

Wildlife Program

Week of January 16, 2012

REGION 1

None

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: The Columbia Plateau has experienced another shot of winter with 4-6 inches of snowfall this week and lows in the single digits just prior to the storm. Snow is light and fluffy but forecasted rain for Saturday will create a crusty snow.

Weekender Opportunities: The recent weather system further reduced the chances that any waterfowl would begin to migrate back to the north as seen in previous years. Waterfowl prospects for the northern half of the Columbia Plateau are looking pretty bleak. Though duck numbers are very low, the change in weather may provide some good shooting in localized areas. The Columbia River may be the best bet until the end of the season.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Odessa Subarea Special Study: Biologist Finger attended an Office of Columbia River update meeting to discuss the timeline of the Odessa EIS, Coordination Act Report, and the Supplemental Feed Route activities and objectives. The meeting was attended by local staff from Wildlife, Fish, and Habitat. Finger updated the group about efforts to obtain funding for habitat enhancement work in the middle crab creek area in preparation for feed through the system.

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

Waterfowl: Biologists Hoenes and Finger visited Mansfield Pond to assess the current spring flow and determine whether or not they could create some open water by opening the water control structure. If water could be delivered to the smaller storage units, it might provide opportunity for waterfowl hunters to have one more hunt before the end of the season. The spring was flowing at a very low rate and Mansfield Pond had risen very little since the structure was closed a few weeks ago. Shortly after the water control structure was opened, chunks of ice and snow in the delivery ditches began to break free and create an ice dam at the secondary water control structure. Because of this, Hoenes and Finger did not feel comfortable leaving the main control structure open so they shut it back down.

Mule Deer: Biologist Hoenes began work on a document that will summarize the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer survey effort over the past three years. Biologists incorporated a sight-ability model that was developed for mule deer located on winter range in Idaho in hopes of generating unbiased estimates of population size, age ratios (fawn:doe), and sex ratios (buck:doe) for a mule deer herd that migrates through three separate management districts and counties. The intent of this effort is to develop a monitoring program that will allow WDFW to more accurately and efficiently monitor the demographic trends (e.g. population size, sex ratios) for this herd which in turn will allow for the development of informed management decisions.

District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen

Weather Conditions: Snow finally fell in the Okanogan Valley with several inches now in lowest elevations and more continues to fall. Throughout the District, most deer winter range is now covered by at least a foot of snow.

Weekender Opportunities: Cold temperatures have frozen most open water in the district. However, waterfowl are holding in the few patches of open water and along the Columbia River. Bald and Golden eagles are also very visible throughout the district. Moose are being seen routinely from a designated snowmobile route in the Upper Chewuch River.



Bull moose at a wolverine project camera site in the Upper Chewuch River.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

District Team Meeting/Habitat Enhancement: Wildlife Biologist Fitkin attended the District Team (DT) meeting in Winthrop. The meeting focused on proposed and potential fish enhancement work on WDFW lands. The group agreed on the need to proactively develop a vision for fish projects on our ground that includes wildlife needs, recreational opportunities, and funder constraints associated with each property. This would not only put us in a better position to go after our own enhancement funding, but would also give us a proactive framework for vetting the ever increasing number of fish enhancement projects being proposed for WDFW property by outside entities. Along these lines, Han's Smith with the Yakima Tribe presented a concept for a project on some of the Methow River property between Winthrop and Twisp. The project got a generally favorable review by the group. A more detailed proposal discussion and site review will take place later this year. Moving forward the DT agreed to form a multi-disciplinary group to begin developing a draft restoration goal worksheet for WDFW properties in the Okanogan District.

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

Weather Conditions: Winter storms dominated the weather in District 7 this past week, depositing heavy snows in the Cascades and giving Douglas County its first significant snow covering this winter. Several areas along the crest received more than 24 inches in 7 days. Douglas County did not accumulate anywhere near those amounts but did receive enough to block unmaintained roads in the county. Rains are reported to be coming this week which should reduce amounts at lower elevations.

Weekender Opportunities: Look for deer and bighorn sheep at lower elevations along the Columbia River Breaks in Chelan County. Bald Eagles can be observed along most stretches of the Columbia River in the District, but the Wells Pool always is a great spot to find them.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Winter Range: Biologist Volsen, along with officers Grant and Oswald, met with USFS Entiat Ranger District staff to discuss closing specific roads on the ranger district to protect wintering mule deer. The district is supportive of WDFW efforts to limit the amount of disturbance to wintering deer herds in core areas. USFS biologist Lyons and Biologist Volsen will develop a proposal for the closures. Eventually, the proposal will be linked to the Forest Service's Transportation Management Plan, and to the Forest Plan Revision.

Highway 97A Wildlife Fence: The completion of the wildlife fence along Highway 97A has significantly reduced the number of vehicle collisions with bighorn sheep and deer between Wenatchee and Entiat. While numbers of sheep on the road are greatly reduced from past years, they do occasionally find their way back onto the highway. Some of the sheep may be moving around the north end of the fence, however, it is more likely that given their incredible athletic ability, they are jumping the fence at certain places. WDFW continues to work with WSDOT to engineer fixes to the fence to eliminate crossings.

In trying to move sheep back across the fence on several occasions, biologist Volsen observed the bighorns attempting to jump back across the fence from a specific rock outcrop. Working with WSDOT, they designed a "jump out" that allows the sheep one way access back across the fence to the correct side. This week, the Wenatchee Office received numerous calls about several bighorn sheep on the wrong side of the fence. As biologist Gallie and State Patrol were

getting ready to respond, a resident called and reported that they saw all the sheep utilize the new jump-out. The resident managed to snap several images of the sheep using the jump out as designed.



Sheep returning through the one-way “jump out” – designed to bring them back to the other side.

Pygmy Rabbits: The successful reintroduction of pygmy rabbits onto the Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area is a top priority for our district. One of our primary goals this year is to document the presence of pygmy rabbits on the wildlife area following releases during 2011. Over the year at least one kit was known to have developed a burrow system resided on Sagebrush Flat. Recent attempts to find that kit have been unsuccessful. With the arrival of snow on Sagebrush Flat, this coming week will provide optimal conditions to check for the presence of “free-range” pygmy rabbits. Biologist will walk transects across the wildlife area in an attempt to locate sign of rabbits. With snow on the ground, the rabbits leave trails that can be followed to burrow systems and hopefully to the confirmation of Columbia Basin rabbits. In addition to the documentation of trails and burrows (and maybe even a sighting) we will be collecting pellet groups found during the surveys. Pellets collected will be used for genetic analysis and these tests can confirm the lineage of any rabbits discovered.

With snow on the ground, rabbits give up their secrets about how they are using the habitat. Biologist Volsen had the opportunity to observe captive wild-caught pygmy rabbits in our enclosures this week. Their pattern of using certain burrows and avoiding others is readily apparent with the recent snows. Several rabbits were observed, with observations of multiple rabbits using a single burrow system. Activity in the enclosures will allow surveyors to identify sign specific to pygmy rabbits prior to surveys.

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

Weather Conditions: Highs in the teens, lows in the single digits, and SNOW.....Finally!!!

Weekender Opportunities: Eagle watching is in full swing in the Methow! Both bald and golden eagles abound along the Methow River from Winthrop to well below Carlton.



(photo courtesy of Justin Haug)

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Aspen Stand Study: This week John Hagan finished preliminary stand reconstruction data collection in the forest edge aspen stands near the Methow HQ. The results show at present there are 250-400 conifers per acre where historically there were between 2.4 and 4.8 conifers per acre. This simple statistic demonstrates just how far our aspen stands are from historic, sustainable stocking levels.

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

Pearygin Creek: Tom McCoy and other WDFW staff attended a meeting with regional state park staff to develop short and long-term solutions to Pearygin Creek flooding and sediment deposition in Pearygin State Park and the adjacent WDFW boat launch. They did not come up with a final design but narrowed down the options to a couple of alternatives that will meet the needs of both agencies.

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

Weather Conditions: Winter finally arrived this week as the first of a series of storms passed through the area leaving in its wake six inches of snow in the Bridgeport area. Wednesday the mercury, well, actually the LCD display, never rose above ten degrees for the high, while the lowest of lows was four degrees and that, coupled with a stiff north wind gave the local area a wind chill of -15 that night. Additional snow accumulations through the weekend, as forecast by the National Weather Service, are anticipated to be between six and fourteen inches.

Weekender Opportunities: Thursday, Rick Hendrick, a local birdwatcher, observed a long-tailed duck just west of Washburn Island. Here at the Area's headquarters, our boat launch is unusable now that this week's cold weather has left two inches of ice on the slough.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Sharp-tailed Grouse: Friday morning, Dan and Research Biologist Mike Schroeder observed nine sharp-tailed grouse in the water birch trees at the West Foster Creek Unit. Thanks to Wednesday's snowfall this was the first such observation of the winter.



Seed Collection: Ann and Fidel collected water birch seed from two stands on the Bridgeport Unit. The seed will be sent to Clifty View Nursery of Bonners Ferry Idaho for propagation.

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 and met with Rich Finger, 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

Weather Conditions: Winter arrives with a vengeance. Not a lot of snow, but very cold temperatures and high winds creating wind chill factors well below zero. A total of about 4 – 5 inches of snow fell this week at the HQ, with more falling at this writing. The 10 day forecast calls for moderating temperatures (highs slightly above freezing) and increased precipitation.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

RCO Grant Request: Manager Olson submitted one RCO grant request to the region for prioritizing which will stabilize about 2.5 miles of Simikameen River bank, and restores the same with native Riparian vegetation.

CAG Meeting: Olson continued planning and preparing for this year's Citizens Advisory Group meeting which will be on January 27th in Okanogan.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex - Dale Swedberg / Justin Haug

Weather Conditions: For the week daytime temperatures ranged from a low of 5 to a high of 29, nighttime temperatures ranged from a low of -5 to a high of 15. Wind averages ranged from 0 to 4.0 mph with gusts ranging from 4 to 13 mph. Approximately 10 inches of snow accumulated between Wednesday and Friday.

Weekender Opportunities: Bird watching – most common wintertime birds, e.g., Red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers, northern shrike, northern harriers, pine grosbeak, redpolls, trumpeter swans and Bohemian waxwings.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project (SERP) Phase 1 & 2: A logging contractor was planning to move equipment to the Sinlahekin on Thursday, but breakdowns prevented it. He will be moving equipment over the weekend and/or first of next week. Silviculturalist Corso continued to mark timber for Phase 2. He also reviewed previously marked timber on Phase 1, for adherence to the prescription and prescription modifications, in preparation for harvesting

this weekend or early next week. Harvesting will begin near the DNR Fire Camp and proceed southward down the remaining Phase 1 timbered areas.

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

Public Presentation – Prescribed Fire: Manager Swedberg prepared and gave a presentation on prescribed burn manager certification at the WSU and University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Sponsored Family Forester Workshop in Spokane. Approximately 80 people, despite bad traveling conditions, were in attendance from throughout Washington and Idaho.

Citizen’s Advisory Group Meeting Planning and Preparation: Assistant manager Haug called and emailed individuals inviting them to this year’s Citizen’s Advisory Group meeting in Tonasket this coming Wednesday the 25th. So far we have confirmed representatives for the USFS, BLM, Okanogan County Weed Board, Backcountry Horsemen, City of Loomis, Tonasket School District, Okanogan Fly-fishing Club, Okanogan Land Trust, and numerous local stakeholders and outdoor enthusiasts. He also continued to work on the presentation.

Chelan Wildlife Area Complex - Ron Fox

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

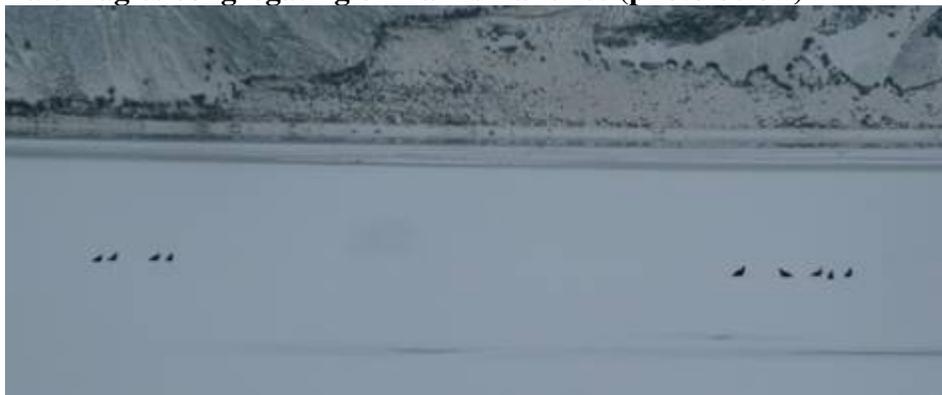
Beebe Springs: Ron Fox, Chelan Wildlife Area Manager, met with consultants from J.A. Brennan Associates at Beebe Springs to look at design options for placement of bridges and trails for developments on the west side of Highway 97.

White River: Ron Fox, Chelan Wildlife Area Manager, worked with Terrie Preston, Lands Agent, completing a Land Use Checklists and Temporary Commercial Use Permit for the Large Wood Attonement Project to be implemented by Cascade Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group. Work authorized under the permit will be conducting initial topographic and geo-tech surveys. The overall project hopes to accelerate floodplain recovery and enhance instream function in the lower White River and improve habitat for all salmonids that utilize the lower White River including spring Chinook, steelhead, sockeye, and bull trout.

PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski

Weekender Opportunities:

Bald Eagles congregating on Banks Lake Ice (photo below)



GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

SAFE: Private Lands Biologist Braaten looked at several SAFE fields, to check to see if Douglas County landowners got work accomplished. Many fields are covered in snow now but it is



apparent what fields were prepped. Landowners with expiring CRP were required to mow and harrow the existing grass to prepare for chemical fallow (See photo). Following up on the SAFE-CRP meeting with FSA and NRCS last week, Biologist Wisniewski spent most of the week correlating FSA's contract records with our working data. This was necessary due to the fact that

for this type of CRP sign up, FSA allows contractors to make changes to their contracts at anytime and many changes were made to location and amount of acres being offered after we had written and the landowners agreed to and signed their working plans. FSA was notified of the corrected maps that we need. The next step will be to revise the maps and plans as necessary when we receive the updated information from FSA. Biologist Cotton worked on a presentation for the Foster Creek Conservation District annual meeting on seeding methods for forbs in SAFE fields.



Fence Marking Near Grouse

Lek: Private Lands Biologist Braaten contacted Douglas County landowner regarding barbed wire fence adjacent to Sage Grouse Lek on property he manages. Private Lands Biologist Braaten asked if the fence could be marked with vinyl fence markers and landowner gave his blessing, about 500 m markers were used so far. The remaining markers will be put on next week depending on weather.

REGION 3

None

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Diversity Project Proposals: Biologist Kertson submitted a new diversity project proposal focused on modeling wildlife habitat and anthropogenic landscape features and influences in District 12. The project would combine existing data sets with analysis of raw data to generate databases and maps for a wide array of conservation and management applications to provide utility for multiple wildlife species. Project analyses for District 12 should lay the groundwork for future work to be completed throughout Region 4. His proposal was submitted in preparation for an upcoming meeting with Diversity Division staff to plan the coming year's diversity activities.

Elk Telemetry: Biologist Kertson spent time radio-tracking and observing elk throughout the upper Snoqualmie Valley during the recent snow and ice storm event. He located collared and uncollared elk hunkered down in heavily forested areas immediately above the valley floor. Biologist Kertson will continue to monitor these elk in the coming weeks to determine what, if any, impacts the storm has on elk space use, movements, and the potential for elk-related property damage.

Citizen Science Amphibian Monitoring: Biologist Anderson met with King County environmental staff, WDFW Habitat Research Scientist Hayes, and a University of WA Master's candidate to discuss integration of the graduate student's project into Woodland Park Zoo citizen amphibian monitoring efforts. Anderson also discussed previous Seattle area amphibian research efforts with a current PhD candidate at University of Washington as it relates to current efforts and desired data collection needs. Anderson then met with Woodland Park Zoo staff to discuss needs of graduate students, how to integrate these items, data management needs with WDFW, and overall next steps with zoo.

Swan Morbidity and Mortality Study: Technician Lapsansky continued to monitor areas of known swan use, including roosts and collect carcasses and tissue samples. University of Washington Ph.D. candidate Mike Smith has been brought on under contract to assist with this project during the period of anticipated peak swan mortality, so Biologist Danilson, Technicians Lapsansky and Otto, and Smith met to coordinate surveillance strategies and other logistics.

Oregon Spotted Frog Survey: Biologist Bohannon set up new computer and GIS in preparation for upcoming Oregon spotted frog surveys. Bohannon also reviewed and submitted comments on the draft Oregon Spotted Frog recovery plan and

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

Wildlife Management

Game Project Proposals: Biologist Kertson submitted District 12 game project proposals in preparation for an upcoming meeting with Game Division staff to plan the coming year's game activities. His proposals focus on developing strategies to reduce bear damage to conifers in public and private forests in Districts 12 and 13 and an evaluation of the efficacy of non-lethal approaches as a means to reduce interactions and conflicts with people. Biologist Kertson's

proposals represent a summation of several months of discussion between Region 4 wildlife staff and Game Division Managers in Olympia, but also provide additional information on expected staff time and project costs.

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 both Quality Hunt programs.

Wildlife Areas

Wiley Slough: Manager Schuster continued to monitor water levels in Wiley Slough to determine if additional pumping may be necessary. Contacts were made with Dike District#22 representatives to arrange for auxiliary pump placement and pumping services. 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 and Hunting Opportunity: 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. Bay-front hunting conditions were good other area had limited open water. Wildlife Area Manager Kessler spoke with several waterfowl hunters using the units of the wildlife area. Despite the weather conditions, most had decent success. Manager Paulson talked to duck hunters at Crescent Lake. Their reports were: "The ducks are finally coming in! They are really using the corn right now".

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Western Pond Turtles: Biologist Holman met with representatives from the Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Staff to discuss possible fisheries enhancement activities on Pierce National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge was the first site selected for re-introduction of western pond turtles into their historic habitat in the Columbia River Gorge. The turtles were re-introduced to the Refuge in 2000 and reproduction among the established population was documented in 2010. Opportunities for habitat enhancements that would mutually benefit salmon and turtles are possible. However, some proposals would benefit salmon while compromising turtle habitat.

Canada Goose Population Surveys: In cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Region 5 Wildlife Biologists conducted surveys for Canada geese in selected areas of southwest Washington. The survey is focused on dusky Canada geese and involves locating flocks of duskies and examining the birds for neck collars. Population information generated via wintering observations in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon are compiled with data generated from aerial surveys of the geese on their breeding grounds in the Copper River delta of Alaska to develop a robust population estimate. Biologists Holman and George conducted the survey in the Woodland Bottoms and Kalama River areas of Cowlitz County. Several flocks of geese were observed during the survey with representation from the Taverners, cackling, western, lesser, white-fronted and snow geese, however, no duskies were located.

St. Helens Elk: On January 19th Biologist Bergh and Technician Pyzik commenced an effort to locate collared elk in the Mt St Helens elk herd. Twenty-four collars were located; 5 of which were on or near the mudflow area. Three collars had mortality signals, which staff will investigate further next week. The effort was focused on GMUs 520, 524, 556, and 550 although access was difficult with the recent snow. Bergh and Pyzik will continue to search next week when access will hopefully be easier with some snow melt.

During this effort Biologist Bergh and Technician Pyzik visited the North Toutle Valley to get a count of elk on the valley floor and assess conditions after the winter storm. Thirteen elk were counted on the valley floor, which was 90% snow covered on the eastern end. Snow cover decreased to the west and rain was falling on SR 504 above the valley. There were scattered tracks in the snow across the valley floor, but no large groupings of elk were observed.

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

Wildlife Management

Region 5 Deer Productivity Surveys: Biologists George and Holman summarized the Regional deer productivity surveys. These surveys are conducted during late summer each year by a combination of WDFW Staff and volunteers. Data generated from this effort is used as one of the inputs into the Regional Sex Age Kill model of deer population estimation. Deer productivity in 2011 was 0.54 fawns per 100 does and effectively equal to the historic average for Region 5. Please see figure ([R5deerproductivity.pdf](#)) illustrating the results of this survey work over the past 17 years.

SW Washington Goose season: During the second week in January, a total of 61 hunters checked in 141 geese in management area 2A. The harvest rate increased from 1.8 to 2.3 geese per hunter over the prior week. Once again there were not any dusky geese harvested in any of the zones. Eleven dusksies have been harvested since the beginning of the season out of Area 2A. All areas with the exception of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge remain open for goose hunting. Hunters should be reminded that the end of the management area 2A and 2B regular goose hunting season is Sunday January 29th, 2012.

Elk: Biologist Bergh retrieved a GPS radio-collar from a successful elk hunter. This collar has been collecting GPS locations every 4-6 hours since it was deployed in February 2011. These locations will provide information on fine-scale habitat use by elk in our region. WDFW thanks hunters for reporting harvest of collared and banded wildlife.

Private Lands/Access

Private Industrial Timberlands: WDFW Private Lands Program staff have met with several local industrial timber companies to discuss incentives for timberland companies to provide public hunting access. These incentives include gates and installation, coordinating volunteers to monitor access points, WDFW signage, trash pick-up, and funding for additional security and/or enforcement patrol during the hunting season. Hancock Forest Management in Klickitat County took advantage of this offer in November by requesting an emphasis patrol on an area of their land where interactions between hunting and logging traffic was creating a dangerous situation. The patrol effort was successful in alleviating the problem and no citations were issued. In addition, WDFW Law Enforcement officers recently completed a two week emphasis patrol of the Coweeman and Winston GMUs, which were open to 400 antlerless elk permit hunters. A significant portion of the Winston and, to a greater extent, the Coweeman GMUs occur on Weyerhaeuser land. Weyerhaeuser requested additional patrol during this time and the effort was coordinated through the Private Lands Program. Law Enforcement made many contacts with hunters and gave several trespassing warnings to people in adjacent GMUs that were closed to hunting.

St. Helens Land Access Program: Another safe and successful year of implementing the St. Helens Land Access Program has just come to a close. This year's effort provided hunting access to 263,000 acres on the Weyerhaeuser St. Helens Tree Farm. A total of 47 volunteers (including new and returning volunteers) made the effort to help the program this year. During the special elk permits season days, Technician Pyzik coordinated 22 volunteers in October, 25 in November, 16 in December, and 14 in January. The volunteer effort facilitates weekday motorized access to the tree farm by monitoring areas where active logging operations are taking place and informing hunters which areas are open and closed to either walk-in only or motorized access. With this presence, Weyerhaeuser feels comfortable allowing motorized access to areas that might otherwise remain closed for safety reasons. The volunteers put in long days beginning at 5:00am and concluding at 4:00pm and working a total of 2,548 hours this season. These hours are master hunter eligible; however, many of the volunteers are not master hunters. The volunteers also conducted one day of clean up on Weyerhaeuser property totaling 52 road miles and collecting seven bags of garbage. A big thank you goes out to all the volunteers for their tireless dedication to facilitating private lands hunting access and for ensuring another safe and successful year.

Trout Lake Elk Area: Technician White worked with WDFW Enforcement Officer Bolton this week to coordinate Trout Lake Valley Elk Area permit hunters to a dairy farmer's property experiencing elk damage.

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. The past week was full of interesting conditions that might best be described as “wild”. Cold heavy rain and low elevation snowfall made for some extreme conditions, but the southwest cascades were somewhat spared from the worst of the conditions. Concerns have shifted more toward flooding with the current warm temperatures and continued heavy rain.

Short-Term Forecast: A mixture of rain and snow is expected over the next week. Snow levels will range from the lowest elevations to as high as 6,000 feet. Valley temperatures will range from the mid 30’s to mid 40’s. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks suggest below normal temperatures and above average precipitation.

Long-Term Forecast: The longer term outlook maps have been updated and still suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter, but Southwest Washington is now on the edge of these forecast zones.

Habitat: Significant snow in the lowest elevations likely limited forage availability for several days over the past week. However the snow has been melting quickly and there are bare patches now present at 2500 feet.

Snow Depths: Snow has been present to the lowest elevations but has been melting. Snowpack is still below average in the Southwest Cascades (83%). The spirit Lake Monitoring station (3500 feet) went from 1 inch of snow on the 14th to 21 inches on the 18th and is now back down to 10 inches on the 20th. 4.8 inches of precipitation (water equivalent) was recorded at the station during this time period.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date, but the recent weather has probably increased concentrations in the lower elevations at least temporarily. 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: Extremely mild winter weather persisted through mid-January. Snow levels remained high, with snowpack well below normal for this time of year.

Weather This week: A severe winter storm hit much of Washington State, and District 9 was no exception. Cold air combined with a powerful, warm-wet storm produced as much as 5 feet of snowfall in the southern Cascades and localized flooding in lower elevation areas. However, much warmer weather has now arrived and is forecast to continue.

Winter Severity: 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 the lower and mid elevation portions District 9.

Animal Concentrations: No concentrations noted.

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 weather related concerns raised by the public this week. One public contact related to hairloss deer in Klickitat County noted this week.

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Goose Management:

Goose check stations are completed for the 2011-2012 seasons. We ended with a total of 7 Dusky's taken.

Saturday 01/21/12

Reikkola- 4 hunters with 10 geese (Cackler 1, Taverner 5, and Lesser 4)

Raymond : 2 hunters, 5 geese (3 Cacklers, 2 Westerns). Westerns ("Wuskys") were banded and collared as follows: #1: 1078-96614, 82XH; #2: 0958-77179, 57XH.

Wednesday 01/18/12

Reikkola: Snow day hunters called in and given a check code.

Total Hunters 4, Total Geese 16

Raymond: 1 hunter, 2 geese (1 Taverner, 1 Lesser)

Winter Marine Waterfowl and Marine Bird Aerial Surveys: Winter marine bird and waterfowl surveys were delayed last week due to inclement weather. Instead, Bios Murphie and Cyra continued data transcription and error checking. This survey is approaching 90% completion, with only the inner San Juan Islands and a few open water transects remaining. This annual survey provides 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.

Swan Project: Biologist Ament received some messages from swan project volunteers regarding a lone swan that was acting unusual – last observed late on January 17th. Martha Jordan saw photos of the swan and confirmed it was a tundra swan. On January 18th Bio Ament conducted a search effort for the swan. The swan was not found where it had been reported (w/ a group of trumpeter swans). Bio searched other known swan locations. She was unable to locate the reported swan. However, she did locate a group of 17 trumpeter swans out in Dungeness Bay. They have been displaced from one of their known roost site ponds since it is currently frozen over. Bio Ament reported back to Martha Jordan and the volunteer group regarding the swan and also provided them with copies of the necropsy reports from the 2 dead swans from November – swans died of an infection and of an impact to the head. Neither swan had toxic levels of lead in their system.