

District 6

Counties: Okanogan

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Summary

District 6 abuts the Canadian border in north-central Washington and encompasses 10 Game Management Units: 203 (Pasayten), 204 (Okanogan East), 209 (Wannacut), 215 (Sinlahekin), 218 (Chewuch), 224 (Perrygin), 231 (Gardner), 233 (Pogue), 239 (Chiliwist), 242 (Alta).

The western two-thirds of the district, stretching from the Okanogan River to the Pacific Crest, lies on the east slope of the Cascade Range and is dominated by mountainous terrain that generally gets more rugged as you move from east to west. Vegetation in this portion of the district ranges from desert/shrub-steppe at the lowest elevations through various types of conifer forests, culminating in alpine tundra on the higher peaks that top out at almost 9,000 feet.

More than three-quarters of the land base in this portion of the county is in public ownership, offering extensive hunting access. Game is plentiful and dispersed throughout the area for most of the year, concentrating in the lower elevations in winter when deep snows cover much of the landscape.

GMU 204 includes the eastern one-third of the district (from the Okanogan River east to the Okanogan County line) and is moderately rolling terrain, generally rising in elevation as you move east. The vegetation changes from shrub-steppe near the Okanogan River to a mix of tall grass and conifer forest throughout the remainder of the unit. This portion of the district is roughly a 50-50 patchwork of public and private land with the public lands generally being higher in elevation. Again, game is plentiful and dispersed throughout.



Pasayten Wilderness, Okanogan County – Scott Fitkin

Weather in the Okanogan District can be quite variable and capable of changing quickly in the fall. Be prepared for everything from warm, sunny days to the possibility of winter temps and significant snow at higher elevations by the second week of October.

Please be respectful of private land and treat land owners and their property the way you would want to be treated if roles were reversed.

Agency biologists will be running a biological check and information station at the Red Barn in Winthrop both weekends of the modern firearm general deer season. We encourage hunters to stop and provide data to biologists whether you've harvested a deer or not; data collected assists in assessing herd health and shaping population management.

2013 Hunting Forecasts

BIG GAME

Deer

District 6 supports the largest migratory mule deer herd in the state and Okanogan County has long been prized by hunters for its mule deer hunting. Prospects for mule deer look good this year. Following three consecutive winters of good fawn recruitment, hunters can expect to see moderate numbers of younger bucks; however, the relative availability of older age class bucks should be the best in years. Last year's post season survey result of 34 bucks per 100 does is the highest this ratio has been in decades, indicating excellent buck carryover. Summer forage conditions appear favorable, so deer should be in good physical condition come fall.

During the early general seasons deer will be widely distributed on the landscape and not yet concentrated in migration areas or on winter range. Mature bucks in particular are often at high elevations in remote locations as long as succulent vegetation is available. In general look for deer taking advantage of the rejuvenated summer forage within recent burns including the 2006 Tripod Fire, as well as other areas holding green forage into the fall.

During the late permit seasons, the majority of deer will have moved to winter range areas at lower elevations on more southerly slopes. In District 6, WDFW Wildlife Areas and immediately adjacent federal lands are good bets for high deer numbers in late fall, although in low snow years, some mature bucks may linger at higher elevations.

For those hunters with 2nd deer permits in Deer areas 2012 -2016, remember that those permits are good only on private land. Permit holders are responsible for making contact with private land owners to secure hunting access.

Generally speaking, white-tailed deer are significantly less abundant than mule deer west of the Okanogan River but are found in most all drainages up to mid-elevations, particularly those with significant riparian vegetation. The Sinlahekin Valley and surrounding lands in portions of Unit 215 are the exception, supporting a robust whitetail population.

In this area, many white-tailed deer are found on private lands, so prospective hunters wishing to target white-tailed deer may want to seek permission in advance of the season to access individual ownerships. The eastern one-third of the district (GMU 204) holds roughly equal numbers of mule and white-tailed deer and both are widely distributed across the unit on both private and public land.

No new major regulation changes are on tap for the 2013 seasons. Permit numbers have been adjusted slightly, with a few more late buck permits and a few less antlerless permits available overall.

2012 District 6 Deer Harvest Summary: General season hunters harvested 2,288 deer from the 10 game management units comprising District 6, a 13% increase over 2011. In addition, general season success rates improved for all user groups and ended up as follows: Modern – 16%, Muzzleloader – 23%, Archery – 33%, and Muilt – 25%. Special permit holders harvested 357 deer in District 6, 226 antlerless and 131 bucks.

Modern firearm hunters accounted for about 65 percent of the general season harvest, and archers took about 53% of the total antlerless harvest. As is typical, GMU 204 (the District's largest unit) yielded the greatest overall deer harvest (825 animals). GMUs 215, 218, 224, and 233 also produced good tallies. These five units combined accounted for 75% of the total number of deer taken in District 6.

2012 District 6 Deer Harvest Statistics: [Deer General Harvest](#)
[Deer Special Permits Harvest](#)



Mule Deer and White-tailed Deer – Scott Fitkin

Elk

Elk are few and far between in Okanogan County, particularly west of the Okanogan River. In GMU 204 where the majority of the District's limited harvest occurs, elk are a bit more abundant and on the increase, but still generally occur only in small groups scattered over the landscape, primarily in the Unit's eastern half. Hunters are reminded that the elk regulations have changed in GMU 204 to an "any bull" general season harvest instead of the traditional any-elk season.

2012 District 6 Elk Harvest Summary: Elk are scarce in Okanogan County, and District 6 hunters harvested only 12 in 2012, four more than in 2011. Ten of the twelve came from GMU 204, and all but one were taken by modern firearm hunters.

2012 District 6 Elk Harvest Statistics: [Elk General Harvest](#)
[Elk Special Permits Harvest](#)

Black Bear

Black bears are abundant and well distributed throughout District 6. The population and associated harvest appears to be relatively stable, so hunting prospects in the district should be good. Bears will likely be widely distributed on the landscape and keying in on local berry concentrations where available. This means they will be shifting up in elevation and into moister areas as the season progresses. Berry fields at higher elevations towards the Pacific Crest will ripen latest probably not peaking until sometime in September this year.

For hunters pursuing black bear in the northern Cascades, it is critical for you to positively identify the bear species, as endangered grizzly bears also inhabit these areas. We have posted on our web site some interactive training materials from BeBearAware.org to help you tell the difference between black and grizzly bears. [Click here](#), then view the Interactive Bear Identification Program and take the Bear Identification Test.

2012 District 6 Black Bear Harvest Summary: District 6 hunters harvested 121 black bear last season, a 57% increase over the 2011 tally. Harvest was spread widely across all GMUs. GMU 242 again led the way with 24 animals taken.

2012 District 6 Black Bear Harvest Statistics: [Okanogan BMU Black Bear Harvest](#)
[Northeastern BMU Black Bear Harvest](#)



Black Bear – Scott Fitkin

Cougar

District 6 cougar populations are healthy and well distributed. Cougars follow the deer herds, which means they will be spread across the landscape through late October and then start to concentrate more on lower elevations as deer move to winter range. Much cougar foraging activity takes place at night, so opportunities to spot the cats on the move is at dawn and dusk.

In District 6, cougars are now managed by a harvest guideline at the individual GMU level to better promote stable population structure and high quality sustainable harvest. Last season's harvest fell slightly short of the harvest guideline in all but one GMU. As a result, cougar hunting opportunities in District 6 should be good in 2013-14. Remember that after Jan 1, individual GMUs close on short notice once the harvest guideline has been reached, and hunters are responsible for knowing if a unit is open or closed. This information is available on the WDFW hotline (1-866-364-4868) or at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar.

2012 District 6 Cougar Harvest Summary: During the first year under the new harvest guideline system, hunters harvested eleven cougars in District 6 during the 2012-13 season, and by design the harvest was distributed across several GMUs.

2012 District 6 Cougar Harvest Statistics: [East Cascades North CMU Cougar Harvest](#)



Cougar with kitten – Scott Fitkin

UPLAND BIRDS

Forest Grouse

The Okanogan supports strong populations of ruffed, dusky (blue) and spruce grouse, which are found throughout the forested areas of the district. Ruffed grouse are generally associated with deciduous tree cover at lower to middle elevations, particularly in riparian habitats. Dusky (blue) grouse are found in the mid to upper elevation conifer forests, often on ridge tops. Spruce grouse are located in higher elevation conifer forests throughout the district.

Dusky (blue) and Spruce grouse populations continue to remain below historical norms within the boundaries of recent wildfires including the massive 175,000-acre Tripod Fire, which burned in 2006 in some of the Districts best forest grouse habitat. Grouse habitat within the burns is improving annually, and bird numbers outside of burned areas appear to be relatively stable. In general, forest grouse prospects should be fairly good, although spring rains may have negatively affected chick survival in some area locations. Best bets for hunting are USFS lands throughout the district, as well as forested portions of the Sinlahekin and Methow Wildlife Areas.

2012 District 6 Forest Grouse Harvest Summary: Despite the lingering effects of recent wild fires, sprawling Okanogan County remained the top forest grouse producer in Washington last year, yielding a harvest of 7,649 blue, ruffed and spruce grouse. While impressive, that number represents an 8-percent decline from 2011 and a 48-percent drop from the five-year average.
2012 District 6 Forest Grouse Harvest Statistics: [Forest Grouse - Statewide and by County](#)



Male Dusky Grouse and Female Spruce Grouse – Scott Fitkin

Partridge (Gray and Chukar)

Improved harvest success indicates Gray partridge and Chukar populations are doing well in District 6. Gray partridge populations are widely distributed and patchy throughout the district's shrub steppe habitats but appear to be increasing in number and distribution over time. Birds are seen frequently on the Indian Dan, Chiliwist, and Methow Wildlife Areas. Scattered groups of chukars are found in the steeper rocky areas in lower elevations of District 6. The steep hills along the Similkameen River in the north part of the Okanogan Valley hold good numbers of birds.

2012 District 6 Partridge Harvest Summary: Compared to 2011, both chukar and gray partridge harvest increased significantly in District 6 last year. Hunters harvested 1,313 chukar (a 37% increase), and District 6 was the top producer for Hungarian partridge in 2012 with a harvest of 1,414 birds, a 12% increase over the 2011 total.

2012 District 6 Partridge Harvest Statistics: [Gray Partridge Statewide and by County](#)
[Chukar Statewide and by County](#)

Quail

Harvest data suggest Quail numbers may be down a bit compared to long-term averages. However, birds are numerous and widespread in Okanogan County, which remains a good choice for hunters pursuing this species. For this season, higher than average snow depths may have increased adult winter mortality in some areas while spring rains appear to have negatively affected early brood survivorship; however, later broods appear to be more successful. Quail can be found in the shrub-steppe habitats at lower elevations throughout the district. The Indian Dan, Chiliwist, and the Sinlahekin Wildlife Areas are good places to start.

2012 District 6 Quail Harvest Summary: Quail harvest dipped slightly from the 2011 tally and is still down 20% from the five-year average. Even so, District 6 hunters still bagged over 7,000 in 2012.

2012 District 6 Quail Harvest Statistics: [Quail - Statewide and by County](#)

Mourning Dove

The 2013 dove call count surveys tallied greater numbers of birds than last year, but overall numbers are still 6 percent below the 10-year survey average. Look for doves in planted food crops in the Sinlahekin and Chiliwist Wildlife Areas and at lower elevations on the Methow Wildlife Area. Hunting success will depend on warm weather keeping the birds in the area through the season.

2012 District 6 Dove Harvest Summary: Dove harvest increased 49% over 2011, but remained 17% below the five-year average.

2012 District 6 Mourning Dove Harvest Statistics: [Mourning Dove - Statewide and by County](#)

Pheasant

Pheasants occur at low densities throughout the Okanogan portion of District 6, with most wild production coming from private land. Hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private land. Higher than average snow depths may have increased adult winter mortality while spring rains may have negatively affected chick survival in some areas this year. Game farm-produced roosters will once again be released at traditional release sites this fall. These sites are mapped on the [Go Hunt](#) website. Hunters are reminded that nontoxic shot is required for ALL upland bird hunting on ALL pheasant release sites STATEWIDE.

2012 District 6 Pheasant Harvest Summary: Hunters bagged 1,008 pheasants last year in Okanogan County, a drop of 6% from 2012 and 10% below the current five-year average.

2012 District 6 Pheasant Harvest Statistics: [Pheasant - Statewide and by County](#)

Wild Turkey

Turkeys are found in scattered groups throughout the district and often concentrate on private land near agriculture areas. Prospective hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private land. The fall turkey permit season occurs within GMUs 218-231, 242, with the majority of the birds being located in the later two units. In recent years, winter conditions and declines in supplemental feeding by private individuals have reduced turkey numbers substantially in the Methow Valley, although most lower-elevation drainages in Unit 242 still harbor birds. For this coming season, last winter's conditions most likely decreased adult

survival and spring rains may have negatively affected early brood productivity; however, later broods may have been more successful.

WATERFOWL

Ducks and Canada Geese

Waterfowl surveys indicate local waterfowl brood production increased 54% in 2013. Abundant water this spring may increase the number of potholes retaining water during the hunting season. Overall, however, waterfowl hunting opportunities are mostly dependent on the number of migrants coming from Canada and Alaska and how long water remains ice-free throughout the district.

The largest concentrations in District 6 occur at the mouth of the Okanogan River and on the Columbia River. The main stem of the Okanogan River and the larger lakes and potholes in the Okanogan Watershed are good secondary sites. Good public access can be found at the Driscoll Island and Sinlahekin Wildlife areas as well as the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.



Barrows Golden eye pair – Scott Fitkin

2012 District 6 Waterfowl Harvest Summary: Duck hunters here enjoyed a 2-percent harvest increase in 2012, bagging 8,184 ducks in Okanogan County. Even better, District 6 hunters harvested 1,276 Canada geese in 2012, a 30-percent increase over the 2011 harvest.

2012 District 6 Waterfowl Harvest Statistics: [Ducks - Statewide and by County](#)
[Canada Goose - Statewide and by County](#)



Canada Geese in a Methow Valley grain field – Scott Fitkin