

Wildlife Program

Week of March 21 – March 27, 2016

WOLF ACTIVITIES

Private Lands/Conflict Tour: Region 1 Private Lands and Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna, Region 5 Private Lands and Wildlife Conflict Supervisor Meyer, Biologist Shepherd, and Technician Bendixen went on a field trip in District One looking at private lands, ungulate, and wolf issues.

Domestic Dog Incidents: Biologist Shepherd discussed a recent visit this week by the Dirty Shirt wolf pack with owners of two dogs in Burnt Valley that were engaged by the pack in January. Biologist Shepherd discussed fencing options with a Red Marble area owner of dog that suffered significant injuries from an unknown cause on the periphery of the Stranger pack territory.

U.S. Forest Service Meeting: Biologist Shepherd met with the Colville National Forest Range staff members to discuss the upcoming permittee meetings, grazing season, range riders, working cooperatively, wildfires, and strategies for future seasons.

Wolf Locations: Supervisor McCanna was contacted by a producer in the Huckleberry and Stranger wolf territories inquiring about last known collar locations as her goats were acting very nervous Friday morning. McCanna provided last known collar locations and expressed the importance of non lethals at all times as many wolves are on the landscape without collars along with other predators present.

New Oregon Wolf in Asotin County: Biologist Earl was informed of a collared wolf from Oregon that has travelled north into District 3. The report from Oregon was:

You have another collared visitor. Introducing OR35, a gray adult female that dispersed from the Minam pack. OR35 has been documented several times during the winter with a black male, most recently mid-February. The pair has traveled considerably since December, likely looking for a territory of their own. We have not had a visual on OR35 since February and therefore do not know if she still has a partner. OR35 is wearing a Vectronic Iridium Survey collar. Satellites willing, locations are collected every 3 hours and downloads come in from this collar at 10pm and 10am, so my thought is to send these messages after the 10am download until we see if she stays.

Okanogan Wolf Monitoring- Loup Loup Pack: Science Technician Erlenbach checked a remote camera deployed on a deer kill in the Loup Loup pack territory that yielded several pictures of at least one wolf. While in transit to set up the cameras, the crew found tracks of five animals travelling together, which is consistent with reports of 5-6 animals in this pack from earlier this winter.



Loup Loup pack wolf – remote camera, WDFW

Okanogan Wolf Monitoring- Lookout Pack: In the Lookout Pack territory, cameras captured photos of a minimum of two wolves travelling together. We still have not obtained any photos of the collared breeding female since last October and the reproductive status of this pack is unknown. Additional monitoring of territories will continue in an effort to help us monitor pack status and identify likely travel routes; this information will help inform potential trapping efforts later this spring.



Lookout Pack wolf – remote camera, USFS

Follow-Up on Wolf Reports: In addition, Biologist Fitkin deployed a remote camera in an area between Winthrop and Mazama where we have several interesting wolf reports, but not verification of wolves to date. If wolves are present in this area, they may be separate from the other two known packs down valley.

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Turkeys: Spring is in the air in northeastern Washington and the turkeys are “strutting their stuff”. The two photographs below were taken this week in not so secluded areas not far away from Colville.



Channeled Scablands Spring Waterfowl Project: Biologist Atamian ran the Lake Creek ground route, counts were up, 2017 ducks and 127 geese, over double the previous week’s total of 972. Majority of ducks were coots (650) on Coffeepot Lake. However, for the first time more pintails (244) and widgeon (378) were counted than mallards (194). Biologist Lowe ran the Tyler & Ewan ground routes; conditions were very windy which made counts and species ID on white-capped Sprague Lake particularly difficult. With recent rains, the northern section of the Tyler route had considerable sheetwater in agricultural fields which was being used by a variety of dabbling ducks, including mallards, pintail and widgeon.



Double crested cormorant on Sprague Lake

Pintail (left) and green-winged teal (right) on the Tyler-Ewan survey route.



Lincoln County Prairie Grouse

Project: Biologist Atamian checked on the locations of the two remaining GPS marked males; both are alive. Atamian worked with Grouse Technician Walker on radio tracking, triangulation, data entry, etc. Walker tracked radio marked hens, ran a corvid/raptor survey, surveyed the sage grouse lek, and worked on the camera traps for getting band resighting (see image below).



Male sage grouse with white over blue leg bands on right, photo from game camera setup on lek by Walker.

Ferruginous hawk survey: Biologists Wik and Vekasy continued surveying for Ferruginous Hawks this week. So far we have nine sites occupied by pairs and three sites with single birds working on nests, and a couple sightings of birds not clearly associated with territories, out of 23 Priority 1 territories. Volunteers have checked a number of Priority 2 sites, mostly nest platforms, with no reports of occupied sites to date.



One of five occupied ferruginous hawk nest platforms

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program/ CP33: Biologist Earl met with Natural Resource Conservation Service staff members in Pomeroy to discuss new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program signups and coordinate seed mixes and installation. Earl also discussed potential CP33 sites within the Garfield County.

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

Presentation: Biologist Thorne Hadley and WDFW Enforcement Officer John gave presentations to a Career Choices Class at College Place High School.

Rustlers Gulch Kiosk Installation – Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Palmer, Access Manager Dziekan, and a very helpful neighbor installed a new kiosk at the west access parking area, along Horseshoe Lake Road, on Rustler’s Gulch Wildlife Area. Further improvements are planned for this location including removal of old post and cable barrier and installation of large boulders and rail fencing to line the perimeter of the parking area. While still on site, Palmer and Dziekan witnessed two dirt bikes and could hear at least one other riding on the wildlife area. Such motorized use is not authorized and the motorcycle riders were apparently aware of this as they turned around and fled when they saw WDFW staff members. Palmer called Enforcement and tried to intercept the riders at another access location to no avail.

Asotin Creek WA –Clarkston H.S. Career Fair: Biologist Woodall attended the Clarkston High School Career Fair. A good number of students stopped by and asked questions about a future career in natural resource management.

Bio Woodall attending a high school career fair



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

Ride Along: Supervisor McCanna invited Region Five Private Lands and Wildlife Conflict Supervisor Meyer over for a three day tour throughout Region One. Thanks to staff members in Region One, Meyer was able to see private lands access program implementation, habitat work that has been completed and potential habitat sites. They discussed conservation planning for those sites, wolf locations and interactions on the landscape. Meyer had opportunity to meet with a producer signed up in a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for deer, elk, and turkey damage throughout all three districts in region one. During the tour Meyer noted the size of region one and the vast changing landscape from northeast to southeast Washington.

REGION 2

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Okanogan Deer Management: Biologist Heinlen started conducting spring deer surveys. Deer are concentrated on traditional spring ranges even within last years burned areas. Early results suggest greater than average fawn mortality this winter, although final results won't be known for 2-3 weeks.

Spring range within the Okanogan Complex Fire boundary - J. Heinlen



Sharp-tailed Grouse: Biologist Heinlen started spring surveys for sharp-tailed grouse within the district. Last year's wild fires burned large amounts of occupied habitat making us curious about how the birds would react this spring. Early surveys have found birds displaying on traditional breeding areas (leks). Additional surveys will be conducted through next month to provide us information on the current status of the population and response to the fires.



Sharp-tailed grouse displaying on a burned lek – J. Heinlen

Wildfire Habitat Restoration – Douglas County: Private Lands Biologist Braaten with help from Private Lands Biologist Baarstad recently secured \$1800.00 in restoration funds from the Mule Deer Foundation. Money will be spent to purchase native riparian plantings which will restore Mule Deer and critical Sharp-tailed grouse winter habitat on private lands in Cold Springs Basin on Dyer Hill. This area burned last year in Chelan Fire. A work party is planned for April 11th to plant shrubs. Landowner is thrilled and grateful the WDFW and Mule Deer Foundation are assisting with this effort.



Assessing damage after Chelan Fire.



Burned Riparian areas from Chelan Fire.

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

Okanogan Wildlife Viewing: WDFW Okanogan District Wildlife Biologist Fitkin of Winthrop reports that with many low-elevation lakes now melting out, migratory waterfowl are abundant on open water, particularly in the Okanogan Watershed. Both trumpeter and tundra swans, plus goldeneye, bufflehead, ring-neck ducks, and hooded mergansers, are visible on Connors and Forde lakes on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. Green-up on the Chiliwist Wildlife Area is in full effect and numerous other bird and wildflower species can be seen right now. Large groups of mule deer are visible on greened-up, south-facing slopes throughout the District. Fitkin also

notes amphibians are beginning to get active in the lower elevation wetlands. Pacific tree frogs and spadefoot toads are beginning to actively call and later in the month egg masses and tadpoles will be evident.

Wild Turkey Hunting Clinic Preparations: Private Land Biologist Braaten met with Hunter Education Chuck Ray, WDFW to go over presentations for upcoming Turkey clinic April 2nd in Wenatchee.

Fish Lake Access Area Alert –The secondary primitive boat launch at Fish Lake #1 is eroding away due to a creek that jumped its banks. The creek is still running high with no signs of slowing down. More than likely when the weather turns a little warmer there will be even more increased flows



Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW



Fish Lake #1 secondary launch flooding. Photo by .M DeHart

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

Senator Murray Staff Sinlahekin Tour –Wildlife Area Manager Haug met with Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Swedberg, Regional Director Brown, Regional Wildlife Program Manager Monda and two of Senator Patty Murray’s staff members on the Sinlahekin to tour areas affected by last years’ fires and discuss the need for more prescribed burning as a tool to manage our lands. The staff members, John and Anna, had great questions and were appreciated the tour and Dale’s discussion regarding prescribed burning and fire ecology.



Dale Swedberg, Matt Monda and Jim Brown discussing fire ecology with Sen. Murray staffers John and Anna.

Okanogan Complex/Twisp River Wildfire: Okanogan Lands Forester Jamie Bass contacted Washington State Parks Arborist Robert Fimbel to finalize a game plan for a field visit next week to obtain a proposal for assessment for the hazard trees on the Okanogan County Wildlife Areas affected by the Carlton Complex. Wildlife Area Manager Furnari provided feedback to Okanogan Lands Manager Swedberg concerning a DFW document he was drafting about Wildlife Areas responsibilities to maintain and repair fences that are apparently deemed shared by neighbors. This will be a document for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) representatives.



Snow melt runoff hasn’t exceeded culvert’s reduced capacity – Photo by Sherry Furnari

Furnari and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Troyer toured the Big Buck Unit (via accessible road areas) to evaluate site conditions and snow levels. She took several photos and provided them to CAMP Engineer Sanich and Okanogan Lands Manager Swedberg to try and determine a timeline to schedule FEMA site visits. No erosional issues noted at predictable problem locations, yet.

Big Buck Unit's Frost Lake: Evaluation of snow levels and accessibility – Photo by Sherry Furnari



Carlton Complex Wildfire: Wildlife Area Manager Furnari and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Troyer toured several areas in the Carlton Complex Wildfire perimeter looking for issues, while showing him some of the dispersed management units on the Wildlife Area. Since the county decided to keep Upper Beaver Creek Rd. plowed open this year (to providing snowmobile access on U.S. Forest Service newly approved trails), it provided the opportunity for others to illegally snowmobile on the Wildlife Area and poach burned Douglas firs (from U.S. Forest Service and Wildlife Area lands) along the accessible roadway. Two sections of the county-maintained road have erosional issues along Wildlife Area lands.



Upper beaver creek road erosion along hillside and embankment – Photo by Sherry Furnari

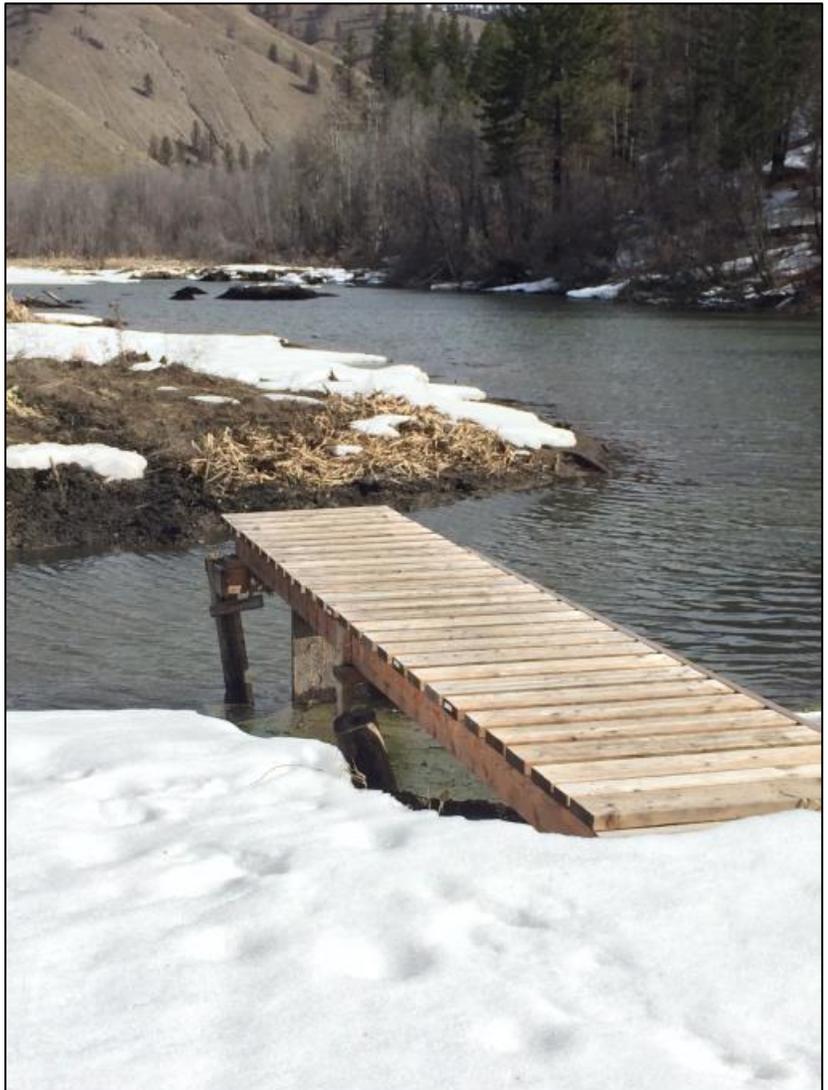
Texas Creek Road Issue: Wildlife Area Manager Furnari and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Troyer reviewed the Texas Creek Unit mentioned last week by Habitat Biologist Hofmann. Besides this obvious sluffing spot, other portions of the roadway display cracking within one foot along the edge of the roadway that haven't slid yet.

Texas Creek Rd. sloughing into Texas Creek – Photo by Sherry Furnari



Wenner Lakes/Chalfa Dam: Wildlife Area Manager Furnari and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Troyer snowshoed out to Wenner Lakes to evaluate snow and lake water levels. Although water was still running through the dam system's culverts/pipes, the lake had more water in it as well as the settling pond noted since her last winter site visit. CAMP Engineer Matson & his group decided to postpone the pre-construction meeting for next week and instead, go out to the site to siphon out the lake and check for clogs.

Wenner Lakes/Chalfa Dam winter snow and water level evaluation trip – Photo by Sherry Furnari





(Above) Road Conditions in Douglas County



(Left) Sharp-tailed grouse on Lek– Douglas County- Photos by Eric Braaten

(Below) Sharp-tailed grouse flushing from Lek in Douglas County- Photos by Eric Braaten





Sparrow nest with nestlings- Photo by Devon Comstock



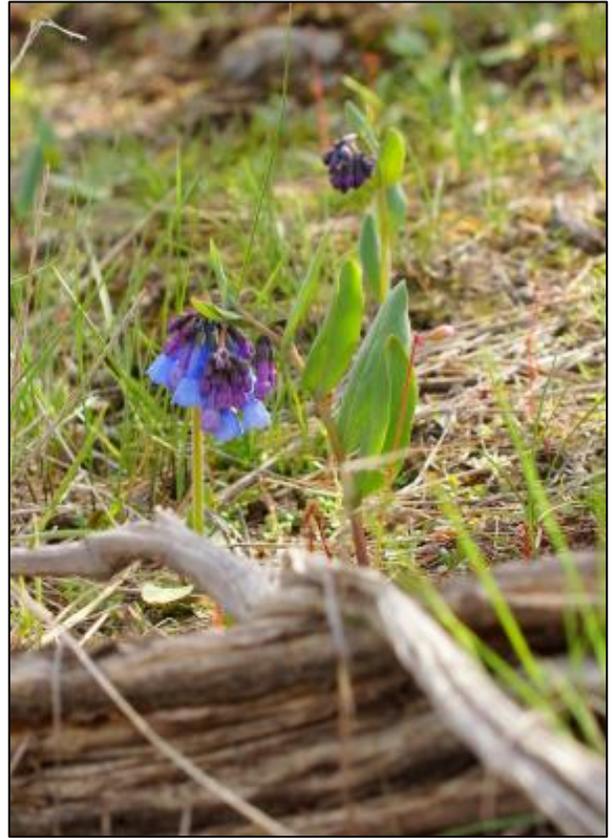
Active bald eagle nest- Photo by Devon Comstock



Okanogan deer spring Okanogan with snow lingering at higher elevations – Photo by J. Heinlen



A group of turkeys on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area- Photo by Justin Haug



Bluebells aka Mertensia spp., coloring up the hillsides on Carter Mountain- Photo by Justin Haug



Silver Hill area on the Scotch Creek WLA- Photo by Jim Olson

REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Sandhill Cranes at Sunnyside Wildlife Area: Natural Resource Technician Kaelber conducted a survey of Sandhill cranes using the wildlife area. Over 1,000 cranes are now utilizing the wildlife area, primarily around the Windmill Ranch unit. In addition, staff members set up a trail camera in circle eight near an area with heavy use to get better pictures of the cranes on the wildlife area.

Cottonwood Fire Restoration: Wildlife Area Manager Confer Morris spoke with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Bugle Conservation Editor Paul Queneau, and provided information for a brief article on the Cottonwood fire restoration seeding that the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundaiton helped fund.

Mellotte Feed Site elk numbers: 0 animals.

The warmer weather and associated green up finally brought feeding to an end at the beginning of the week.

Elk have ranged out across Clemans Mountain and were in seasonally good condition when they left the feed site.

Oak Creek Feed Site: Feeding operations at Oak Creek wrapped up on Monday after elk started coming in very late for feeding and were leaving hay behind.

Beaver at Tim's Pond: Wildlife Area Manager Huffman checked on Tim's Pond, finding a lot of beaver activity with trees and brush down in numerous areas. The water is still flowing out of the pond on the east end. Huffman is assuming this has something to do with the beaver(s) that are now residing there; they have somehow raised the water level in this ground water fed pond.

Oak Creek Wood Project: Wildlife Area Manager Huffman checked on status of the large wood replenishment project completed in 2014-15 on Oak Creek by the Yakama Nation. Huffman found that high flows had not moved the logs much, and the stream was looking great, with sediment backed up behind some logs and scouring occurring in other areas. The stream was flowing in multiple channels and had built up a lot of additional debris and sediment.

New pool along Oak Creek; materials were deposited just downstream making multiple channels. The large wood project seems to be doing what was intended and wood is not moving much even during high flows.



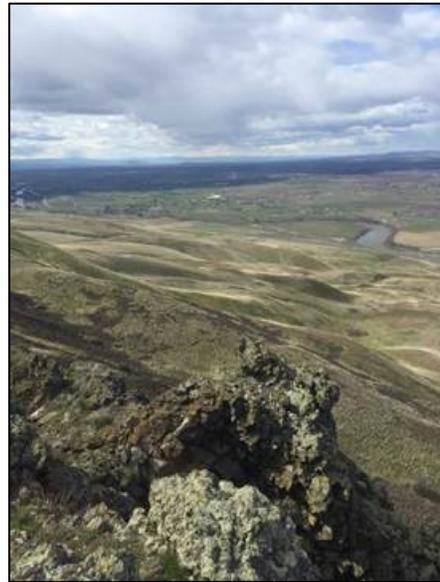
Ferruginous Hawk Surveys and Territories: District Biologist Fidorra spent much of the week surveying Ferruginous Hawk territories and working on landowner access and volunteer, partner, and staff coordination. Three FEHA occupied sites have been located thus far. Fidorra prepared arrangements for a Bureau of Land Management and WDFW survey of Juniper Dunes in the coming week.



Biologist Blatz and a volunteer survey the Horse Heaven Hills and a prairie falcon pair located there.

Ferruginous Hawk Surveys near Prosser, WA: Private Lands Biologist Stutzman did three Ferruginous Hawk surveys around Prosser later in the week. No hawks were seen, and the nests were either in disrepair or absent altogether. Two Prairie Falcons were seen.

Surveying for Ferruginous Hawks in high winds provided Biologist Stutzman with a nice view of the Yakima Valley.



Bighorn Sheep: Biologist Bernatowicz and Natural Resource Technician Leuck aerially surveyed the Quilomene herd. 162 sheep were observed. The total count was a recent high, but only 17 lambs (23 per 100 ewes) were observed. The last two years, lamb recruitment has been similar. The reasons for the low recruitment are unknown. Cougars are possibly one reason and a dead cougar was observed in the cliffs near the sheep on the survey.

Biologist Bernatowicz reviewed and commented on data provided by Section Manager Harris for a presentation at the National Wild Sheep and Goat Conference in May.

Deer Study: Biologist Bernatowicz responded to two more collar deer mortalities. The carcasses were heavily scavenged, but it appeared both died from winter starvation. Sixteen collared deer have died this winter. Annual survival is now under 70% with over a month left in the biological year. At the end of the week, another deer had gone on mortality mode. MIT staff members will probably check on the deer next week.

Colockum Elk Survey: Biologists Bernatowicz and Moore tallied counts from photos and Moore ran the visibility model. During the survey, 5,018 elk were seen. The final population estimate for the surveyed portion of winter range was 5,087 with 28 calves and 16 bulls per 100 cows. Total elk numbers were down about 1,000 (17%) from last spring. Bull numbers were up substantially, and this is the first time the Colockum herd has technically reached bull objectives on the winter range. The bulls likely are often outside the survey area and/or in timber in most years. Antlerless harvest and winter mortality were fairly high in winter 2015-2016. Bernatowicz talked with a person who rode from Wenatchee to Vantage and was concerned with the high number of winter elk mortalities observed.

Other: Biologist Bernatowicz talked with a reporter regarding the impact of the winter on local deer and elk populations.

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

Installation of Vehicle Counters in Oak Creek Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Huffman loaded the Ranger and drove to the North Fork Cowiche Area to install vehicle counters on the open roads. Only two counters were installed, as the third road still has some snow and was not safely passable. The area is seeing a lot of use. In addition, the roads received damage from the high flows in the creek. Huffman took several pictures of mud holes and erosion to be used in the Recreation and Conservation Office Non-highway and Off-road Vehicle Activities grant that will be submitted this fall.

Road on the NF Cowiche Creek with flood damage and a log blocking the road. People have been making a new road that can be seen on the right side of the picture.



Signs and Maps in Wildlife Areas: Natural Resource Technician Kass and Natural Resource Worker Farias installed a new information sign purchased by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The kiosk was installed at western end of French's Ridge Rd and parallel to the road hopefully to reduce people shooting at it. Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Berry and Natural Resource Worker Farias also installed a sign and map on the Cowiche parking lot kiosk.



New sign and map of the Cowiche Unit



New information sign on the French's Ridge Rd.

Wildlife Area Hunter Registration Data: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Buser began crunching numbers from the hunter registration data collected throughout the hunting season on the wildlife area. On the Snake River half of the wildlife area, 982 waterfowl hunters harvested 2,403 ducks, for an average of 2.4 ducks/hunter. This is slightly lower than the area's historical season averages of 1,022 hunters taking 2,698 ducks, for a harvest rate of 2.6 ducks/hunter.

Vehicles on Closed Roads: Wildlife Area Manager Lopushinsky worked with enforcement from both Regions 2 and 3 to try and address reports of elk shed antler hunters driving vehicles on closed roads and off roads. Lopushinsky patrolled roads and looked for areas where shed hunters are driving closed roads.

A closed road blocked with felled dead trees by WDFW staff in 2015. Note cleared trees and vehicle tracks from shed antler hunters.



Wenas Target Shooting Proposal: Wildlife Area Manager Confer Morris worked with Environmental Planner Posner to draft the scoping notice for public meetings and a fact sheet for the Wenas Target Shooting proposal. She also participated in a conference call with Posner and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Grant Manager Behan to discuss the National Environmental Policy Act process questions regarding Target Shooting Environmental Assessment.

Confer Morris and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Taylor met with a sub-group of the district team to provide additional information and take input on the Wenas target shooting proposal.

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

Wildlife Education Corp Awards: Manager Huffman worked on awards for the upcoming Wildlife Education Corp (WEC) awards dinner. Volunteers will be given service awards for years spent volunteering at Oak Creek. The dinner is set for Wednesday April 13th.

Forms for Private Land Owners: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel met with several landowners in Thorp and at Weaver Road this week to get signatures on forms required by U.S. Department of Agriculture to work on private land. All major landowners have signed these forms.

Elk Hazing between Robinson and Manastash Creeks: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel hazed elk each day this week from the area between Robinson and Manastash Creeks. Elk are moving and have split up into bulls and cows. Several cows moved north of Watt Canyon to agriculture areas, these were hazed back.



Elk being moved toward re-entry gate, elk wouldn't use the gate.

Elk Hazing North of I-90: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel hazed elk north of I-90 near the Ryegrass summit. One elk was hit on the eastbound lane during the previous night.

Elk Damage in West Valley: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel was contacted by a landowner on Winchester Road in West Valley about a break in the elk fence. Wetzel repaired the elk fence in several locations in that vicinity.



Elk fence washout repair.

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

Channeled Scablands Weed Management Area Workshop: Acting Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Buser and Natural Resource Technician Kaelber attended the Channeled Scablands Weed Management Area Workshop at Cheney. The workshop provided useful information about weed control relevant to the wildlife area, plus provided recertification credits towards staff pesticide applicator's licenses.

Flooding on Cowiche Unit of Oak Creek Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Huffman and Habitat Biologist Bartrand visited the flooded area on the Cowiche Unit, along the SF Cowiche Creek, to see if there were any short term fixes to repair the road and keep the flood waters to a minimum. Water is still flowing across the road on the south side of the bridge. Bartrand recommended removing some debris from above the bridge and using larger rock on the road. However, the stream channel appears to have changed for the time being and will probably flow water across the road except during low summer flows.

Powerline Down on the Cowiche Unit: Wildlife Area Manager Huffman received a phone call of a powerline down on the Cowiche Unit from the grazing permittee. They were accessing their adjacent private property and noticed the wire down. Huffman contact Pacific Power and helped guide the technician into the area over the phone.

Repairs to Flood Damaged Breakaway in Elk Fence: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Berry, Natural Resource Technician Kass, and Natural Resource Worker Farias replaced a flood damaged breakaway in elk fence adjacent to Snow Mountain Ranch. The area was finally accessible to complete the repairs. Old fence material still needs to be removed, and the fence in the creek bottom needs to be repaired when flows drop.



Before and after pictures of the elk fence on the Cowiche Unit that was damaged during flooding several weeks ago. The small seasonal channel is now large and deep.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE



Photo by Kim Chandler

Oregon Spotted Frog: Biologist DeBruyn surveyed reported new locations for Oregon spotted frog ovipositions along roadsides in Whatcom County near historical breeding areas. Maintenance of roadways (mowing) creates favorable Oregon spotted frog habitat. Egg masses at two locations had been disrupted by flooding but one was viable and was in the post-hatching stage.

Flooded Roadside Habitat Supporting Oregon Spotted Frog Egg Masses.



North Cascades Elk Survey: Biologists DeBruyn and Yarborough participated in the annual helicopter elk surveys. The surveys are co-funded by WDFW and the Point Elliott Treaty Tribes. There is another round of surveys before the data will be entered and analyzed.



Group of elk photographed from the helicopter. Photos are used to confirm counts. Note animal with collar.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Report: Two additional swan mortalities were recorded in Skagit County this week. Total swan mortalities have now reached 346. Along with recording two swan mortalities, Technician Trejo gave a presentation on avian conservation and management to Sultan Elementary third graders. The presentation was focused on why and how biologists band, collar, and use radio telemetry to conserve wildlife populations. Students received an introduction to radio telemetry, and then got to use telemetry to find a marked duck decoy.

Trejo continued to compile and construct maps, graphs, and other data to be included in the final Swan Mortality and Morbidity Report.

	Lead suspect	Powerline suspect	Other trauma	Undetermined	Feather Pile	Total
Whatcom	166	36	2	22	32	258
Skagit	18	20	2	7	6	53
Snohomish	8	22	0	3	2	35
	192	78	4	32	40	346
Percents	55.49%	23%	1%	9%	12%	100.00%

Common Loons: Biologist Smith monitored local lakes for early loon activity. Single adult loons were seen at two local lakes. Loons appear to still be moving about and undecided as to their choice for the perfect nesting location. Placement of nesting platforms will occur in the coming weeks.



Common loon foraging on the Tolt Reservoir



Young black-tailed deer seen during loon monitoring

Fisher Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances: At the request of Olympia staff members who are on annual leave, District 13 staff members made preliminary contact with a landowner in Snohomish County to provide them with information regarding the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances opportunity for landowners to consider relative to potential listing of the Fisher.

Wolverine Project Update: District 13 staff members discussed the scope of the upcoming four state wolverine survey with the species lead in Olympia. Ideas were shared on how best to accomplish the surveys that will take place at high elevation sites in winter.

Seattle City Light Proposals: Biologist Yarborough reviewed and rated the Seattle City Lights Wildlife Research Program grants.

Stillwater Unit: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm reports that Sound Salmon Solutions conducted a volunteer planting event along Harris Creek. This is the second of three scheduled events that will complete the planting requirements for the Harris Creek Restoration Project. Seven volunteers from Whale Scouts planted approximately 90 bare root conifers over a 0.10 acre area.

Lake Terrell English Ivy Removal: A volunteer worked at one of the Lake Terrell access points to remove noxious English ivy. He filled six large garbage bags with the ivy which Wildlife Area Manager Kessler took to the landfill.

Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association British Petroleum Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Project: The Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association hosted local high school students for two days of tree and shrub plantings on the British Petroleum unit. Wildlife Area Manager Kessler made and posted signs on the property to inform recreational users of the planting project. He also monitored the area during the project to make sure there were no conflicts.

Hovander House Bat Houses: Natural Resource Technician Deyo worked to complete the new maternity bat house which will be installed adjacent to the Hovander House at Whatcom County's Hovander Park. Wildlife Area Manager Kessler coordinated with the Ferndale High School wood shop, who have completed the construction of two Rocket Bat Boxes for the same site. The boxes are planned to be installed this week in preparation for the return of the large colony of bats

Capital Budget Requests: Project Coordinator Brokaw completed drafts of capital budget request materials to ask for funds to develop a parking area on the Samish River Unit, secure waterfowl forage and hunting lands in the Skagit delta, and to contribute matching funding for Leque Island Estuary Restoration Project construction grants.

North Leque Island Project: Projects Coordinator Brokaw met with a neighboring landowner of property west of North Leque Island. They reviewed a potential future project that WDFW is starting to plan which involves removing the rest of the relict perimeter dike, reconnecting several channels in the marsh that drain to Skagit Bay, and plugging the large channel that currently drains the area that is aimed at the landowner's dike. The landowner is supportive of the project because it will likely reduce maintenance needs on her dike, and will also benefit fish and other wildlife. Following the meeting, Brokaw met with the farmer who leases the field for agriculture to review the project. He also requested, received, and reviewed data provided by the Stillaguamish and Swinomish Tribes regarding juvenile Chinook salmon use in the area.

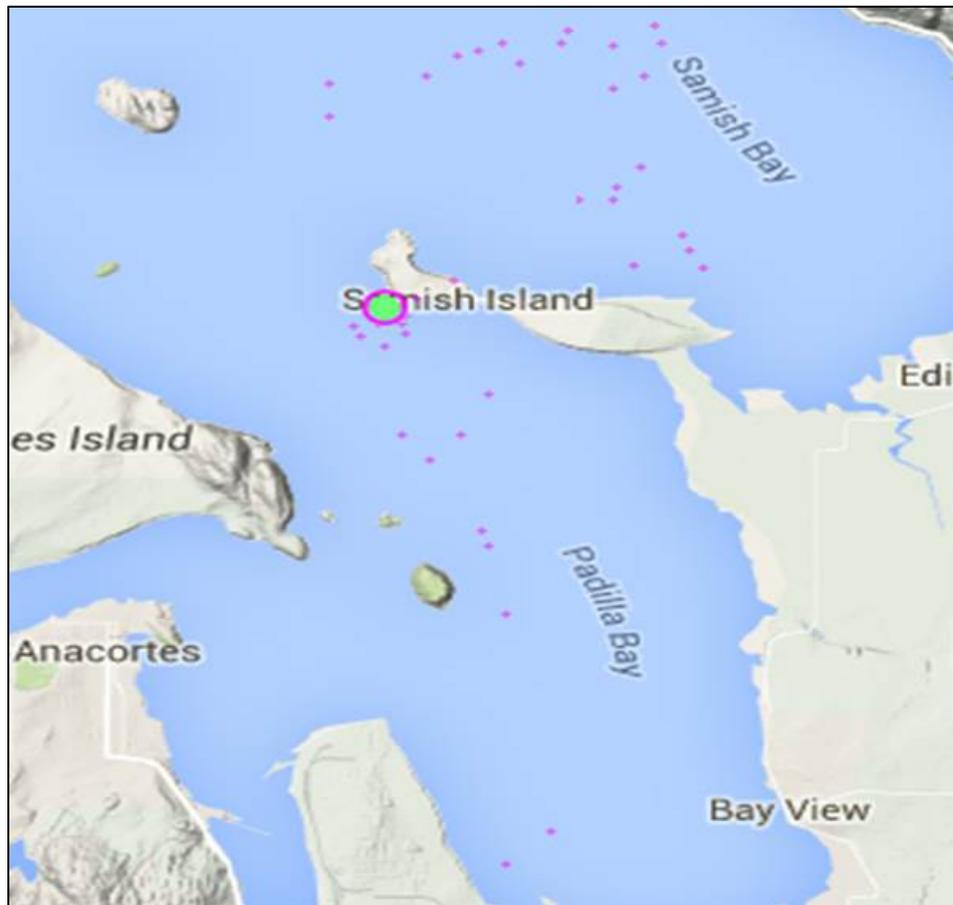
Leque Island Estuary Restoration Project: Projects Coordinator Brokaw provided materials for The Nature Conservancy to include in a grant application to the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA) to fund construction of the project. Additionally, he followed up on questions asked by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) review panel at the site tour the previous week.

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

Western High Arctic Brant

Capture: Natural Resource Technician Otto assisted Biologist DeBruyn and the statewide waterfowl program in the successful capture of black brant geese in Skagit County. This was the first use of a rocket net to capture brant in Washington State. Otto continued to organize and keep rocket net materials operational throughout the week.

*Rocket net being fired to capture black brant (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) in Skagit County.*



Initial locations of brant from satellite data. Large dot is capture location

Hunting Pamphlet Review: Staff members reviewed the draft hunting pamphlet and corrected several errors.

Lake Terrell Bass Fishing Tournament: Wildlife Area Manager Kessler met onsite with a member of the Borderline Bassin Contenders bass fishing club who will be hosting a fishing tournament in two weeks. The tournament will now be an open tournament, with more than 20 boats attending. They discussed and planned out the parking arrangements for the event. The group will have a parking attendant to help pack more boat trailers into the available space.

Island Unit Site Visit: Projects Coordinator Brokaw, Habitat Planner Friebel, and Skagit Wildlife Area staff members visited the Island Unit to make a materials list and plan installation of a water level data logger adjacent to the Barnfield Tidegate that is leaking. Data will be used to determine the type of tidegate that should be installed as a replacement. Additionally, the group visited a location in the Deepwater restoration area that could be considered for a future restoration effort, which would involve reconnecting a distributary channel.

A few thousand waterfowl were using the Deepwater Restoration Area, which has been subjected to tidal influence for about 15 years.



Bureau of Land Management National Monument Planning Session: District 13 staff members attended an all day workshop with the cooperating partners who are assisting the Bureau of Land Management staff members with the development of a management plan for the 1000 acre San Juan Islands National Monument.

Spring Bear Hunt: Private Lands Biologist Wingard prepared materials for pre-hunt coordination meetings for both the North Skagit and Monroe Spring Bear hunt permittees. Wingard also fielded several phone calls and answered questions from spring bear hunters.

Whidbey Island Private Land Deer Hunt: Private Lands Biologist Wingard began gathering and preparing information to renew the contract for Private Land deer hunting on Whidbey Island. This is a unique opportunity to hunt deer on a large block of private forest land on Whidbey Island. This hunt has been in place since 2012, and partners have reported positive experiences and look forward to continuing the opportunity.

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

Potential Heron Rookery: Biologist Yarborough accompanied Habitat Biologist Ingram to map a heron rookery near Lynden. The rookery was not previously documented in the Priority Habitat Species program.

Upper Snoqualmie Valley Elk Management Meeting: Biologist Smith attended a meeting of the Upper Snoqualmie Valley Elk Management Group with Research Scientist Kertson, who provided an update of his Cougar research project. The project update was very well received by the 20+ in attendance.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need Planning: District 13 staff members submitted vitae and other details regarding staff members from Districts 12, 13, and 14 as required prior to being considered eligible for housing at Friday Harbor Labs in the San Juan Islands. Housing to WDFW staff members is sometimes available and is considerably cheaper than other options in the islands.

Wildlife Conflict Monitoring & Management: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman received a call from a Skagit County resident inquiring on how the state manages damage caused by elk on agricultural lands. The caller was advised of current damage mitigation efforts taking place along with controlled and monitored hunting in damage areas. The caller was also referred to the wildlife interaction rules established through the Washington Administrative Code. Witman learned after speaking with the caller, that he is also a large landowner in New Mexico that has elk damage in agricultural areas. The caller was interested in what information he could glean from Washington that may be helpful in dealing with elk related conflict in New Mexico.

Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman met with two landowners in the Acme area of Whatcom County and completed damage prevention cooperative agreements to mitigate elk related damage. The two landowners have been hazing elk and were provided additional hazing materials to assist them. One landowner was interested in trying to drive the elk up onto Washington Department of Natural Resources lands with multiple people hazing the elk further away from his property. A similar effort was effective last year. That effort reduced observed elk numbers from 28 animals to less than 10. Witman will coordinate the hazing effort after the first week of April.

Deer Damage in Whatcom County: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman met with a berry producer in Whatcom County experiencing deer damage to raspberry and blueberry crops. The producer was issued two permits to remove deer causing damage. All harvested animals are to be donated to charity.

Volunteer Coordination: Biologist Smith continued to coordinate with volunteers and landowners involved in ongoing fence repair work. Smith also coordinated with South Sound Master Hunter permit holders. Seven of the 10 Master Hunters have been used this season to

hunt properties experiencing damage due to elk. Smith also completed entering Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements into the system.

Master Hunter Coordination and Tribal Co-Management Fencing Project Coordination:

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman and Natural Resource Technician Cogdal coordinated Master Hunter volunteers and Tribal Co-manager assistance for the completion of an elk exclusionary fence in Day Creek. The group was able to install over 13,500 feet of fence wire in one day to complete the 42 acre project at Hinton Ranches.



A recently constructed elk exclusionary fence line in Skagit County. This was the third major fencing project completed in Day Creek in the last year and puts the overall Day Creek project at approximately 85% complete.



Another example of an electric fence in Skagit County.



Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm removed hunting-related signage and replaced it with seasonal appropriate informational signage at all of the hunting units.

Cherry Valley Unit: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm met with Drainage District 7 to review lease access agreements and access road improvements near the Waterwheel Creek Project site. Boehm continues to coordinate with the District on planned repairs to the breach that occurred over this past flood season.

Volunteer Opportunities: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm met with two Master Hunter volunteers who are looking for community service projects. Trail clearing, windfall removal, and general maintenance projects were discussed. Boehm continues to work with Hunter Education and Volunteer Coordinator Dazey to connect Master Hunter volunteers with projects on the Snoqualmie Units.

Fir Island Farm: Wildlife Area Manager Rotton attended pre-construction and damage and debris assessment meeting with Restoration Project Manager Friebel, WDFW Construction Site Monitor Yarborough, and IMCO Construction Coordinator Howard. The group examined damage area and debris to develop a plan forward for the upcoming construction season.



Fir Island Farm Restoration team review the debris and damage following the storms.

Skagit Headquarters: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove graded and filled potholes on roads and dikes at the Headquarters Unit, including further dike-top grading to repair areas damaged in the recent extreme high tide event.

Capsized Boat on Freshwater Slough: A capsized boat was reported to WDFW staff members on Freshwater Slough, Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove, Natural Resource Specialist Meis and Officer Lucci located the capsized boat in Freshwater Slough near the end of the Headquarters Unit spur dike. Efforts were made to find identifying marks and to flip and haul the boat out of the channel. Attempts were unsuccessful, and a buoy was attached to mark the boat. Cosgrove notified the Skagit County Sheriff Department and checked local boat launches to see if anybody had launched recently. No trucks and trailers were seen. It is suspected the boat was washed off of the shore of Camano Island during recent high tides and south-west wind storms.

Freshwater Slough Clean- up: Natural Resource Specialist Meis reposted safety zone signs affected from the high tide levels at the headquarters unit. Meis also picked up other debris that has floated up on the dikes like parts of footbridges and bird nest boxes.

Duck Stamp Project: Biologist Rotton participated in a conference call to rank Duck Stamp project for this interim year. Region 4 had a good number of projects for this round. There is limited funding available for the operational funding category but there is some money available for the capital funding. Project rankings are due to Kraege next week and then will be presented to the Waterfowl Advisory group.

Americans with Disabilities Act Wildlife Viewing Blind: Volunteers from Washington Waterfowl group met this Saturday to plant shrubs and trees around the Americans with Disabilities Act viewing blind installed this fall. Final ramp improvements are scheduled to be completed this spring.

Leque Island: Natural Resource Specialist Meis toured the Leque Unit, found more damage from the high tidal level that occurred on March 10 to the existing dikes on the South end of the Unit. Photos have been taken and information was forwarded.

DeBay's Slough: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove mowed parking areas, fence lines, and grass areas at the Johnson/DeBay's Slough Unit with the John Deere x300 riding mower.

Leque Unit: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove thinned out trees around a pond on the Leque Unit hunt side that was a Duck Stamp Project a few years ago, many trees had already fallen and have started to take over the work that was done from the project.

Samish Unit: Natural Resource Specialist Meis followed up with the sharecrop farmer regarding the planting plan for the Samish site this season.

Island Unit: Natural Resource Technician Cosgrove and Natural Resource Specialist Meis assisted stakeholders with repair of the steering system to the seine skiff used to push the Island Unit transport barge. Cosgrove replaced engine and cab air filters on the John Deere 7230 in preparation for use on Island Unit agricultural enhancements. Cosgrove transported 15 gallons of gas to the Island Unit for the Chevy truck used for maintenance and habitat management projects. Skagit Wildlife Area Staff members, (Rotton, Meis and Cosgrove) and Restoration Staff members (Brokaw and Friebel) toured an area off of the Island Unit at the top of Gilbert Hanson Slough, where the slough is disconnected from riverine flow by a section of old unused dike, for initial evaluation as a possible distributary connectivity project.

Skagit Wildlife Area and Restoration staff toured the Deepwater Slough Restoration site during low tide to examine the site of a potential restoration improvement project in Gilbert Hanson Slough.



Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program Analysis: Private Lands Biologist Wingard completed analyzing data collected this waterfowl season at Waterfowl Quality Hunt Unit sites. This information was gathered by Region 4 Private Lands Access Program staff members, five volunteers, and waterfowl hunters who completed hunter satisfaction cards at the sites. The analysis of this data will allow Private Lands staff members to determine use and success at each of our sites. This information provides Private Lands staff members a clearer picture of which sites are productive, and how different management styles lead to differences in hunt quality. Next week, Private Lands Supervisory Biologist Caldwell will work with the Region 4, Private Lands Access Program team to talk about the data, develop a summary report, and strategize data needs for upcoming seasons. Supervisor Caldwell will also be reaching out to the newly hired Small Game Section Manager Curtis to discuss Region 4 specific matters and brief her on what objectives and goals the regional Program is currently attempting to achieve.

GOAL 4: SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

Training: Biologist Yarborough completed Reasonable Suspicion Training for Supervisors DFW.

Wildlife Area Management Plan Update: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm continues to coordinate with the Wildlife Area Management Planning Team in preparation for the first stakeholder meeting scheduled for April 11. Manager Boehm contacted Biologist Rotton from the Skagit Wildlife Area to discuss her role in writing the 2006 Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Management Plan that was prepared in 2006. Manager Boehm reviewed that plan and the 1993 Management Plan.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Klickitat Spring Deer Surveys: Biologists Anderson, Bergh, Peterson, Van Lueven, and Davis, along with Volunteer Cady completed the annual spring deer surveys on and near the Klickitat Wildlife Area this week. A total of 235 deer were seen on the four survey routes with 220 of those deer classified as either adult or fawn. Fewer deer than normal were seen on the surveys possibly due to stormy and windy weather overnight and during the morning two survey routes. A ratio of 48 fawns per 100 adults was observed, which is down from the past two years but still on par with the long-term average and reasonable since the area has finally experienced a normal winter after two years of mild winters. Of the deer that were classified, 6.4% showed signs of Deer Hairloss Syndrome (HLS), which is more than in the past two years, but less than in previous years. HLS is caused by a hypersensitivity to an exotic louse and showed up in a significant percentage of the deer observed during these surveys starting in 2007.

Group of deer along the Klickitat River as seen through the spotting scope



Pacificorps' Forestry Tour: Regional Wildlife Program Manager Jonker, St. Helens Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald, Wildlife Area Assistant Managers Sample and Hand, and District Wildlife Biologist Holman were joined by Lands Division Manager Sprague and WDFW's forestry staff members for site visits to Pacificorps' wildlife habitat management lands. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation staff members Richardson and Crosswell attended as well and helped facilitate the visit. Pacificorps' manages 13,000+ acres for wildlife habitat in the watershed of the North Fork Lewis River as mitigation for inundation of the river behind three hydroelectric dams. The Pacificorps' lands offer a rich example of how forestry can be used to enhance habitats for species preferring both early serial and late successional conditions. Lessons learned are applicable to upcoming efforts to use forestry to enhance lands on the St. Helens and Klickitat Wildlife Area. Thanks to Pacificorps' Wildlife Biologists/Foresters Naylor and Emmerson for sharing their knowledge of a combined 40+ years of managing the habitat migration lands with WDFW staff members.



Willapa Hills Elk Herd Population Survey: Region 5 Biologists Holman, Stephens, and George were joined by Region 6 Biologists Novack, Michaelis, Sundstrom, and Game Data Specialist Kindschuh to conduct the annual survey of the Willapa Hills herd area. The southern portion of the Willapa Hills Elk herd area (GMUs 681, 673, 506, 530) was surveyed by helicopter using a stratified random sample where 17 of a possible 30 units categorized as high, medium, or low elk density were surveyed. The survey effort was completed in four days thanks to the skillful flying of Pilot Pete Emmerson of JL Aviation while the above staff members rotated among the various tasks of observing, classifying, spotting, recording data, and navigating. Sightability corrected estimates of the elk population in the four surveyed Game Management Units will be developed in the coming weeks. The raw survey results include observations of 221 elk groups totaling more than 2,000. A number of other wildlife species were also observed during the survey effort including black-tailed deer, coyotes, bears, and a rare aerial sighting of a westside cougar.



Willapa Hills Elk Herd Population Survey

Dusky Canada Goose Survey: Biologist Butler conducted a dusky Canada goose survey within Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum Counties. Areas surveyed included: Shillapoo Wildlife Area, Woodland Bottoms, Kalama, Willow Grove, Puget Island, and areas near Grays Bay. During the survey, a large flock of cacklers was spotted on Puget Island along with a few small groups of western Canada geese. Seven small flocks of dusky Canada geese were observed within the Shillapoo Wildlife Area and the surrounding land with a total of five dusky collars spotted amongst them. In addition, approximately 75 Sandhill cranes were observed with a flock of cackling geese in the Woodland Bottoms.



Dusky Canada geese



Sandhill cranes

Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area Timber Cruising Tour: Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald, Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Sample, Foresters Pfeifle, Ashiglar, and Mackey lead a pre-bid timber cruising tour of the Hoffstadt Unit. Several contractors interested in bidding on the timber cruising and surveying of the timber unit boundaries showed up for the tour to ask questions and get familiar with the area. The timber cruising proposal includes 550 acres in 14 units that will need to be surveyed and evaluated to determine the scope of timber thinning that could take place to benefit wildlife in the area. The timber cruising is expected to be completed by the first of July.

Mount St. Helens Institute Tour Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald met with members and volunteers of the Mt. St. Helens Institute to lead a tour discussing the management of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Sediment Retention Structure (SRS) on the North Fork Toutle River. Every year volunteers from the Institute staff members access and viewing areas along Spirit Lake Highway within the Mt. St. Helens National Monument to answer questions and educate tourist traveling through the region. The tour of the Wildlife Area and SRS allowed them to ask questions and become more knowledgeable of the area and be better equipped to answer the questions from the public that they may come into contact with. These volunteers will have tens of thousands of contacts and interactions with tourists visiting the region in a given summer season.

Western Gray Squirrel Habitat Evaluation: District Biologist Anderson, Research Scientist Vander Haegen, Forest Habitat Biologist Bell, and Klickitat Wildlife Area staff members VanLeuven and Davis conducted a site visit to evaluate the current condition of western gray squirrel habitat on the Klickitat Wildlife Area. The primary objective of the site visit was to develop a forest management plan with the goal of protecting western gray squirrel habitat and improving forest health through selective timber harvest. WDFW biologists are currently working with Agency foresters to develop a long-term plan that perpetuates the unique oak/conifer forest type that is found on the Klickitat Wildlife Area.



Klickitat Wildlife Area western gray squirrel habitat evaluation

2015 Fuels Reduction Project: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven and Natural Resource Technician Davis resurveyed segments of the Phase I Fuels Reduction Project area to document locations of western gray squirrel nests one year after the work was done. Squirrel nest trees were marked prior to initiation of the work, and subsequently a contractor thinned small trees

and pruned limbs from the remaining trees to reduce the quantity of burnable material near the ground in order to make the work area more resistant to the spread of wildfire. The slash was disposed of to ensure that accumulated debris did not compromise the purpose of the project. This project resulted in modification of habitat for western gray squirrels, therefore a follow-up survey is being done to determine whether squirrel use of the project area has changed significantly. The work was expected to produce an improvement in squirrel habitat as well as improved forest fire resistance. This project was completed in three phases in 2015, and all of the treated areas are to be resurveyed in spring 2016.

Peterman Hill Unit 2016 Pre-Commercial Thinning Project Planning: Cowlitz Project Forester Russell from Tacoma Power and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Vanderlip have identified 10 units totaling 362 acres for Pre-Commercial Thinning (PCT) ranging in age class from 11 to 18 years old. These units are comprised mostly of conifer species with a couple of the units being dominated by hardwoods. These units are densely stocked and require PCT treatments to ensure optimal growth, stand health, and vegetation diversity for wildlife forage. The unit boundaries have been flagged where they lie adjacent to private timberlands and will be thinned this year with an anticipated start date in May. Tacoma Power is responsible for contracting out the work with Wildlife Area staff members managing the project implementation. This will be an annual project with new units being identified each year. In some years commercial harvests will also be included in the scope of work as habitat needs evolve over time.

Peterman Hill Unit Harvest Reforestation: A large portion of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area Peterman Hill Unit is comprised of a large timber reservation with Green Diamond Resources Company (GDRC). Mitigation funds from Tacoma Power originally purchased the property for the Peterman Unit with GDRC having a onetime harvest right on certain timber units. Once GDRC completes a commercial timber harvest on these units the timber right returns back to Tacoma Power along with timber management. WDFW and Tacoma Power are responsible for harvest reforestation. A contract crew finished planting 96 acres this week from three harvest units logged in 2015. Approximately 39,000 Douglas fir seedlings were planted to ensure we meet the survival rates required under Department of Natural Resource's forest practice standards.

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

Watchable Wildlife: This week we received this photo of a bobcat from Kira Bartlett while she was hiking at Beacon Rock State Park. We appreciate her sharing this great photograph with us.

Bobcat – Photo by Kira Bartlett



Leidle South Access: Access staff members removed a fallen tree across the loop road at the Leidle Access site.



Leidle South tree removal

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

Education for the Next Generation: Last week, Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hand went to Kalama Elementary School to teach a kindergarten class about “Wings of Waterfowl”. The lesson was focused around characteristic that make birds unique (specifically waterfowl), the different functions of feathers, how birds can fly and other interesting facts. Hand brought a couple dozen duck wings for all the children to examine as the lesson was taught. The wings were actually from the recently attended 2016 Pacific Flyway WingBee, where biologists from each State in the flyway gather to examine, sex/age, and separate by species over 28,000 duck wings submitted by hunters from the 2015/16 hunting season. The kids also got to color their own duck wing, listen to a book reading about feathers, and keep one colorful feather!



Education for the Next Generation

Cowlitz Wildlife Area Annual Report: The 2015 Wildlife Area annual report has been completed and submitted to Tacoma Power for internal review and subsequent 30 day review to Lewis County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, WDFW, and area Tribes. The report is a required document by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) summarizing the Wildlife Area’s annual accomplishments, operating budget, acquisitions, and next year’s expectations.

Cowlitz Wildlife Area 2016 Scheduled Hunter Education Classes: The Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff members have scheduled three upcoming hunter education classes at the Wildlife Area office located in Morton. Each class will accommodate 20 students. The 4.5 hour online evaluation classes are scheduled for April 16th, May 7th, and August 13th. These classes are in high demand and historically, these classes have drawn participants from all around the state – even as far east as Pullman. These classes offered to students who have completed the online class, but have not yet passed the skills evaluation process conducted by a hunter education instructor. This step is required before they can purchase a hunting license in the state of Washington. The material from the student manual will be reviewed and each student will need to pass a 20 question test as well as demonstrate they can safely handle and operate a firearm in a variety of situations. Enrollment is over the internet on the WDFW website under Hunter Education.

Private Lands/Conflict Tour: Region 1 Private Lands/Conflict Supervisor McCanna, Region 5 Private Lands/Conflict Supervisor Meyer, Biologist Shepherd (Region 1), and Technician Bendixen (Region 1) went on a field trip in District One looking at private lands, ungulate, and wolf issues.

District 10 Wildlife Conflict:

Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Conklin received a call from a land owner in Glenoma. He reported his 18 acre field of newly planted Alfalfa-mix hay is a complete loss for his first cut of hay for haylage. Conklin assessed the field and placed Mylar tape along one side of the field and instructed the land owner to place it all the way around the perimeter of the field. Conklin will continue to work with the landowner.

Cougar: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Conklin and WDFW Police responded to a cougar sighting in Randle. The reporting party stated she believes the cougar is stalking her horse. Conklin placed a trail camera on the property to monitor the situation. No activity has been detected.

Bear Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Conklin visited some old bear damage locations in Lewis County. She will be showing colleagues these locations to assist them in detecting tree damage from bear. This is in preparation for the 2016 bear damage season. While in the forest Conklin found an empty supplemental feed barrel.

Supplemental bear feed barrel on industrial forest land.



GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.

Women in Agriculture: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Conklin attended the Women in Agriculture conference in Chehalis. The conference focused on communication skills and how best to communicate with individuals with various communication styles.

Tour of Walla Walla and Columbia Counties: Biologist Thorne Hadley and Conflict Specialist Rasley took Biologist Meyer and Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna to look at habitat projects, elk, and deer damage situations in Walla Walla and Columbia Counties. Multi-Million dollar vineyards in the Walla Walla area continue to experience deer damage to grape buds in the early spring. Continued coordination with WDFW has greatly reduced the damage. They were able to see private lands access program implementation, habitat work that has been completed, and potential habitat sites discussing conservation planning for those sites, wolf locations and interactions on the landscape, as well as meeting with a producer signed up in a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for deer, elk, and turkey damage throughout all three districts in region one.

Conflict Specialist Rasley, Private Lands and Conflict Supervisor Meyer, Private Lands and Conflict Supervisor McCanna and Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley



District 10 & Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area Winter Conditions:

Past Weather: November temperatures and precipitation were both below normal, with several days of low temperatures in the 20's. December temperatures were slightly above normal and the month had record high precipitation causing some flooding throughout the District. January temperatures were average and precipitation for the month was above average. February temperatures were above normal and rainfall was average for the month.

Short-Term Forecast: Snow levels will fluctuate between 4,500 to 10,000 feet during the upcoming week with temperatures in the valleys ranging into the 50's. The 6-10 and 8-14 day forecasts are for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation.

Long-Term Forecast: The April forecast is for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation, and the three month forecast is for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation.

Habitat: Forage is available at middle and lower elevations, with the Wildlife Area being heavily utilized. Green up is slowly starting at the lower elevations on the Wildlife Area.

Snow Depths: Lower elevations are currently snow free below about 3,500 feet. Snowpack is slightly below average for the region.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. The fourth winter elk survey was conducted on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area on March 2nd, with 94 elk being observed.

Animal Condition: The majority of animals appear to be in good condition, but a couple observed have been in poor condition.

Mortality: Three mortalities have been observed while conducting other work on the Wildlife Area so far this winter.

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, 2015, to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

District 9 Winter Conditions:

Past Weather: Temperatures were cooler this week with rain and snow (above 3,000 ft.) throughout the District. New snowpack brought the current snow water equivalent in the south Cascades up to 107% (103% last week) of normal. The Soda Springs Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area has no snow cover and green up is providing abundant forage on south facing slopes. Early spring wildflowers like grass widow are now blooming.

Winter Severity: Winter conditions continue to be typical of March weather in the south Cascades and Klickitat River drainage. Snow coverage is primarily above 3,000ft elevation. There are no current concerns for big game populations in eastern Klickitat County as most animals came into this winter in favorable physical condition. Eastern Klickitat County has experienced heavier than normal precipitation and local ranchers report good spring conditions.

Habitat: 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. Deer are generally absent from open areas above 3,000ft as snow conditions have pushed deer into dense forested habitats.

Animal Concentrations: Deer are bunched in normal concentrations throughout the District, with deer in Klickitat County seen at higher elevations with the melting snowpacks. Large numbers of elk are being seen associated with the Trout Lake and Glenwood Valleys as agricultural and managed forest lands below 2,500 ft. open up with spring forage.

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

Mortality: Mortalities this week were primarily associated with road kills.

Public Contacts: No concerns raised by the public this week related to winter conditions.

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Washington Wildlife Recreation Program Grant Application: Biologist Tirhi began work on a 2016 application for \$1M towards the acquisition of 148 acres of prairie habitat near the Scatter Creek Wildlife Area. According to WDFW Prairie Ecologist Hays, this site is the highest quality privately-owned prairie site remaining in Thurston County. The property will be applied for in the Urban Category of the Washington Wildlife Recreation Program (WWRP), being within five miles of the town of Grand Mound. The site is occupied by several state/federal listed species as well as other priority and/or species of greatest conservation need. The site also supports Oregon white oaks and ½ mile of Scatter Creek. Funds generated would be used as match towards another site being purchased for the recovery of state/federal listed Mazama pocket gopher.

***South Sound Prairie
2016 WWRP land
acquisition site near
Scatter Creek,
Thurston County.***



Satsop/Mason Deer Project: In 2009, WDFW initiated a study of the effects of forest management practices on black-tailed deer reproduction. Two of eight study sites are represented in District 15: Mason and Satsop. An objective of this study involves determining sources of mortality among all radio-collared deer. The radio-collars in the Mason cluster have remote monitoring capabilities and text messages are sent when certain events occur; although periodic field checks are recommended. The Satsop collars require field monitoring to determine status. Biologist Murphie reports that no mortalities have occurred recently. Two does and four fawns are currently being monitored in the Satsop cluster, while the Mason cluster has seven does and three fawns.

Per the study design, the doe collars in the Mason unit are scheduled to drop off soon after a two-year deployment. Eight new collars will be deployed in March on different does. Prior to this week, Biologist Murphie has reported that four does have been collared. One of these died recently with predation being a contributing factor. This week, Biologist Murphie and two Master Hunter volunteers deployed three collars and also captured one buck and one yearling.

District 16 Black-tailed Deer Study: Biologist Ament spent some time on the deer project last week. She reviewed all her field notebooks and scanned all information from her 2015 field work. Copies of all notes were provided to District Biologist McMillan and will be entered into the PDA. The information provided included notes related to fawn searches, collar downloads, and investigations of Separation Events and four fawn mortalities.

Mortality Investigation: Biologist Novack checked on the mortality signal of a doe in Capitol Forest. The signal was faintly heard on mortality mode but, nowhere in the vicinity of the recent GPS fixes.

Trumpeter Swan Monitoring: The swan monitoring volunteers reported the following for last week: Surveys completed on 3/24/2016. Two reports: 1) *Hi all, I searched for swans this morning and came up empty. If anyone else has seen any this week, let us know. Christina* 2) *I was over on Schmuck Road yesterday as well as Anderson and saw no swans so I assumed they were all gone. But, this morning I heard a small group of swans heading north over the Strait about 8AM this morning, almost certainly before Christina was out doing the count. These swans were likely the last of the Sequim swans. Bob have heard or seen several groups starting across the Strait in the past couple of weeks. Kind of a melancholy sound, but still a sure sign of spring. Bob and I are scheduled to do the Swan Survey next week so if anyone happens to see swans before Sunday please let us know. Enid.*

There were some e-mail communications discussing if there is the need to continue with surveys. The latest that swans were recorded on previous Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society swan surveys was April 1, 2012. They have been seen in the Dungeness Valley in the first few days of April. The decision was made to continue the surveys for a couple more weeks, just to be sure. Anyone on the swan monitoring team has been advised to “spread the word” if anyone sees any swans still in the area.

Oregon spotted Frog Survey: Biologists Michaelis and Sundstrom surveyed the lower portion of the Black River for Oregon Spotted frogs. No frogs or egg masses were observed and the weather was quite favorable.

Snowy Plover: Biologist Sundstrom reviewed and compiled the final list of banded plovers observed in 2015 and emailed to both California and Oregon banders for confirmation and additional information.

Special thanks to Scott Harris and his GIS/ArcMap expertise for helping Biologist Sundstrom establish (and re-verify) the southern property line of private land that is to be signed at Midway Beach for the protection of plover nesting.

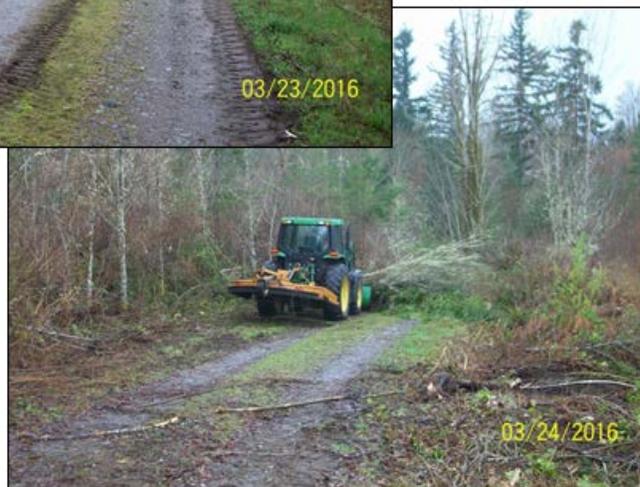
GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCES

Elk Survey Flights: Biologists Michaelis, Novack and Sundstrom assisted Biologists from Region 5 during elk survey flights conducted in the Willapa Elk Herd. Game Management Units (GMU's) surveyed included 681- Bear River- 673 Williams Creek, 506 -Willapa Hills, 530 -

Ryderwood, and 504 - Stella. Each of the GMU's was divided into several survey units. Over two thousand elk were observed and classified. A new helicopter operator was used from Oregon and the ship and pilot performed exceptionally well!

Remote Camera System - Biologist Harris recently took over managing the host computer for the Remote Camera System. The volunteer who normally manages the system will be out for about a month due to back surgery. Currently there are only two systems in operation: Grayland Cranberries and Oak Creek Wildlife Area. Taking over management of the system has reminded Biologist Harris just how much volunteers do behind the scenes. He is wishing for the volunteer's speedy recovery!

Road Maintenance: Manager Gerchak, Assistant Manager Gallegos, and Wildlife Area Assistants R. Vanblaricom and D. Vanblaricom spent four days improving the primary management access road leading to the interior of the West Rocky Prairie WLA Unit. The one-mile long roadway, used by both agency staff members and the public (foot traffic), included several dangerous blind curves, was too narrow for two vehicles to pass, and was often blocked by fallen trees. The project cleared the roadway of small trees, Scotch broom, low-hanging limbs, and other vegetation. The work was completed manually using chainsaws and a tractor and should ensure safe, reliable access the Wildlife Area for many years to come



Spring Bear Permits: Biologist Harris spoke with several hunters who drew spring bear permits. Advice was given. He also reached out to some large timber landowners in GMU 681 regarding access for the spring bear permit season. After clarifying some access questions with several landowners he estimates that greater than 90% of the GMU is open to free access for the 2016 spring season.

Long Beach Cranberries: Another Damage Prevention Permit holder harvested an elk from the middle of the Peninsula. The elk have not been seen since. Everyone is hoping that they clue in that they are not wanted in the bogs. Over the past few weeks they have done significant damage.

Grayland Cranberries: The elk have been behaving themselves lately. However, the remote camera system took pictures of a large bear munching old berries. This is fairly normal in the spring. Each year a few bears stop by for a fermented cranberry snack after waking up. Occasionally one consumes a little too much and offers some entertainment for the lucky observer. For the most part, the bears are tolerated. They do not do a lot of damage. A few producers do get a little frustrated as the bears do not pick up their feet when walking through the vines. This forces the producer to have to go out and reset the vines before they die. Occasionally they dig for insects. This is one activity the does not make the producers happy. (Deer problems should increase any day now.)

Willapa Valley Elk: Pretty slow still. One Producer reported problems with a small group. A Master Hunter familiar with the property attempted to harvest. He got bulled. While his permit is antlerless he knew that harvesting an antlerless bull was really not what we needed. There were approximately 12 elk with most being bulls. Biologist Harris escorted another hunter unfortunately the elk did not cooperate. He took the hunter to several other properties and found a group on a field that has been mostly devoid of elk this year. While the elk were visible from the highway, access to the field this time of year requires a boat or driving several miles of logging roads. While they were traveling logging roads the elk entered the timber. While traveling down through the timber the hunter unintentionally hazed the elk. After tracking and going in circles the hunter did catch up to a small portion of the group that has split off. Unfortunately he got spiked. The only cow elk in the group had a spike standing in front of and behind her. No elk down this week. However, it is nice to know that the hunters made good decisions.

North River Valley Elk: A small group of elk are being persistent and making themselves unwelcome. A Master Hunter has been trying to educate. As usually happens when we bust up the big groups, a small local group remains and then proceeds to educate us.

Master Hunter Designated Elk Permits: Current Designated Permit Stats for Region 6.

Master Hunter - Region 6 Designated Permits		
Deployed	7	12%
On Call	3	5%
Pass	4	7%
Waiting	21	35%
Harvested	25	42%
Permits	60	100%
Success Rate		71%

Deployed = hunters currently hunting

On Call = hunters who are on call for staff or a landowner

Pass = hunter who have chosen not to hunt or hunters who have no responded to staff.

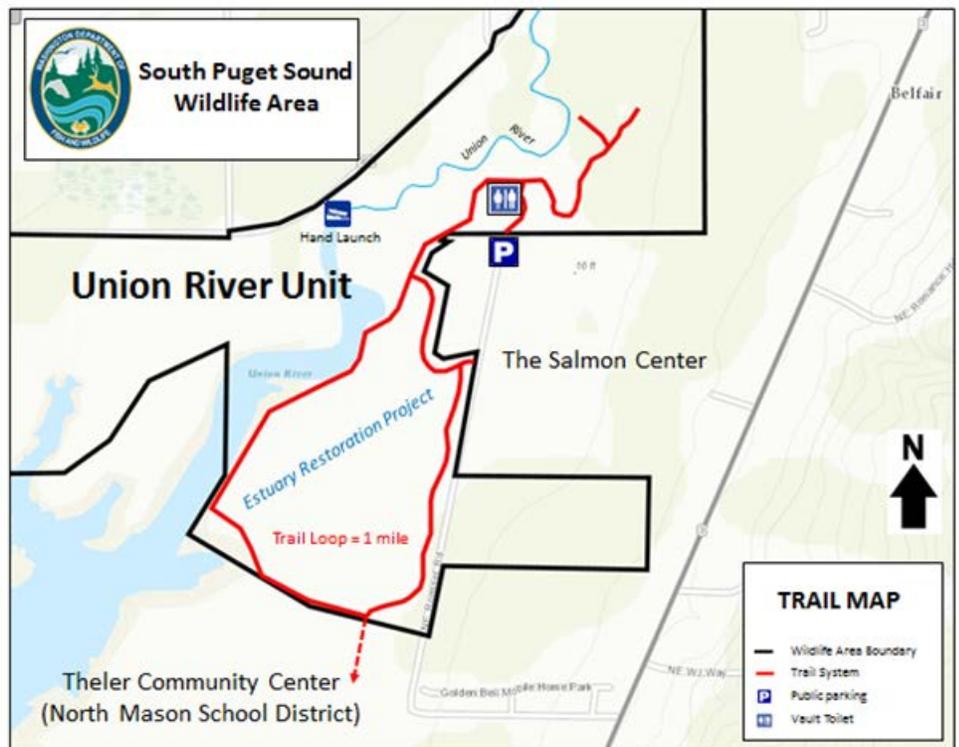
Waiting = hunter who have not, or are waiting to hunt

Success Rate = Success of total hunter deployed, on call, and harvested.

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

Land Use and Maintenance Agreement for the Union River Wildlife Area Unit: Wildlife Area Manager Belson and Lands Agent Cannon coordinated with the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group

(HCSEG) to finalize a multi-year Land Use and Maintenance Agreement for the Union River Wildlife Area Unit. HCSEG was awarded an ALEA grant in 2015 to maintain and improve the 1.5-mile trail system on the wildlife area, which is part of a larger trail network that includes the adjacent Theler Community Center. This agreement will allow HCSEG to perform the work funded by the ALEA grant and is just one representation of the valuable partnership that has been developed during recent years.



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

Foreign Animal Disease Tabletop Exercise: Biologist Murphie participated in a foreign animal disease tabletop exercise sponsored by the Washington Department of Agriculture. Representatives from several city, county, state, and federal agencies or jurisdictions participated. The fictional scenario was based on the exposure of livestock to foot and mouth disease at a county fair. Initial presentations were related to foreign animal diseases, quarantine and hold order procedures, general response capabilities, and disposal options for animal carcasses. A tabletop discussion followed to identify roles and responsibilities of county, state, federal, and tribal authorities, as well as, capabilities and preparedness of these agencies.

New Staff: Biologist Harris received approval to offer the Region 6 Natural Resource Technician 2 position to George Leite. George accepted and his first day will be April 1st. George is a retired Olympic National Park Ranger with lots of experience working with the public, private landowners, and wildlife conflict.