

Wildlife Program

Week of December 30, 2013 – January 5, 2014

SCIENCE DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Christmas Bird Count (CBC): Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Research Scientist Michael Schroeder organized and conducted the annual Bridgeport Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 21. The CBC project was initiated by 27 observers in 1900 as a response to an earlier tradition to competitively shoot as many species of birds and mammals as possible on Christmas Day. The CBC project has been refined over the years and now includes a 24-hour count of all birds observed within more than 2,200 pre-defined and non-overlapping circles of 15 kilometers in diameter, scattered throughout North America. The CBC project is the longest running citizen science project in the World with participation by more than 60,000 observers. The citizen scientists remotely enter the data, which is available for online review and analysis. Michael started the Bridgeport CBC during the Christmas season of 1996; this year's count was his 18th straight year organizing citizen scientists to spend the day in sub-freezing weather counting birds. Approximately 26,000 individuals of 92 species were observed this year with the help of 19 volunteers. Michael also participated in the Chelan Christmas Bird Count on December 28.



Common loons observed on Lake Chelan.



Chelan Butte

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wolf Conservation and Management

District 1

Ruby Creek Wolf: Specialist Shepherd discussed Ruby Creek wolf locations with various staff as the wolf is near residences again in Pend Oreille County.

Kettle Mountains: Specialist Shepherd discussed livestock and pet protection with a Deadman Creek resident. A field visit was suggested and will occur later in the month.

Wedge: A report from an off-duty staff prompted Specialist Shepherd and Assistant District Biologist Prince to scout for an injured moose and wolf sign in the Wedge. Blood and moose tracks were observed and a single set of wolf tracks were found.



Left: Assistant District Biologist Prince following moose tracks on skis in the Wedge. Right: An apparent mountain lion track near a wolf track in the Wedge.



A wolf track observed in the Wedge.

District 2

Wildlife Camera: Conflict Specialist Bennett placed a trail camera near Porcupine Bay after two reports of a black wolf in the area (late fall 2013 and December 18) from a landowner that has a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) with the Department. The camera will be checked once weekly.

Possible Wolf Sighting: Bendixen took a call for a possible wolf sighting in a fairly congested area near Loon Lake. After talking with the gentleman about the physical characteristics of wolves, the gentleman determined that it must have been a couple coyotes. However, Bendixen told the caller that if he saw them again to contact him and he would then install a remote camera to rule out whether or not they are wolves.

District 3

Wolf Activity: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) reported two collared wolves from the Wenaha pack have been active in the Tucannon River drainage. ODFW was going to fly on Monday to try and determine pack size as part of the end of year reporting.

REGION 2

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wolf Conservation and Management



Carcass Report: Biologist Volsen checked a carcass reported to be a dead wolf in the upper Squilchuck Basin. The carcass was in fact from a domestic dog and looked to have been dumped off the forest road.

Wildlife Management

Winter Wildlife Counts: Biologist Gallie also made it out to the other mountain goat areas of Chelan County and was shocked by the lack of snow even at higher regions closer to the Cascade crest along Stevens Pass and Icicle Ridge which had more mule deer than goats. However, he did manage to get a count of 35 goats (28 adults, 7 kids) in Tumwater Canyon (previous high was 27 last year) which is the highest count yet for this drainage. While observing a group of mountain goats, he soon realized he was also being surveyed by this cougar just off shore. He was able to watch this cat for about 15 minutes while it slowly walked along the shore and then disappeared up into the hillside vegetation.



Cougar on the south shore of Lake Chelan.

Caspian Tern Monitoring – Biologist Duvuvuei drafted a Caspian tern monitoring protocol for the Frenchman Regulated Access Area. Biologist Duvuvuei will try to recruit members of the Central Basin Audubon Society to assist with monitoring the project area this coming spring and summer.

Odessa Implementation – Biologists Finger and Duvuvuei began developing ‘Environmental Enhancement’ Statements of Work for the Odessa project. Enhancements identified include evaluation of feasibility of using artificial nest platforms to increase nesting success of western grebes, construction of about 150 artificial nest burrows for burrowing owls along newly created spoil of the East Low Canal expansion, evaluating the feasibility of conducting a Northern Leopard Frog translocation by first conducting a Population Viability Assessment and disease reconnaissance at source and potential recipient sites, and environmental compliance and construction phases of a pending wetland project at Artesian and Black Lakes.

Wildlife Areas

North Central Washington Prescribed Burn Team – Prescribed Burn Team Member White continues helping with miscellaneous projects on the Methow Wildlife Area now that the slash pile burning on Pogue Mountain Wildlife Area is completed. There is very little snow on the ground. The team continued to mop-up, dig check-lines and monitor piles for containment. There has been slow creeping through the deep duff layer, but no serious issues with containment. The Prescribed Fire Burn Plan for the Blue 3 Unit on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area underwent editing and should be ready for approval signature by Swedberg, Okanogan Lands Operations and Prescribed Burn Program manager. A first draft of the Mill 2 Prescribed Burn Unit Plan was submitted by Dry Forests Restoration Specialist Guse. Comments and edits to the plan have been returned by Swedberg, and a technical review by Fuels Manager Leuschen has been completed. Guse will begin working on a second draft of the Mill 2 burn plan.

Illegal Off Road Vehicle Activity – Assistant Manager Eidson spent time in both Frenchman Coulee and Quincy Lakes (Babcock Bench) checking on some illegal off road activity that was reported. Several new cuts in the existing roadside fence at the Frenchman Coulee were observed, including one in a location that has been fixed multiple times. Eidson is working on a more permanent fix of the situation.

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

Wildlife Management

Regulated Access Area Monitoring – Biologists Finger and Duvuvuei toured the Regulated Access Areas to determine the amount of open water and number of waterfowl using the area. Both the Frenchmen and Winchester Regulated Access Areas were frozen with very little open water remaining. Though the reserves were not checked thoroughly, Winchester Reserve was holding 20,000+ mallards and Canada geese but few waterfowl were observed on Frenchmen Reserve. The Regulated Access Areas had very little waterfowl use and hunters would likely have better success on larger water bodies with more open water. Efforts to create open water on

Frenchmen Regulated Access Area are limited by low water level in the wasteway. Therefore, open water is virtually non-existent within the project and restricted to small patches within the ditches.

Wildlife Areas

Chesaw Elk: Manger Olson observed 10 head of Elk cows and calves, a rare sight on the Chesaw Wildlife Area. This is part of the area in Okanogan County that was added to the Selkirk Elk Herd Management Plan.



Elk cows and calves on Chesaw Wildlife Area – Photo by Jim Olson.

REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Wolf Conservation and Management

Kittitas County Wolf Activity: Biologist Bernatowicz received reports of unusual wolf activity in northern Kittitas County. A single animal had been observed in close proximity to houses, pets and livestock on several occasions over the last few weeks. After consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Wildlife Conflict Specialists Novack and Wetzel attempted to trap the wolf Jan. 1 through Jan. 3, but were unsuccessful due to freezing and thawing weather conditions. The USFWS has since indicated federal staff will assume the lead role and are currently assessing the situation in cooperation with WDFW.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

North Puget Sound Waterfowl Surveys: Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn conducted aerial surveys for snow geese, dabbling ducks and brant. DeBruyn and Technician Deyo also conducted age and race ratio counts for brant on Sunday, January 5.

Snow Geese: The second aerial snow goose survey was conducted on December 24. The population estimate for snow goose surveys is derived from photographs taken during the survey and the results are not yet available. High overcast skies provided ideal conditions for estimating juvenile:adult ratios during this survey and the numbers should be available in the next week or so.

In the meantime, the preliminary estimate from the initial snow goose survey (conducted on December 4) came out to 75,313 with 59 percent of the geese on the U.S. side of the border and 41 percent in the Fraser River Delta in British Columbia. The largest flock (more than 32,000 geese) was during the first flight on Fir Island. During the second flight, the largest flock was observed on the agricultural flats northeast of Burlington. The isolated flock of snow geese in the Snohomish River Valley appears to have increased from last year, as just over 6,400 geese were counted in the flock on the December 4 survey.



Snohomish County Snow Goose Flock from the air.

North Puget Sound Snow Goose Survey (12/4/2013)		
Location	Flock #	Count
Fraser River Delta	1	285
Fraser River Delta	2	757
Fraser River Delta	3	1,376
Fraser River Delta	4	3,577
Fraser River Delta	5	115
Fraser River Delta	6	20,750
Fraser River Delta	7	1,809
Fraser River Delta	8	1,463
Fraser River Delta	9	771
Sub Total		30,903
Padilla Bay	10	15
Fir Island	11	32,343
Port Susan Bay	12	5,636
Snohomish	13	6,416
Sub Total		44,410
Total		75,313

Winter Marine Waterfowl Surveys: Assistant District Biologist Cyra, Waterfowl Survey and Sea Duck Specialist Evenson, and Assistant District Biologist Murphie resumed the winter sea duck and marine bird aerial surveys after a break for the holidays. This is the 22nd winter that these surveys have been conducted. These surveys are the longest data set documenting trends of winter marine bird distribution and population indices in the Puget Sound, documenting the declining trends in many of the species that inhabit the Puget Sound during the winter season.

In addition, these surveys are used to document population index levels of sea ducks that will be used to determine next year's harvest limits. Two days of survey were flown this week, with the second day shortened by mechanicals. We are fortunate again to retain the services of Kenmore Air and their chief pilot for these technically challenging surveys. They are a large part of the success of this project and their rapid response to aircraft issues is appreciated. Information on these surveys along with past data can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/psamp/>.

Dabbling Ducks: A total of 184,000 dabbling ducks were counted during the mid-winter waterfowl aerial survey conducted on January 3. This is slightly lower than the number of dabblers counted in November. Mallards remained the most prevalent species observed, but the numbers of mallards and pintail were lower than the previous month. Skagit Bay was holding the most ducks at the time the survey was conducted. By the time the flight reached Whatcom County, conditions on the bays had deteriorated and fewer than normal dabblers were observed. Follow-up ground surveys conducted this week during more favorable conditions revealed the usual compliment of about ten thousand dabbling ducks occupying Lummi Bay.



Ducks dabble on Lummi Bay.

District 14 Aerial Waterfowl Survey - Port Susan to Drayton Harbor					
Date: 1/3/2013	Plane/pilot: N 4793F C172 /Jeff Wells		Observers: Paul DeBruyn, Chris Danilson		
Weather: Sunny initially, with increasing cloud cover, winds 5-10 kts		Tide @ Beginning: 10.5		Tide @ End: 6.5	
Location	Mallard	Northern Pintail	American Widgeon	Green-Winged Teal	Totals
Port Susan Bay	20	10	0	0	30
Livingston Bay	460	45	0	0	505
Skagit Bay	59,725	13,550	7,900	2,700	83,875
Fidalgo Bay	0	0	0	0	0
Padilla Bay	16,950	21,000	20,970	2,550	61,470
Samish Bay	9,580	13,200	9,280	2,660	34,720
Nooksack Delta/Portage	725	100	0	150	975
Lummi Bay	825	725	825	50	2,425
Birch Bay	0	0	4	0	4
Drayton Harbor	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	88,285	48,630	38,979	8,110	184,004

Brant: The aerial survey for brant is conducted annually during the last week of December. In addition to documenting the mid-winter population estimate for brant in north Puget Sound, it is also used to determine whether a limited Skagit County brant hunt (as proposed in the annual WDFW waterfowl pamphlet) can proceed. This year, the number of brant in Skagit County bays was 6,486. This is down from the 8,960 counted in Skagit in 2012, but eclipses the 6,000 bird threshold necessary for the hunt to occur. An additional 4,000 brant were counted in Whatcom County bays this year, which is also lower than last year’s Whatcom County total.

Danilson also accompanied Waterfowl Biologist Evenson on attempt to conduct photo transect counts of brant in Skagit County. However, the survey had to be abandoned last minute because of poor weather. The objective of this trial effort is to evaluate the efficacy of this new method for estimating brant numbers. The flight has been rescheduled for the week of January 6.

DeBruyn and Deyo observed brant coming into the Swinomish Brant Reserve for gravel on January 5. The purpose of the trip was to ascertain the ratio of juveniles in the flock of Western High Arctic Brant (gray-bellies) that winter almost exclusively in Padilla Bay. Very few juveniles were observed indicating a poor production year on the breeding grounds.



Western High Arctic Brant gravelling in the Swinomish Reserve. Note the “black” brant among them, second from the left front.

District 14 Aerial Brant Survey - Skagit and Whatcom counties (12/30/2013)	
Location	Count
Fidalgo Bay	0
Padilla Bay	2,819
Swinomish Reserve	0
Samish Bay	3,667
Skagit County Subtotal	6,486
Bellingham Bay	319
Lummi Bay	2,219
Birch Bay	422
Blaine/Drayton Harbor	996
Whatcom County Subtotal	3,956
Grand Total	10,442

Mountain Goat Management: Biologist Danilson coordinated with Special Species Section Manager Harris and veterinary staff to make arrangements for packaging and delivery of mountain goat biological samples at the upcoming winter workshop. Danilson also worked with Harris on logistics for Danilson to attend the annual Safari Club International (SCI) fundraising event on January 25 to present an award to one of the mountain goat hunters who worked with WDFW staff to have samples taken from their harvested goat. The award (a gift certificate to be raffled to those hunters that participated) is intended to encourage hunters to comply with the voluntary sampling and was made possible by a contribution from the local SCI chapter.

Swan Morbidity and Mortality Project: This week 62 swan mortalities were recorded by WDFW and collaborators. Of these 62, 58 carcasses were sampled as part of the lead mortality and morbidity study. Of the 58 carcasses sampled, 55 were lead suspected mortalities. A total of 4 swans were recovered from Skagit County, 1 swan from Snohomish County, and 57 from Whatcom County.

	Skagit	Snohomish	Whatcom	TOTAL
Powerline suspect	11	3	9	23
Pb suspect	7	8	81	96
Trauma	1	1	1	3
Unknown	5			5
Feather Pile	3	2	7	12
TOTAL	27	14	98	139

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Management

Black Brant Management: Technician Deyo performed Black Brant age and subspecies ratio surveys with Biologists Danilson and DeBruyn.

Skagit County Elk Conflict: Conflict Specialist Griffith took Assistant Program Manager Ralf Schreiner with him one day over the past two weeks conducting daily work tasks. Griffith and Schreiner met with three landowners regarding elk damages. Damage permits were issued out to two of them and discussions regarding cooperative fencing took place with the third.

Griffith met with three additional landowners, implemented damage prevention cooperative agreements, issued a number of damage permits, coordinated a master hunter assignment, and worked with Pinjuv to finalize a Cooperative Fencing Agreement. Pinjuv met with landowners and began work on two new fencing projects. Pinjuv also met with a landowner to discuss an ongoing fencing project finalizing materials, specifications and fence layout.

Conflict Specialist Griffith met with several landowners along the Skagit River and Acme this week in response to elk complaints. Griffith issued out a number of damage permits and damage prevention cooperative agreements. Conflict Technician Kyle Pinjuv continued to work on the elk fencing project near Birdsvew.

Seattle Parks and Heron Habitat Helpers (HHH) – Wildlife Management: Biologist Anderson provided maps labeled with locations for ongoing efforts with a webcam operator hired by HHH. They desire to put a wildlife camera up, likely in the Commodore Park area. This effort has had collaboration amongst Seattle Parks, HHH, Army Corp of Engineers, WDFW, National Park Service, and Seattle Dept. of Neighborhoods. Currently they are conducting public outreach to finalize a camera site and other interpretive features.

Die off of American Robins: Biologist Anderson worked with Customer Service Specialist Wilson to obtain 12 dead robins, all found in one area, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The robins will be sent to the National Wildlife Health Center (USGS) for testing, per WDFW Wildlife Health group instructions.

District 12 Diversity Professional Poster and Presentation Efforts: Biologist Anderson received word from collaborators that a poster regarding local Purple Martin Stewardship activities was accepted at the upcoming Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference in late April. Anderson also received word of another presentation he has collaborated on with staff of Woodland Park Zoo education unit regarding citizen wildlife documentation. The presentation proposal was accepted. This topic and related local efforts will be presented at the upcoming annual meeting of the WA Chapter of The Wildlife Society in February.

Waterfowl Mortality Event in Whatcom County: Biologist DeBruyn continued to monitor Wisner Lake in Whatcom County for waterfowl dying from what has been determined by the National Wildlife Health Center to be *Aspergillus* poisoning. Working in conjunction with the swan program he removed recently deceased carcasses of ducks from the lake to prevent secondary poisoning. Several fresh samples were frozen and saved in case further analysis is desired.

Wildlife Areas

Leque Island Alternatives Analysis and Design Project: Projects Coordinator Brokaw continued preparing for the upcoming Stakeholder Committee meeting, which will take place on January 8. Preparations included drafting a presentation for the meeting, preparing visuals and handouts, coordinating a contract with a third party facilitator for the meeting, and making adjustments to the agenda based on

Area of Leque Island Alternatives Analysis and Design Project



feedback from the WDFW cross-program team. The January 8 meeting will be an opportunity for people who volunteered to participate in the project Stakeholder Committee to provide input on how they value the property, and an opportunity for WDFW to further explain background information and sideboards for the alternatives analysis process.



Dike conditions on Leque Island are very poor in some areas.

Stillwater Unit: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm coordinated with Wild Fish Conservancy to complete planting the construction area for the revetment project that took place earlier this summer. Over 1,750 native trees and live stakes were planted on the 2+ acre project site. Partners in this phase of the project included Wild Fish Conservancy, Duck's Unlimited and Sound Salmon Solutions.

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

Wildlife Areas

Baiting Issues: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm was informed by WDFW Law Enforcement Officers that the unit was in violation of state baiting laws. The unit was temporarily closed to waterfowl hunters on December 10. Manager Boehm coordinated a volunteer corn pick-up event on December 14. Approximately 20 volunteers and WDFW staff cleaned up the unit by removing corn that was on the ground in areas identified by WDFW

Enforcement Officers. All of the baiting issues were resolved and the unit was open to waterfowl hunters on December 25, 2013.

Natural Resources Specialist Greg Meis and Natural Resource Tech Curran Cosgrove checked the Island Unit of the Skagit Wildlife Area for potential baiting. There were two separate calls from the public concerned about some corn that had been knocked down. Enforcement has been notified and the site is being checked regularly. No bird or hunter use has been observed.

Hunter Use on the Skagit Wildlife Area: Manager Belinda Rotton toured sites to check hunter use and winter water conditions during the holiday break. Hunter numbers were good. Bird watcher and hunter number were good towards the end of the holiday break with the clear sunny weather. Staff continues to monitor water levels, waterfowl use and public use on the Island, Samish, Leque Island and Headquarters units.

Private Lands/Access

Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program: Natural Resource Technicians Otto and Deyo and Biologist Caldwell monitored quality hunt sites for use, identifying any maintenance needed or issues to address. Natural Resource Technicians Otto and Deyo performed parking lot and field maintenance on Waterfowl Quality Hunt sites in Whatcom, Skagit and Snohomish counties.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Management

Living with Wildlife – Crows: Biologist Anderson worked with IT Specialist Ushakoff to update the legalities section regarding management of crows. The website and PDF are now up to date. See <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/crows.html>.

State Authorized Wildlife Take Permitting Needs:

Biologist Anderson discussed state take authorization with multiple entities as well as suggested and discussed how to streamline the process for larger municipal entities (in this case King County) so that there is a go-to document rather than multiple iterations and items to track per any given project. Anderson will be presenting this discussion to appropriate policy folks upon receipt of thoughts and comments from King County Department of Transportation.



Injured Wildlife Assistance: Biologist Anderson assisted and explained to a member of the Trumpeter Swan Society that if an injured swan was located, under rehabilitation permits issued by WDFW, an injured or orphaned wild animal may be taken to a rehabber for care or euthanasia.

in coordination with them. Anderson also provided verbal authorization to take the animal to Technician Anderson for euthanasia. The local sheriff department needed some sort of reassurance from WDFW regarding legalities.

Biologist Anderson coordinated volunteer falcon watchers to check in on a potentially injured falcon in Seattle to contact Anderson or a wildlife rehabilitator directly. No bird was observed, but they are keeping an eye on that area as a nest site is nearby.

Wildlife Areas

DeBay Slough: Manager Rotton met a local contractor to discuss mowing for a pond rehabilitation project in the hunt unit. Washington Waterfowl Association will be putting together a duck stamp proposal for the pond rehab and maintenance project.

Wiley Slough Restoration Project: Manager Rotton monitored photo points on the Wiley Slough Restoration site.

Private Lands/Access

Hunter Concerns: Biologist Caldwell responded to questions regarding blind height, site attributes and use by a disabled hunter on a reservation site. Biologist Caldwell explained the site restrictions and site attributes to the hunter. Biologist Caldwell further suggested possible alternative private and public hunt opportunities found within Region 4.

Biologist Caldwell also responded to another hunter comment and suggestion regarding people occupying private lands site before the 4 a.m. occupancy standard. Biologist Caldwell informed the hunter of ways in which he could assist us with addressing the problem and measures that we will take in the future to help resolve it.

GOAL 4: BUILD AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATION BY SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

Wildlife Management

Radio Training: Assistant District Biologist Cyra assisted staff with obtaining radio training, answering questions, and assigning radio call numbers.

Mandatory Training: Many staff completed mandatory security awareness and globally harmonized system hazard communication training.

Biologist Danilson had IT staff install new digital photography manipulation software (Microsoft Image Composition Editor) on his computer and became familiar with this program while creating mosaics of snow goose flocks from multiple images taken during recent aerial photography surveys.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Areas

Klickitat Wildlife Area – Fire Hazard Reduction: Technician Davis continued to cut brush along Anderson Road on the Soda Springs Unit to finish and maintain the fuel break that was developed there a couple years ago as part of the program to strengthen and maintain this corridor as a wildfire fuels break. The previous work focused mostly on the tree limbing and thinning with the brush cutting component of the prescription as the next phase, so Technician Davis is sometimes having to contend with fairly heavy shrub growth. Davis completed about 1/2 mile of the work (both sides of the road) this week.

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

Wildlife Management

Midwinter Waterfowl Survey: District 10 Biologists Bergh and Miller began the annual Midwinter Waterfowl Inventory for 2013-2014. Surveys were conducted in Wahkiakum County this week. Regional survey assignments are the areas outside of the aerial survey of the Columbia River and other critical locations. Low water levels this fall and winter are definitely impacting count numbers, with the local area seven to nine inches below average rainfall, and many areas where we would normally see ducks and geese were empty.



Pintails on pond

Private Lands/Access

St. Helens Land Access Program: Biologist Stephens and Technician Sample continued to work with volunteers and Weyerhaeuser this week to facilitate weekday motorized access to the St Helens Tree Farm. This season's effort has been a success in that very little garbage dumping or vandalism occurred while the tree farm was open to the public and no accidents occurred on active logging and hauling roads. WDFW would like to sincerely thank all of the volunteers who contributed their time to make this season a success.

Wildlife Areas



Shillapoo Wildlife Area – Watchable Wildlife on the Vancouver Lowlands:

Large flocks of Snow geese have showed up in the Vancouver Lowlands, with the geese mostly being seen in harvested corn fields. Along with the Snow geese there are also large numbers of Canada geese and Sandhill cranes.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Management

Klickitat County Landowner Agreements: District Wildlife Biologist Anderson and Conflict Specialist McDonald continued with the development of the WDFW damage prevention program with livestock producers in Klickitat County. Activities that are part of the agreements include non-lethal actions designed to minimize the adverse effects of wildlife on livestock operations. Currently there are eight individual contracts with livestock producers involved in the program.

Wildlife Conflict: The congregation of elk on private agricultural lands has been increasing with most of the elk problems occurring in western Klickitat County, Wahkiakum County, and the Packwood/Randle Valley. Conflict Specialist McDonald met with a Trout Lake dairy owner who has been experiencing daily elk visits. His hazing efforts have not worked for more than 24 hours. The dairy owner placed his sled dogs around silage bags to deter the elk from breaking to the bags. A landowner preference permit has been issued, a master hunter has been called to the property, and Nite Guard Solar flashing lights will be placed around the silage bags.

Conflict Specialist McDonald also signed a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement (DPCA) with a BZ Corners orchard manager. The orchard has experienced damage by 80-90 elk that push down fences to browse on apple trees. The orchard will repair damaged fence lines and landowner damage access permits have been issued.

Conflict Specialist Conklin met with two Wahkiakum landowners and three landowners in Randle who are experiencing hay damage from elk and issued a noise device to one of the landowners. Conflict Specialist Conklin also met with a Cowlitz County landowner experiencing damage to Christmas trees and a Barley field from elk.

Winter Conditions

District 10 and Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Winter Conditions

Past Weather: December temperatures and precipitation were below normal. There was little snowfall or accumulation below 3,000 feet until the first week in December, when arctic air arrived lowering temperatures to well below normal for the time of year. Most areas between 2,500 feet and sea level only received a trace to a couple of inches of snow in December during two snowfall events.

Short-Term Forecast: Snow levels will range from 3,000 to 6,000 feet for the upcoming week. The 6-10 day forecast is for normal temperatures and above average precipitation and the 8-14 day forecast predicts average temperatures and precipitation.

Long-Term Forecast: The January forecast is for an equal chance for either above average, below average, or normal temperatures and precipitation. The three month forecast predicts below normal temperatures and an equal chance for above average, below average, or normal precipitation.

Habitat: Forage is available at all mid to lower elevations, with the landscape being snow free below 3,000 feet.

Snow Depths: Areas of mid to low elevations are snow free, with there being only minimal snow in elevations above 3,000 feet. Snowpack is less than 50% of average for the time of year.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. The first monthly winter elk survey was conducted on December 5. A total of 100 elk were observed on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area.

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 reported.

Public Contacts: None to report regarding winter conditions.

The Public is reminded the portion 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, 2014, to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

District 9 Winter Conditions

Past Weather: Precipitation in the South Cascades continues to be below normal for this time of the year as precipitation/snowpack is around 55% of normal as recorded at the Washington SNOTEL Snow/Precipitation site on Potato Hill near Mt Adams. Most snow accumulation is

currently above 5,000 feet. Night time temperatures are cold this week with warming during the day. There has been little precipitation this week.

Winter Severity: Elevations below 5,000 feet continue to be open throughout District 9 both the west and east side of the Cascades. 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 in the White Salmon River drainage. Those portions of Klickitat County east of Rock Creek have no snow accumulation and deer are reported in good condition.

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

Animal Concentrations: Deer are bunched in normal concentrations in good habitat at mid elevations east of Highway 97.

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

Mortality: One cow elk mortality was reported this week in Skamania County as a result of a train kill.

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

MOUNT SAINT HELENS ELK HERD
 2013/2014 WINTER CONDITIONS - SNO-PARK SNOW DEPTH,
 NRCS SNOTEL DATA, AND SNOWPACK

From web page <http://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/giffordpinchot/recreation/wintersports/?recid=31178&actid=91>
http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/cgi-bin/sno_narr3.pl
<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/snotel/Washington/washington.html>

SNOWPARKS:									
Name	Elevation		12/6/2013	12/13/2013	12/20/2013	12/27/2013	1/3/2014	1/10/2014	1/17/2014
MARBLE MT	2,700'		No report	4" new snow	No new report	No new report	No new report		
WAKEPISH	2,800'		No report		1-2" snow	1-2" snow	2" snow		

SNOWTEL STATIONS:

Name	Elevation	Stats	11/30-12/6	12/7-12/13	12/14-12/20	12/21-12/27	12/28-1/3	1/4-1/10	1/11-1/17
		Avg Snow							
JUNE LAKE	3,340'	Depth (inches)	0.66	5	5.3	7	6.7		
		Min Temp (F)	14	19	23	29	31		
		Max Temp (F)	45	27	50	54	51		
		Avg Temp (F)	30	22	36.2	38.3	39.5		
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	27	27	27.7	30.9	31.3		

Name	Elevation	Stats	11/30-12/6	12/7-12/13	12/14-12/20	12/21-12/27	12/28-1/3	1/4-1/10	1/11-1/17
		Avg Snow							
SPIRIT LAKE	3,520'	Depth (inches)	2.43	3	0.86	0.86	0		
		Min Temp (F)	11	18	21	29	30		
		Max Temp (F)	46	27	52	51	52		
		Avg Temp (F)	29	25	36.8	36.8	39.2		
		Year to date precipitation (inches)	17.5	17.9	18.3	22.1	22.7		

Name	Elevation	Stats	11/30-12/6	12/7-12/13	12/14-12/20	12/21-12/27	12/28-1/3	1/4-1/10	1/11-1/17
		Avg Snow							
PEPPER CREEK	2,140'	Depth (inches)	0.31	2	0.3	0.42	0		
		Min Temp (F)	14	16	24	28	29		
		Max Temp (F)	48	26	46	46	51		
		Avg Temp (F)	31.5	22	34.5	34.8	36		

		Year to date precipitation (inches)						
		11/30-12/6	12/7-12/13	12/14-12/20	12/21-12/27	12/28-1/3	1/4-1/10	1/11-1/17
Name	Elevation	Stats						
SHEEP CANYON	3,990'	13.1	13.5	13.6	15.3	15.6		
		Avg Snow						
		Depth (inches)						
		4		7	8.6	7.9		
		Min Temp (F)						
		12		20	28	29		
		Max Temp (F)						
		43		50	51	50		
		Avg Temp (F)						
		26		35.3	36.8	38.8		
		Year to date precipitation (inches)						
		23.1		24.4	27.8	28.4		

		Year to date precipitation (inches)						
		11/30-12/6	12/7-12/13	12/14-12/20	12/21-12/27	12/28-1/3	1/4-1/10	1/11-1/17
Name	Elevation	Stats						
CALAMITY	2500'	Avg Snow						
		Depth (inches)						
		1	5.5	0.1	0	0		
		Min Temp (F)						
		16	18	27	32	33		
		Max Temp (F)						
		47	27	55	52	53		
		Avg Temp (F)						
		31	23	39.2	41.2	42.3		
		Year to date precipitation (inches)						
		18.8	22	20.3	23.2	23.6		

Snowpack % of Avg Snow Water Equivalent		12/6/2013	12/13/2013	12/20/2013	12/27/2013	1/3/2014	1/10/2014	1/17/2014
JUNE LAKE		5%		13%	21%	14%		
SPIRIT LAKE		122%		100%	48%	33%		
SHEEP CANYON		20%		20%	27%	22%		

REGION 6

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Management

Deer and Elk Conflict Management – Satsop Elk: On December 30, 2014, Biologists Harris and Sundstrom along with Regional Program Manager Cope and Officer Cilk moved the elk north of HWY 12 with assistance from six master hunters and the Washington State Patrol. The goal was to push the elk north across HWY 12 and the Monte-Brady road. Once across the Monte-Brady road we had hoped to push them west. However, the elk had other ideas and took off east. Overall, the herding went well. The event involved two teams of herders and coordination with Fish and Wildlife Officers and the Washington State Patrol. The first team of herders pushed elk to the highway and then Fish and Wildlife Officers worked with State patrol to close the highway. Once elk were across the highway, the second team took over while the officers and patrol rushed to close the Monte-Brady road.

On January 3, 2014, Officer Alexander notified Biologist Harris that the elk had returned to the Goeres Farm on the south side of HWY 12. On January 4 Officer Cilk was called out because the elk were balled up by HWY 12 causing traffic issues.

On January 5, 2014, Biologists Harris and Sundstrom, Officers Alexander and James with assistance from several Master Hunters and the Washington State Patrol herded the elk back north over HWY 12. This time, a third team of herders were positioned to try and stop the elk from going east. Additionally, two Master Hunters with antlerless permits were positioned to harvest. Unfortunately, the hunters were not able to get good shots so the elk were herded north over the roadways. When the elk were positioned to move west across Moore Road, a driver refused a volunteer's request to let the elk cross before proceeding. This individual stopped his vehicle in front of the elk and they immediately took off at a run towards the east, while totally ignoring the herders.

These elk are causing a severe amount of damage in the area. At the Goeres Farm they have caused extensive damage to newly seeded grass, fences and pastures. Thankfully, the landowner is working with us and understands that we cannot just push the elk without developing a plan due to public safety concerns. Once Biologist Harris returns from the Game Workshop he will be aggressively working to resolve this problem for all the affected landowners.

Biologist Harris would like to thank all involved. Moving these elk is somewhat complex and involves a lot of moving parts. The assistance of wildlife staff, Enforcement, and Master Hunters is very much appreciated. Special mention should also go out to Washington State Patrol officers who assisted. Their ability to stop all east and west bound traffic at just the right time was exceptional.