012.

#### **Nooksack Unit**

Wildlife Area Manager Kessler attended a meeting and tour of the lower Nooksack River conservation projects, including projects to be funded by a new Coastal Wetland Grant award we have received.

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

### **Wildlife Management**

**Cougar 3-Year Package:** Biologist Kertson spent several days with Biologist Beausoleil, Biologist Maletzke, Carnivore Section Manager Martorello, Chief Scientist Pierce, and biologists and managers from Regions 1, 3, and 5 to finalize recommendations for the cougar 3-year hunting package. Considerable effort was put into modeling the trajectory and age structure of several local cougar populations of interest using research data and harvest statistics. Modeling efforts and discussions between the attendees at the workshop were very insightful and highly productive. Consequently, scientists, biologists, and managers put forth a recommendation that maintains general seasons throughout much of the state while establishing a season structure that maintains opportunities to hunt cougar during deer and elk modern firearm seasons, but puts harvest thresholds in place for Population Management Units (PMUs) where cougar harvest has exceeded 14% over the last three years. This recommendation will be sent on to the Division Manager Ware in the coming days.

**Skagit Audubon Guest Speaker:** District Biologist Milner prepared and presented a talk that summarized the various projects focusing on shorebirds in Skagit and Port Susan Bays to members of Skagit Audubon. The talk was very well received and several attendees mentioned they would like to participate in the current Citizen Science project assessing the phenomenon of high tide flying in the bays.

**Deer Projects on Whidbey Island:** District biologist Milner met with a professor from the University of Montana who is interested in conducting research on deer on Whidbey Island. Several ideas were considered and Milner provided a number of contacts to talk with as we formulate a possible project on the island.

**Elk Clover Trap Project:** Biologist Danilson hosted a meeting with state and Tribal personnel to coordinate trapping efforts to commence in the upcoming weeks. Construction of two Clover traps is ongoing with Sauk-Suiattle Tribe currently hanging the netting.

**Brant Hunting Season Bag Checks:** Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn and Technician Otto conducted hunter bag checks on the opening weekend (January 14<sup>th</sup>) of the Skagit County brant hunt.

### **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 sites. Biologist Roozen and Technicians Otto and Deyo continued public use surveys for Waterfowl Quality Hunt Units. Biologist Roozen and technician Otto surveyed private land access sites and met with several partner landowners.

**Whidbey Island Access:** Biologist Roozen began ownership evaluation and access possibilities for deer hunting on private lands on Whidbey Island.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Skagit Wildlife Area:** Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Schuster, Habitat Biologist Brian Williams, Major Project Biologist Bock Applegate, and WDFW Weed Crew Coordinator Dave Heimer met to discuss the Wylie Slough weed and cat-tail management proposal submitted to Puget Sound Energy (PSE). A meeting will be scheduled with project partner Greg Hood from SRSC to discuss a potential project modification that would provide additional information regarding effectiveness of early weed control and habitat management. The decision to continue to pursue funding under the PSE grant has not been determined.

**Wiley Slough:** Manager Schuster reviewed the tide and culvert report provided by NHC consultants regarding the culvert inspection. The Wiley Adaptive Management Working Group has a meeting scheduled with the consultants to discuss the report and provide alternatives analysis for pipe repair. Manager Schuster will monitor water levels in Wiley Slough to determine if additional pumping may be necessary. The Wiley Adaptive Management group has designated a protocol that could be triggered by the weather predictions for later this week. Rain on snow events could cause some localized flooding conditions in the area.

**Winter Conditions:** Skagit Wildlife Area hunter numbers showed a slight increase with the change in weather conditions to more wintery weather mix. Snow goose hunting activity in the area has increased with more bird movement.

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

### **Wildlife Management**

**WDFW Wildlife Tree Website:** Biologist Anderson worked with IT Specialist Ushakoff to provide information and an updated downloadable flyer on the WDFW Wildlife Tree website regarding how to order Wildlife Tree outreach signs, the site is:  
<http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/snags/index.html>

**WDFW Wildlife Heron Camera – Kiwanis Ravine:** Biologist Anderson assisted Watchable Wildlife Staff with coordination and consultation with Seattle Parks and Recreation staff regarding WDFW camera maintenance and upgrade efforts in the Kiwanis Ravine colony.

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Skagit Headquarters:** Natural Resources Technician (NRT) Hacker continued to perform maintenance on all the tractors and implements returned from the Island Unit. Hacker is preparing the John Deere 4030 for transfer to Snoqualmie Wildlife Area and coordinating transport of the tractor.

#### ***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.***

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Skagit Headquarter:** Manager Schuster and Region 4 Wildlife Program Manager Link held a second round of interviews for the Natural Resources Specialist position for the Skagit Wildlife Area.

## **REGION 5**

### **GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE**

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Western Pond Turtles:** Biologist Holman completed work on the annual report to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), summarizing work done related to western pond turtle management in the Columbia River Gorge area. Activities included significant habitat improvements at all four pond turtle sites, collection of young for the head-start program, mark/re-capture population investigations, environmental education, turtle releases, increased predator control efforts, etc. A couple of highlights of this year's work include the collection of 46 hatchling western pond turtles from the wild and the release of 40 head-started pond turtles back into the four populations within the Columbia River Gorge. This release brings the total count of head-started individuals released into the Gorge to 1284 since 1991. Thanks to BPA for their 2011 funding of the Western pond turtle work.

**Sandhill Cranes:** Biologist Anderson met with Joe Engler (USFWS) and Gary Ivey (Crane Foundation) to discuss development of a report/paper summarizing breeding sandhill crane population changes in Washington over the past 20 years. This effort would provide an analysis of data collected over the years primarily at Conboy National Wildlife Refuge. The sandhill crane was listed as endangered in Washington in 1981 primarily to protect and manage the small breeding population found in Klickitat and Yakima counties.



**Mid Winter Waterfowl Survey/ Canada Goose Neck Collar Survey:** Biologists Miller and Bergh completed the mid winter waterfowl surveys and dark goose collar surveys in District 10 this week. Duck distribution was impacted by recent weather patterns in SW Washington. Some survey locations that normally produce 1000's of ducks had none this year during the survey time period. Low/no water levels in upland areas were mostly the

cause with much of west Lewis County having little to no sheet water in fields that normally produce lots of ducks for the count. The January dark goose neck collar survey was also conducted, biologists observed 300+ cacklers and 3 neck collars in 2 flocks. Few/no dusks were observed in our survey area and on the JBH National Wildlife Refuge where we normally see quite a few. Anecdotal reports of few birds in area by hunter also support the idea that birds have moved out of the area after the storm in December.

**St Helens Elk Study:** District Wildlife Biologist Miller contacted National Volcanic Monument USFS personnel to secure entry permits into the NVM during this year's elk captures if needed. District 10 biologists also contacted hunters that harvested elk with radio collars during the January permit hunts, both of the radio collars were GPS equipped and recovering them is a high priority to secure the habitat use information stored on board.

## **Wildlife Areas**

### **Shillapoo Wildlife Area:**

**Estuary MOA Feasibility Study Update:** Program Manager Jonker and Wildlife Area Manager Calkins attended a meeting at the Corps of Engineers Portland District office for an update on the Corps proposed approach to studying the feasibility of reconnecting the Shillapoo Lakebed to the Columbia River. The Corps proposes a phased approach with an evaluation of real estate issues and potential relocation of a petroleum pipeline to be completed prior to other work. Further evaluation of benefits to juvenile salmon was also added to the first phase as a result of the meeting. Acquisition of private lands and security of the pipeline are two major hurdles that need to be resolved before being able to proceed with an intertidal restoration project here. Thus, BPA and the Corps want to make certain that there is a likelihood that these can be overcome before investing in the rest of the study components.

**Wood Duck Nest Boxes:** Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald and Technician Boylan spent a day installing new wood duck nest boxes in the North and Vancouver Lake Units of the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. Installation of the boxes was made easier this year due to the unusually low water levels in the wetland basins. In most of the areas where the nest boxes were installed, the water level was less than a foot deep where it is typically 2-3 feet deep this time of year.

## ***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.***

### **Wildlife Management**

**New District 10 Biologist Reports for Duty:** This week, Stefanie Bergh reported for work in Region 5 Wildlife Program. She hails from the Midwest but has many work and education experiences from across the US and abroad. Staff completed the new hire paperwork and began the task of orienting her to the Region and the job. She participated in the monthly elk survey at MSHWA, the MWI in Lewis County, secured some field gear and a vehicle (which broke down upon its first use in 5 months), spent a day with Fish and Wildlife Officer Martin in the 550 and 520 units during a patrol of January permit hunting for antlerless elk, spent a day on boat orientation and travel on the Columbia River, and began planning for tasks in January and February. Our biologists hit the ground running in Region 5!

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### **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.

**Short-Term Forecast:** Low elevation snow is expected early in the week. Snow depths could be significant in the valleys and then snow levels are expected to transition to around 3,000 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks suggest near normal temperatures and above average precipitation.

**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. Green herbaceous forage in the most desirable sites on the Wildlife Area is about at 50-60% utilization based on visual estimates, with lighter use in other sites that are not intensively managed. Use of shrubs (willow) has been heavy in some areas but light in others. Least desirable plants show little use (certain sedges, scotch broom, etc.).

**Snow Depths:** Areas below 3000 feet remain mostly snow free. Snowpack is well below average.

**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 reasonably good condition. Some animals on the Wildlife Area are showing rough pelage, but none look to be in severe decline.

**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:** Dry conditions continue and snowpack is well below normal for this time of year. Average temperatures have decreased.

**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 noticed or reported.

**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.

MOUNT SAINT HELEN'S ELK HERD  
2011/2012 WINTER CONDITIONS - SNO-PARK SNOW  
DEPTH,

NRCS SNOTEL DATA, AND SNOWPACK

From web <http://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/giffordpinchot/recreation/wintersports/?recid=31178&acfid=91>

pages: <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/snotel/Washington/washington.html>

Name	Elevation	11/25/2011	12/02/2011	12/14/2011	12/21/2011	12/27/2011	12/28/2011	01/13/2012
COUGAR	2,200'	No report	No report	"no snow"	"no snow"	"no snow"	"no snow"	No report
MARBLE MT	2,700'	8-10"	6"	8-10" frozen	8-10" "crusty"	No report	No report	No report
WAKEPISH	2,800'	No report	No report	No depth report	8"	10"	No report	No report

Name	Elevation	Stats	11/25-12/1	12/3-12/9	12/10-12/16	12/17-12/23	12/23-12/29	12/31-1/6	1/7-1/13
JUNE LAKE	3,340'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	26	20	21.6	21.3	26	25.5	27.6
		Min Temp (F)	29.7	27.3	25.7	26.8	28.4	24.6	26.2
		Max Temp (F)	46.6	48.2	50	59.4	48.9	47.3	47.8
		Avg Temp (F)	35.1	35	33.5	36.5	37	35.9	33.6
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	38.4	38.3	39.1	39.2	48.6	54.5	54.9

Name	Elevation	Stats	11/25-12/1	12/3-12/9	12/10-12/16	12/17-12/23	12/23-12/29	12/31-1/6	1/7-1/13
SPIRIT LAKE	3,520'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	2.1	2.9	1.3	0.3	1.3	1.6	1.7
		Min Temp (F)	24.4	25.5	21.7	26.2	24.8	21	21.9
		Max Temp (F)	55.8	50.9	48.2	55.2	50.5	54.1	50
		Avg Temp (F)	36.6	34.6	34	36.9	38.8	37.6	34
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	22.3	22.2	22.4	22.8	27.2	31.4	31.9

Name	Elevation	Stats	11/25-12/1	12/3-12/9	12/10-12/16	12/17-12/23	12/23-12/29	12/31-1/6	1/7-1/13
PEPPER CREEK	2,140'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	4	3.3	3.7	4.4	3.7	2	0.4
		Min Temp (F)	30.6	25.2	24.4	25.2	23.9	27.3	27.9
		Max Temp (F)	45.1	46.6	49.5	50.2	53.8	48.9	47.5
		Avg Temp (F)	35.8	31.8	32.7	34	36	36.9	33.7
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	14.2	14.2	14.6	14.6	18.1	20.7	20.9

Name	Elevation	Stats	11/25-12/1	12/3-12/9	12/10-12/16	12/17-12/23	12/23-12/29	12/31-1/6	1/7-1/13
SHEEP CANYON	3,990'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	26	25.6	25.6	26.6	28.9	30.6	30.1
		Min Temp (F)	26.8	23.2	21.6	23.2	23.7	22.1	22.8
		Max Temp (F)	48.4	46.9	55	58.1	49.5	47.1	46.8
		Avg Temp (F)	33.5	33.8	33.1	35.8	36.3	35.4	32.7
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	34.9	34.9	35.3	35.7	43.1	48.8	49.1

Name	Elevation	Stats	12/3-12/9	12/10-12/16	12/17-12/23	12/23-12/29	12/31-1/6	1/7-1/13
CALAMITY	2500'	Avg Snow Depth (inches)	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Min Temp (F)	29.7	27.9	31.1	31.5	29.5	28
		Max Temp (F)	49.8	46.9	57.4	51.6	52.9	49.3
		Avg Temp (F)	36.3	35.5	39.3	41.2	39.3	36.3
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	25.9	26.5	26.8	32.2	37.6	37.9

Snowpack % of Avg Snow Water Equivalent	12/01/2011	12/09/2011	12/16/2011	12/23/2011	12/29/2011	01/06/2012	01/13/2012
JUNE LAKE	115%	79%	75%	56%	60%	53%	52%
SPIRIT LAKE	95%	144%	116%	83%	28%	24%	76%
SHEEP CANYON	128%	92%	75%	65%	72%	63%	59%

## **REGION 6**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Western Pond Turtles:** Bio Schmidt tracked the remaining 13 juvenile pond turtles plus the two adult males with transmitters. The 2011 SPSWA turtle report is nearly completed. Nest production results were received this week from Woodland Park Zoo. The 2011 production year was disappointing in spite of a bumper crop of eggs this past nesting season. Of the 123 eggs sent to the Woodland Park Zoo, 41 hatched and 4 of those died during hatching or soon after. Unhatched eggs displayed embryo deaths at various stages once zoo staff opened the eggs in December and few were cracked.

**Swan Project:** Biologist Ament communicated with Martha Jordan regarding the swan project. There have been no reported sick or dead swans in the past month. The volunteers continue to monitor local swans every week. Biologist Ament did observe a total of 48 swans on the Clapp Field during mid-winter surveys.

**Mazama Pocket Gopher:** Biologist Tirhi accompanied WSDOT biologists Carl Ward and Kelly McAllister to tour the newly purchased WSDOT Mazama pocket gopher mitigation site (e.g. set aside). The 90-acre site was required to mitigate for impacts to occupied gopher habitat as a result of the Yelm Road widening project in Thurston County, and is also large enough to mitigate for future WSDOT projects. The site borders the I-5 WSDOT Scatter Creek rest stop, is occupied by gophers, and contains prairie soils, mima mounds and flooded oak woodlands (although no remnant prairie remains). Tirhi and WSDOT biologist discussed and planned improvements to the site, including hand removal of all Scots Broom and other invasives, restoration of prairie, and fencing.



*WSDOT Scatter Creek Mazama Pocket Gopher Mitigation Site (Set Aside).*

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

**Private Lands/Access**

**Private Timberland Access:** Bio Harris met with Weyerhaeuser staff this week to discuss deployment of Eyes in the Woods (EITW) cameras and continued hunting access. Currently we are looking at deploying the cameras in the lower Donovan (GMU 648) or Wilson, Ward creek area of GMU 660. A site visit was made to the lower Donovan block. This area is seeing a high level of garbage being dumped. Currently, the area is open to motorized access. Because the location of this area is near populated areas, it was discussed that access should be limited to the non-motorized until next fall's hunting seasons. We also looked at the first few miles of the upper Donovan. This area has had limited vehicular access for the past several years. WDFW staff requested that it be green dotted this year to allow hunter access to extensive forest lands accessible by this road system. Some garbage has appeared on the spur roads. They are currently keeping the road open for winter steelhead fisherman to access the Wynoochee River. Weyerhaeuser has express interest in increasing the use of the EITW property watch program on their holdings.