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Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 4 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Benton and Franklin Counties

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DISTRICT 4 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 4 is located in the south central part of the state in the Columbia Basin ecoregion. This is the driest part of Washington, with a near desert climate. Precipitation averages only 6 to 9 inches per year and is mostly received in the winter. Benton and Franklin Counties fall within District 4 which administratively is part of WDFW's Region 3. The following Game Management Units (GMU) are included in District 4: Rattlesnake Hills (372), Horse Heaven (373), Ringold (379), and Kahlotus (381).

This area is defined by some of Washington's major rivers. The Hanford Reach of the Columbia River runs through the middle of the District between Benton and Franklin Counties. This 50-mile stretch is one of the most scenic areas of the River in the state. To the east, the Snake River carves the boundary of Franklin County. The heart of District 4 is the confluence of the Yakima, Snake, and Walla Walla Rivers with the main stem of the Columbia River at the Tri-Cities (Pasco, Kennewick, Richland). Large populations of waterfowl congregate throughout the district for breeding, migrating and wintering. Upland, habitats are defined by the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion which was historically dominated by native shrub steppe. Since the 1800s, farmers and ranchers have been working the land around District 4. Intensive irrigated agriculture supporting many orchards and vineyards is a major land use in the Yakima River Valley, southern Benton County, and western Franklin County. Dryland wheat is also a major land use in southern Benton County, as well as eastern Franklin County. Many thousands of acres of this wheat country have been enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) providing important cover for mule deer and other wildlife.

In Benton County, large west-east trending ridges, including the Horse Heaven Hills and Rattlesnake Hills, add to the topographic diversity of the district. The eastern Franklin County landscape includes Palouse Prairie with rolling hills and is the southernmost extent of the channeled scablands. Deep canyons associated with the Palouse River form the eastern boundary of the district. Many of these depressions have been filled with run-off from irrigation projects and provide additional wetlands that attract wildlife. This landscape provides a diversity of habitats favored by upland birds (chukar, pheasant, quail, dove) and big game (deer and elk).

Welcome to District 4 and Happy Hunting!

****NEW**** In an effort to promote public safety, WDFW has made some slight modifications to hunting access regulations along the Hanford Reach. Effective April 1, 2014, The Columbia River, all islands except privately owned, in the river, the Benton County shoreline below the high water mark, Central Hanford Department of Energy property, and any peninsula originating on the Benton County shoreline, between Vernita Bridge on Highway 24 downstream to the Richland city limits, are designated as a "CLOSED AREA" to hunting wild animals and wild birds. The only exception is waterfowl hunting, which is open below the high water mark

between the old Hanford townsite power line crossing (wooden towers) in Section 24, T 13 N, R 27 E, and the Richland city limits (Figure 1). These details are printed in the 2014 Big Game Regulations p. 82.



FIGURE 1. MAP DEPICTING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE REVISED HUNTING CLOSURE (IN RED) AT THE HANFORD REACH NATIONAL MONUMENT. IN SEASON, WATERFOWL HUNTING IS ALLOWED BETWEEN THE WOODEN TOWERS (YELLOW LINE) AND THE RICHLAND CITY LIMITS. THIS MAP CAN BE DOWNLOADED [HERE](#).

ELK

AN ELK HARVESTED IN GMU 372.

Opportunity for elk hunting is primarily limited in District 4 to lands surrounding the western and southern boundaries of the Hanford Reach National Monument (GMU 372). Surveys on the Hanford Monument in February 2014 yielded a total herd estimate of 1068 elk with 55 bulls and 30 calves per 100 cows. The high bull ratio is typical for this herd since they can seek refuge on the federal Hanford lands during hunting season.

Each year during the general season 175-190 hunters pursue elk in District 4. Of those, 20-25 (usually modern firearm) are successful. Last year was very similar. There were 25 elk harvested, 19 of which were from GMU 372. Hunter success was about 15%. Hunts are geared toward addressing crop damage on surrounding wheat farms, vineyards, and orchards. While

most of the land around the Hanford Monument is private, Elk hunters can pursue elk in Benton County on WDFW’s Thorton and Rattlesnake Slope Units of the Sunnyside Wildlife Area north of Prosser and Benton City. There are also limited opportunities for elk in Franklin County in the [Juniper Dunes Wilderness](#) and on the Windmill Ranch unit (See Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area map above and click [here](#)).

On private land, the best way to secure access is to apply for a special permit through the Landowner Hunt Program (LHP). If selected, permit holders are guaranteed a one day guided hunt. Most permits are limited to antlerless opportunity for youth hunters, but a few permits for any elk are issued each year. See the current hunting regulations for more information.

DEER

Most of District 4 is private, open country farmland. Eastern Franklin County is an important wintering area for mule deer that migrate south to the relatively mild winters near the Snake River, as compared to their breeding grounds further north. The highest concentrations of deer (mostly mule deer with a few white-tails) are in the Kahlotus Unit (GMU 381), with a large percentage migrating in from northern units starting in October, right around the opening of the modern firearm general season.



A BUCK HARVESTED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY (GMU 381)

In northern Benton County (GMU 372), spend some time scouting for deer in the Thornton and Rattlesnake units of the Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area (Figure 2). In southern Benton County there are small groups of deer available to hunters on land in the Horse Heaven Hills (GMU 373) managed by the BLM, scattered tracts of DNR and private property, and the USFWS’s Umatilla NWR. On the Umatilla NWR’s Whitcomb and Paterson Units (see Figure 4 above), Deer Areas 3071 and 3072 respectively, there are 40 special permits split every September between muzzleloader and archery hunters. In even numbered years, archery hunters have the opportunity to hunt antlerless deer during the first week of September and any buck during the second week of September and muzzleloader hunters are able to hunt antlerless deer for the rest of the month. During odd numbered years, the opportunity switches between weapon types. Muzzleloader hunters are able to hunt antlerless and buck deer in early September and archers hunt antlerless for the rest of the month. Please consult the current hunting regulations for more details.

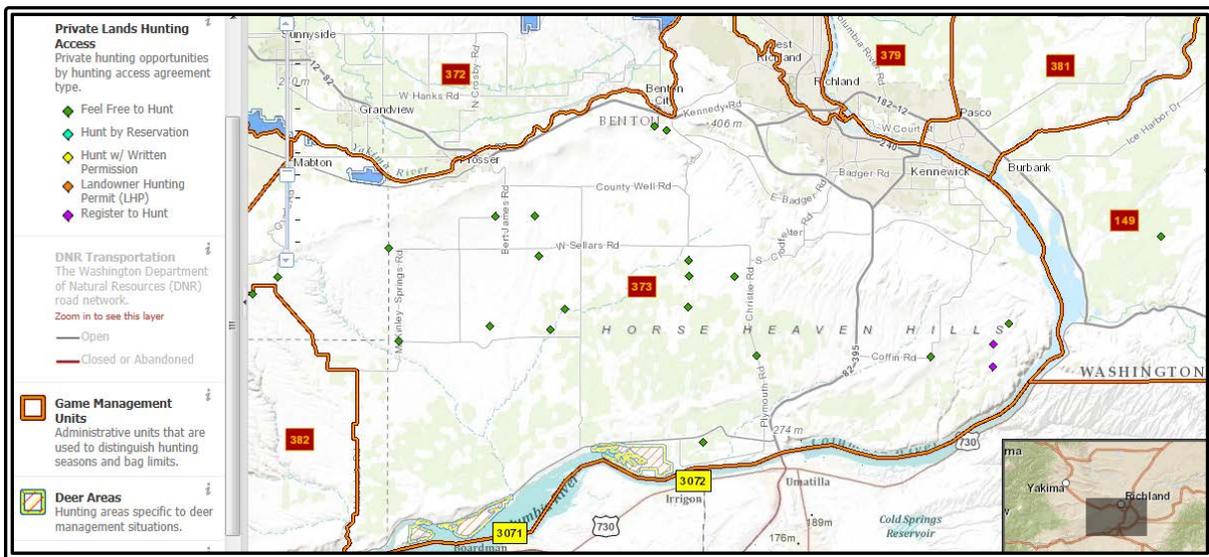


FIGURE 5. A DEPICTION OF THE PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS AND DEER AREAS 3071 AND 3072 IN GMU 373 FROM WDFW’S GOHUNT WEBSITE.

In 2013, the hunter success rate for deer in District 4 was 40%. This was higher than the 5-year average of 36%. Hunter success in surrounding districts was 27% last season. District 4 hunters enjoy a higher success rate primarily due to restricted access for hunters and a lack of cover for deer. There are some “Feel Free to Hunt” and “Hunt by Written Permission” acres where hunters can gain access to deer. Pre-season scouting is advisable in order to learn where to hunt

and to obtain permission from private landowners. *Don't be shy about knocking on doors and asking about access.*

As mentioned above, the newly revamped [GoHunt](#) application on WDFW's website is a good place to initially learn where the private lands access areas are located. *It is advised to double check that lands available for hunting previously are still open to the public.*

Post season classification surveys in December 2013 yielded an estimated 15 bucks to 100 does (Figure 6). This value is on the low side compared to the 10-year average of 19 bucks to 100 does and may be attributable to the high hunter success mentioned above. Of these bucks, about 18% were classified as 3+ point (i.e. legal to harvest). Fawn numbers, on the other hand, were at 69 fawns per 100 does (Figure 6). This compares well to the 10-year average of 59 fawns per 100 does and indicates good production.

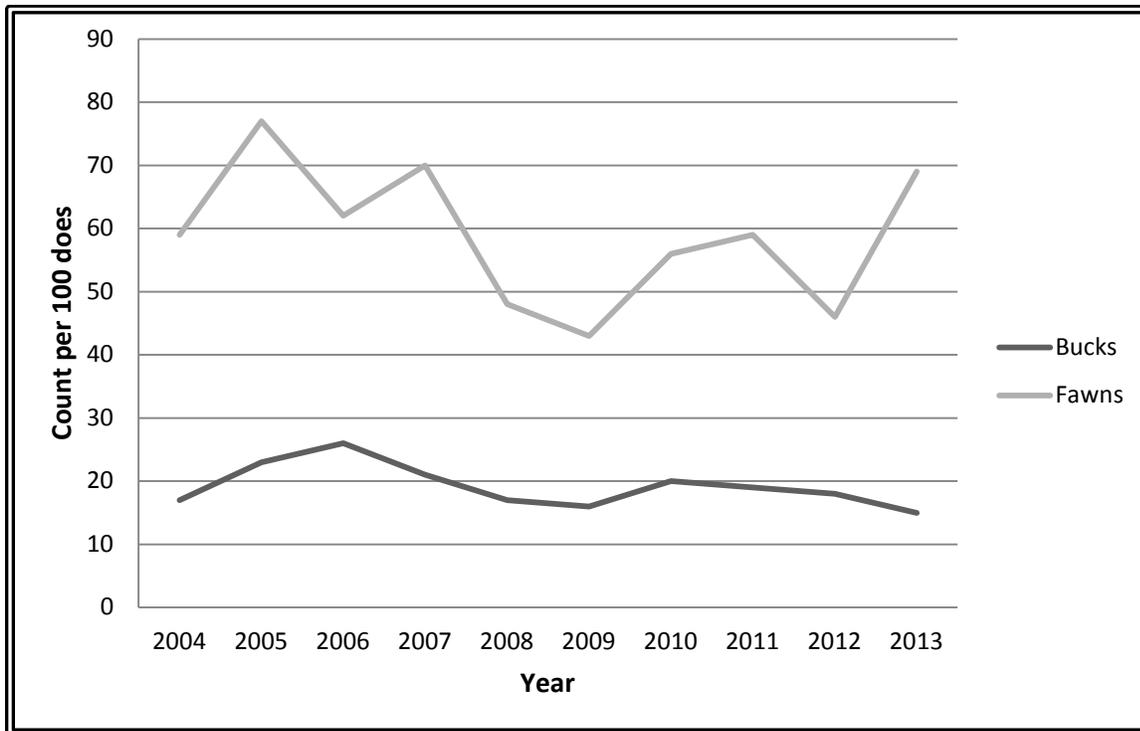


FIGURE 6. BUCK AND FAWN RATIOS IN DISTRICT 4, 2004-2013.

Most legal bucks will be harvested during the first few days of the modern firearm season. As in years past, later in November, a late muzzleloader general season will open in Franklin County providing good opportunity for hunters to harvest a buck or antlerless deer. Last year, 50% of the muzzleloader hunters in Franklin County were successful.

****NEW**** Youth hunters may now apply for 10 antlerless modern firearm permits in the Ringold Unit (GMU 379). This hunt, which will occur in mid-October has been added to address increasing damage concerns and promote opportunities for new hunters.

UPLAND BIRD

Overall, Benton and Franklin Counties offer upland bird hunters many opportunities. While there are many factors that determine hunter success, on average, harvest of most species has been steady or increasing over the last five years (Figure 7). Habitat is a key component influencing survival and reproduction of birds. At the Mesa Lake Unit of the WDFW Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area funding has been awarded for enhancing nesting opportunities for several species including pheasant, quail and doves. Over the next year, several acres will be planted with native shrubs and grasses as part of an ongoing effort to enhance wildlife habitat on WDFW lands.

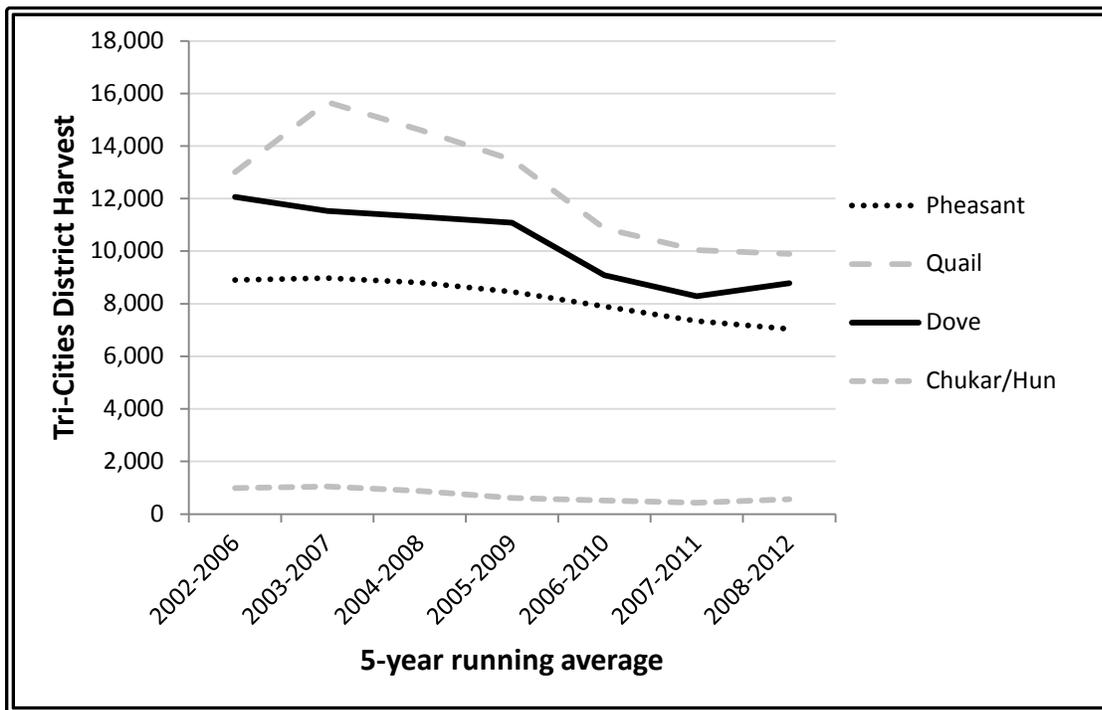


FIGURE 7. UPLAND BIRD HARVEST TRENDS BASED ON 5-YEAR RUNNING AVERAGES.

PHEASANT

In 2013, the number of pheasant hunters in District 4 increased by 12% (Figure 8). However, pheasant harvest decreased for the second year in a row. Hunters reported harvest of 5584 birds, down 13% from 2012. This is a trend observed in other areas of the state.

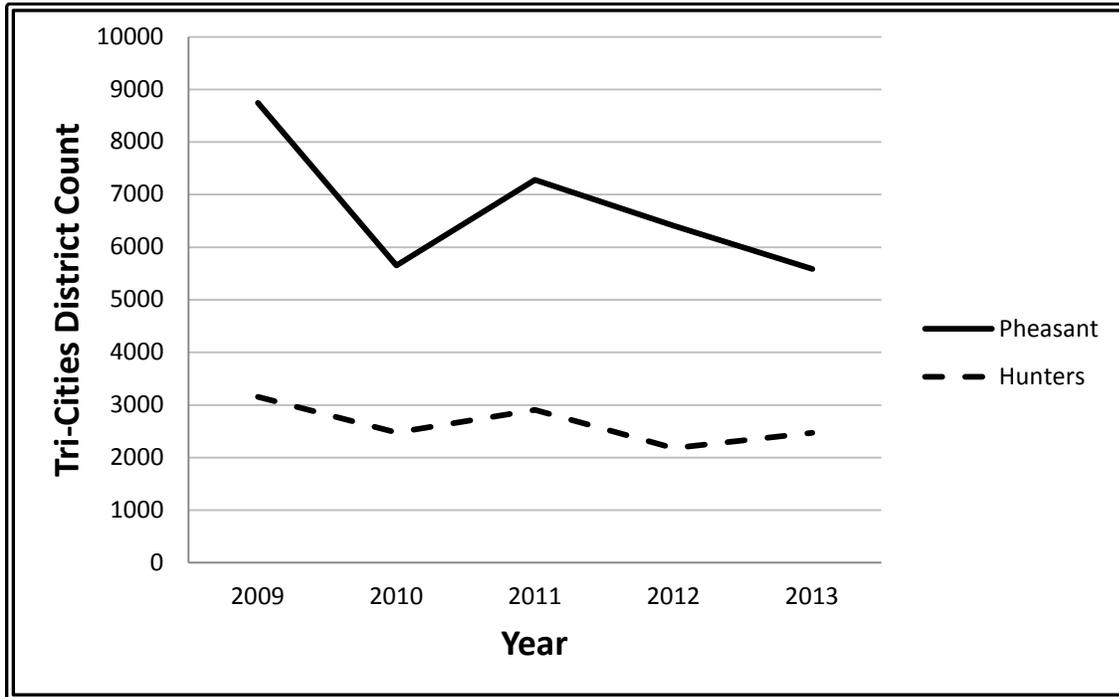


FIGURE 8. PHEASANTS HARVESTED AND PHEASANT HUNTERS IN DISTRICT 4, 2009-2013.

Each summer, biologists with the Yakama Nation conduct pheasant surveys. In 2013, birds were observed every three miles (Figure 9). This is equal to the running average since 1993 and the highest number of birds observed for the last three years.

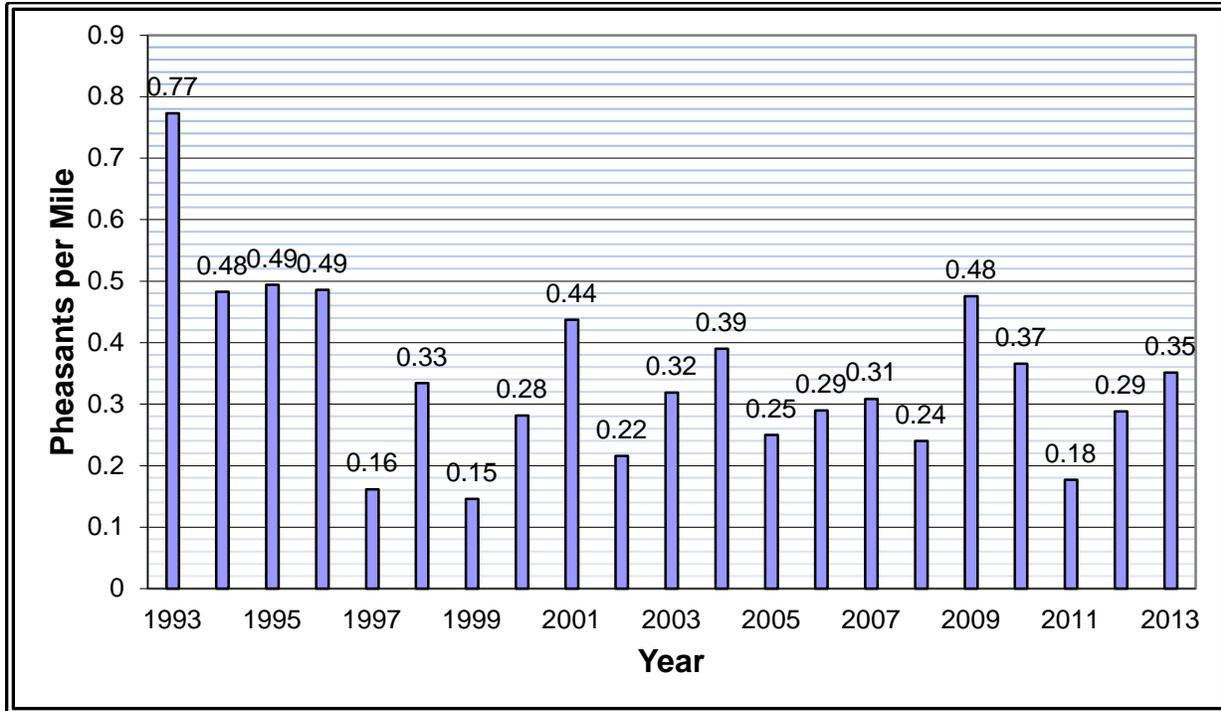


FIGURE 9. AVERAGE PHEASANTS PER MILE OBSERVED DURING BROOD COUNTS ON THE YAKAMA RESERVATION

This year’s growing season was preceded by a very mild and dry winter and early spring, followed by above average rainfall in May and June. Additionally, temperatures have remained warm, so there should be adequate cover and insects.

Hunters should focus efforts in dense weedy and grassy areas adjacent to wetlands, streams, and irrigation waterways. Birds may also be found around irrigated farmland. The best pheasant habitat in the District is in north Franklin County on and surrounding WDFW’s Windmill Ranch Wildlife Area, Mesa Lake Wildlife Area, and the Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch. Each of these hunting areas has two parking areas. Hunters are required to park and register at one of the designated parking areas. All areas allow a maximum of 5 vehicles per lot. See map of the Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area above for the general locations of Windmill and Bailie. Driving directions to the Mesa Lake Unit can be found in Appendix A.

Other areas with good pheasant habitat include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Hanford Reach National Monument (Ringold and East Wahluke Units) and [Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge](#) along the Columbia River near the town of Paterson.

Going after birds planted as part of WDFW's [Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) is a great way to work dogs and get kids involved in hunting. Last year WDFW planted 1,240 pheasants in three locations: the Hope Valley Unit of the WDFW Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area and the Big Flat and Lost Island Habitat Management Units (HMU) held by the Army Corps of Engineers (Figures 10 and 11). For 2014, close to 1200 roosters will be released again at these same locations. Information for the Army Corps HMUs is available [here](#). Nontoxic shot is required at all release sites.



THREE ROOSTERS RELEASED AT THE HOPE VALLEY UNIT OF THE WDFW SUNNYSIDE SNAKE RIVER WILDLIFE AREA.

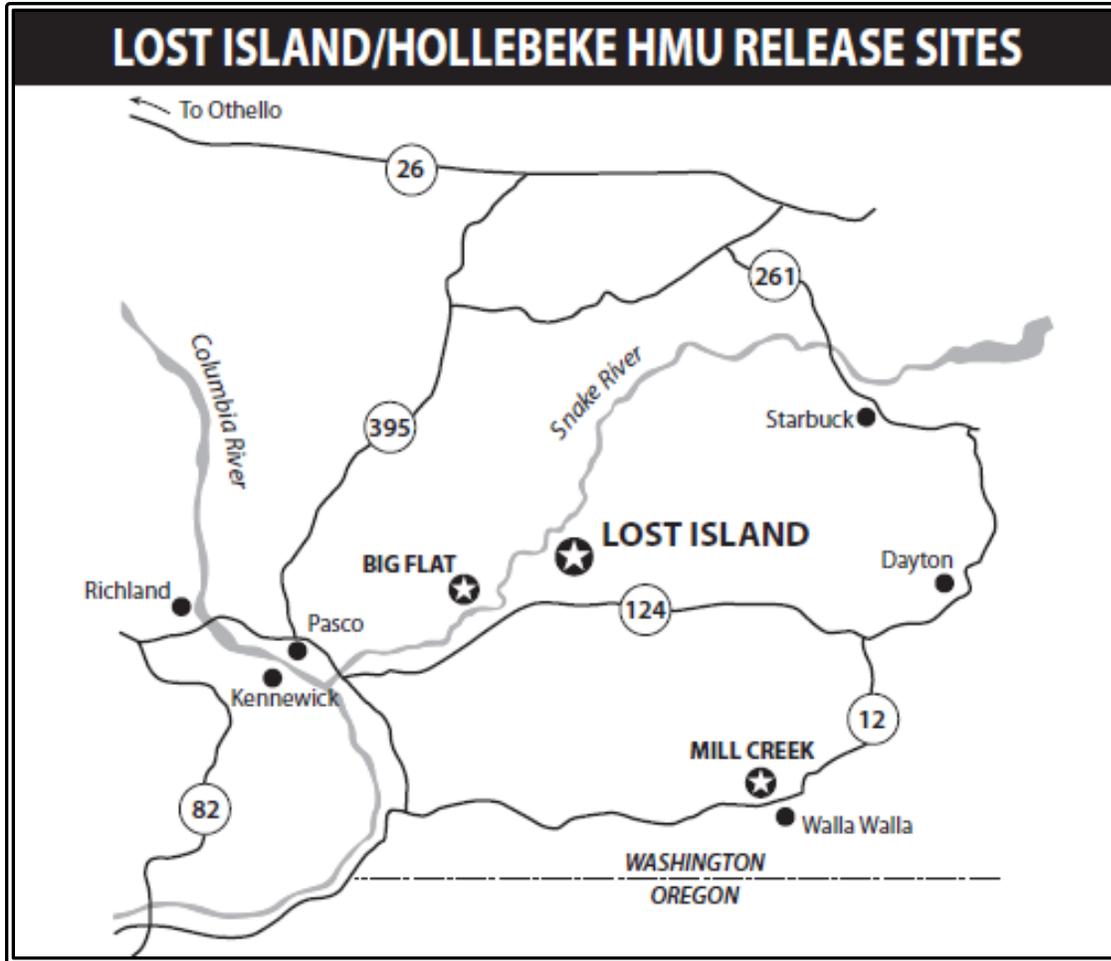


FIGURE 10. MAP DEPICTING GENERAL LOCATION OF BIG FLAT AND LOST ISLAND PHEASANT RELEASE SITES

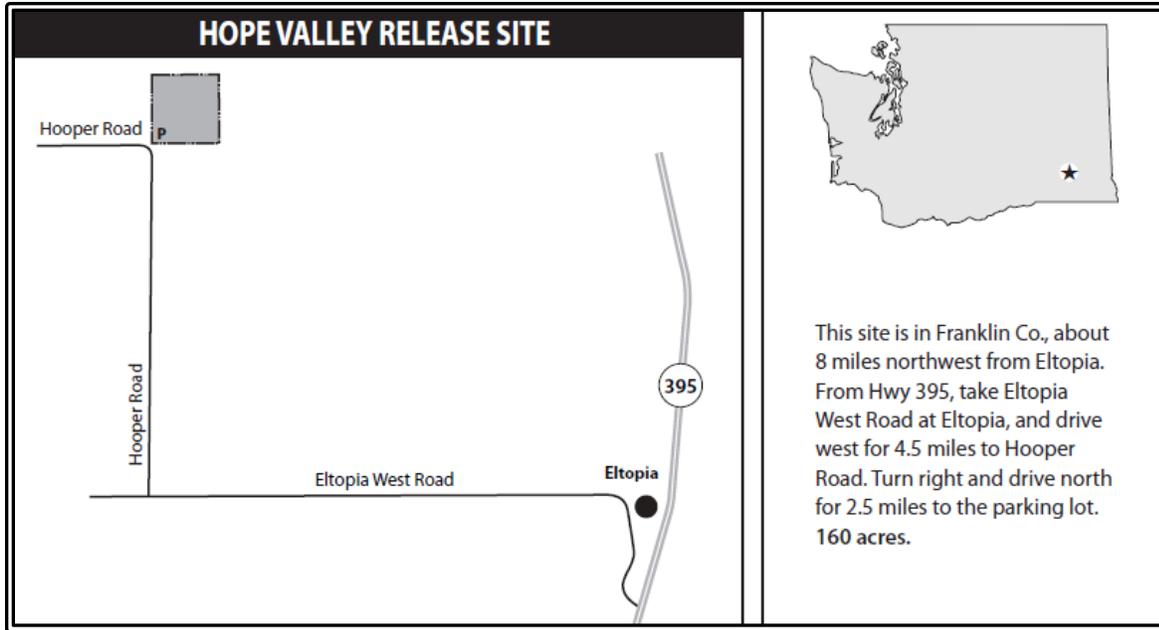


FIGURE 11. MAP DEPICTING LOCATION OF THE PHEASANT RELEASE SITE AT HOPE VALLEY.

QUAIL

Numerous California quail have been observed in the District and given the ample cover and insects it should be another good season. Best quail habitat in District 4 is similar to those listed above for pheasant. In addition, anywhere along water bodies where riparian and herbaceous vegetation intersect will provide quail habitat. An ideal setting is where Russian olives or willows are adjacent to black greasewood or sagebrush.

DOVE**ONE OF MANY DOVES BANDED IN FRANKLIN COUNTY**

There has been good success at our trapping/banding station. More than 2/3 of the birds captured are juveniles that were hatched this year indicating good production. In addition, many doves have been observed in Franklin County, even in dryer areas. Weather patterns play a critical role in determining how many doves are present during the season opener. Focus hunting efforts in or near wheat or corn stubble fields in the irrigated Yakima and Columbia Basins. The best combination of habitat includes a stubble field near water and large isolated trees or power lines where doves perch and attract other doves.

WATERFOWL

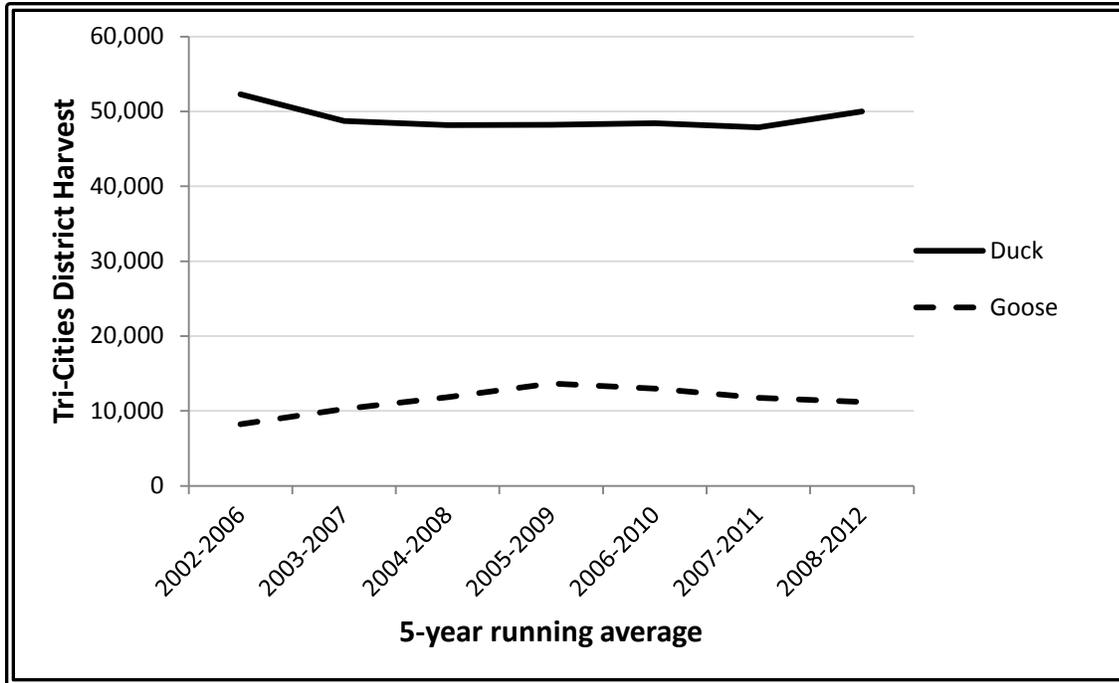


FIGURE 12. DISTRICT 4 WATERFOWL HARVEST TRENDS BASED ON 5-YEAR RUNNING AVERAGES.

As indicated in Figure 12 above, the 5 year running average of ducks in District 4 has been increasing while the goose harvest is down slightly. Pair counts for waterfowl in the irrigated portions of the Columbia Basin (Figure 13) yielded an estimate of 25,815 mallards. This is higher than the 6 year average of 20,796 and indicates good local production in the preceding year. There should be plenty of ducks for the youth season and opening weekend. Hunter success will likely taper off as the local ducks get “educated” and restrict their daytime movements to local reserves and sanctuaries. At that point, hunters will likely have to wait for the migrants to arrive in the mid- to late-season. Weather patterns will determine when they will arrive and where they will congregate.

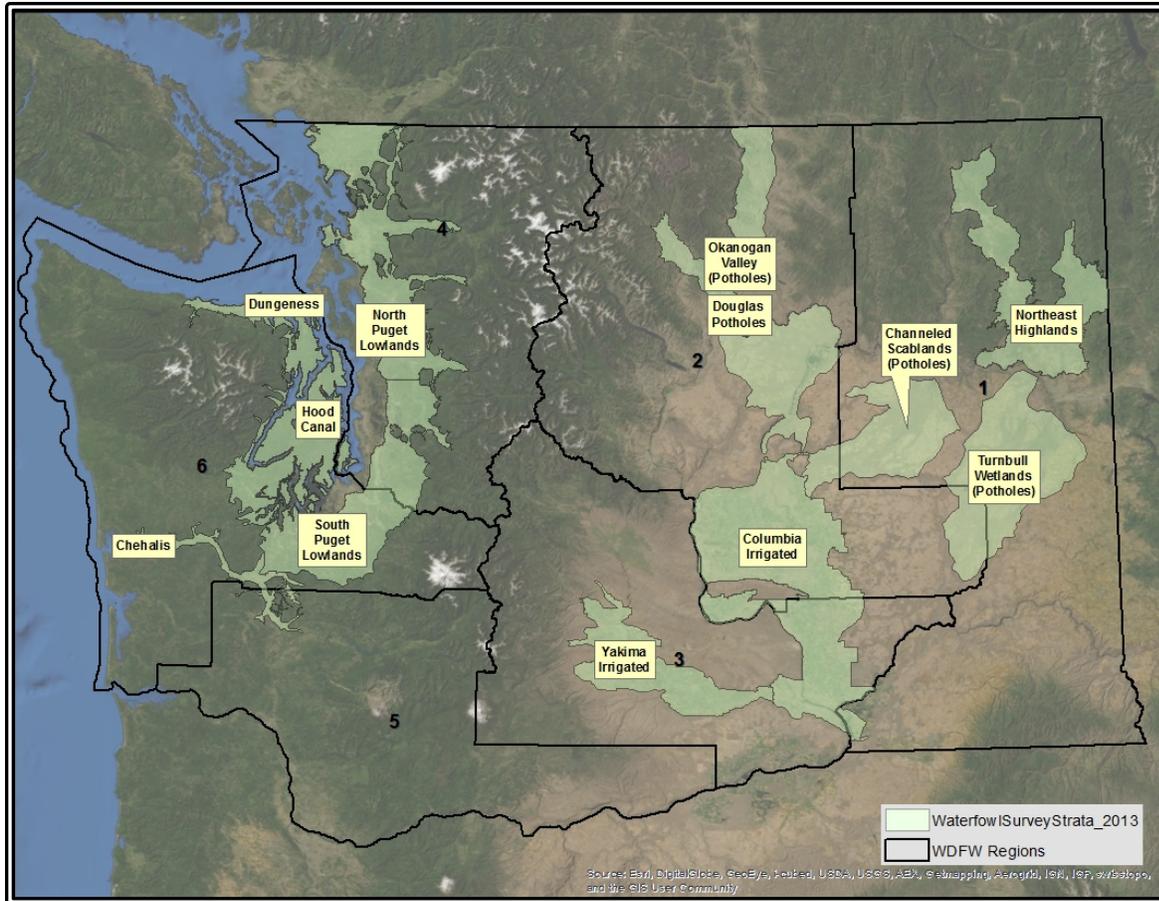


FIGURE 13. WATERFOWL PAIR COUNT SURVEY AREAS.

There are many places to hunt ducks and geese in the District. Small ponds and lakes can be found on WDFW’s Windmill Ranch, Mesa Lake, and Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch (*see link under pheasants for directions and maps*). Scootney Reservoir managed by the [Bureau of Reclamation](#) can provide good hunting. For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, [see “Let’s Go Waterfowling.”](#)

The Snake and Columbia Rivers and associated water bodies will hold tens of thousands of ducks when the weather gets below freezing. Access can be gained at the McNary and Umatilla National Wildlife Refuges and the Hanford Reach National Monument (*see maps above*).



A MALLARD BROOD IN THE POTHOLE CANAL, FRANKLIN COUNTY.

During odd numbered years, Canada goose nests are surveyed on most of the islands in the Columbia River throughout District 4 to track local production. Last year, the number of Canada geese nests counted was up 10% over the previous survey in 2011. Therefore, there will again be an early goose season running for September 13-14, 2014. In addition, thousands of migratory Canada geese will arrive in the District sometime in October or November. They can be pursued in the farm fields near the Snake and Columbia Rivers. *Most of the land is private so secure permission before hunting.*



GOOSE HARVEST IN THE TRI-CITIES.

Benton and Franklin County farmers are currently being contacted to determine their interest in delaying tillage of corn and wheat stubble and providing hunter access on those acres. We had 600 acres enrolled last year and hope for the same or more this year. Watch the WDFW website for updated maps and directions to these fields in the coming weeks <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/>.

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

Hunting access in Benton and Franklin Counties is more limited than some other parts of the state, as much of the district is held in private ownership or by federal agencies that do not allow hunting. However, quality opportunities on both public and private land do exist and WDFW is always trying to expand hunting access.

The Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area (Figure 2) comprises most of the WDFW-owned land in the District and most parcels are open to hunting, but with specific restrictions at some units. For information go to: http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/.

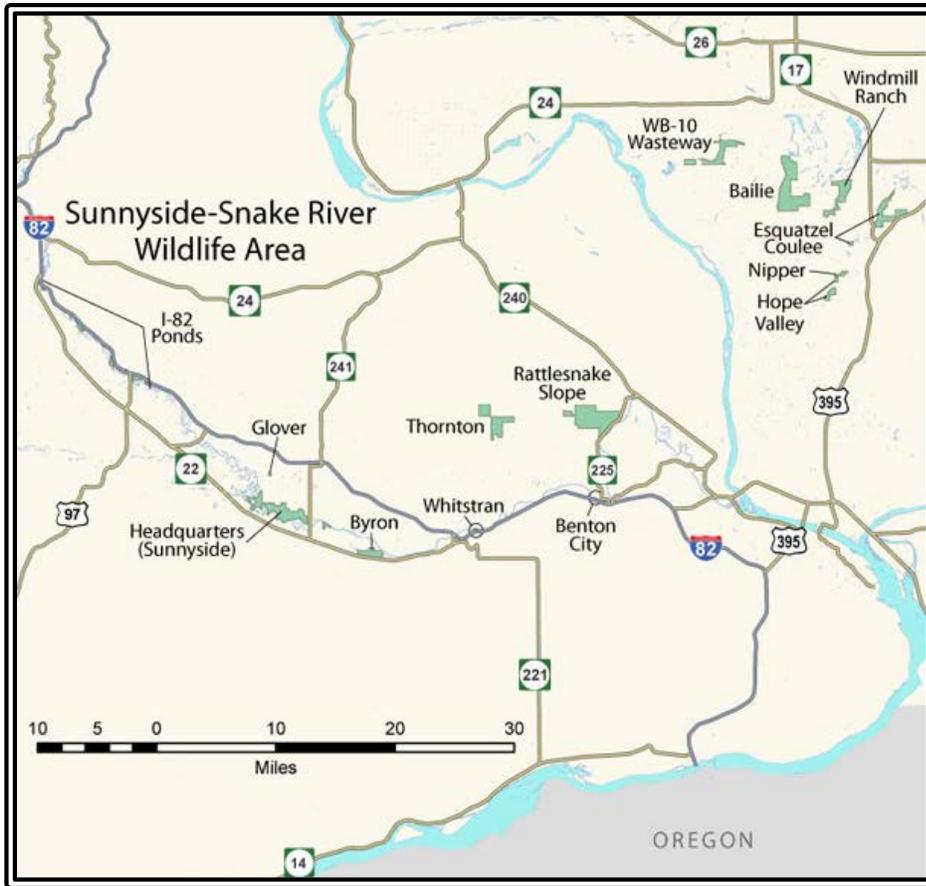


FIGURE 2. MAP OF THE SUNNYSIDE/SNAKE RIVER WILDLIFE AREA UNITS.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) allows hunting on a number of units that are part of the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex including a portion of the Hanford Reach National Monument and a portion of the Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) (Figures 3 and 4 and [here](#)) and certain areas within the McNary NWR.

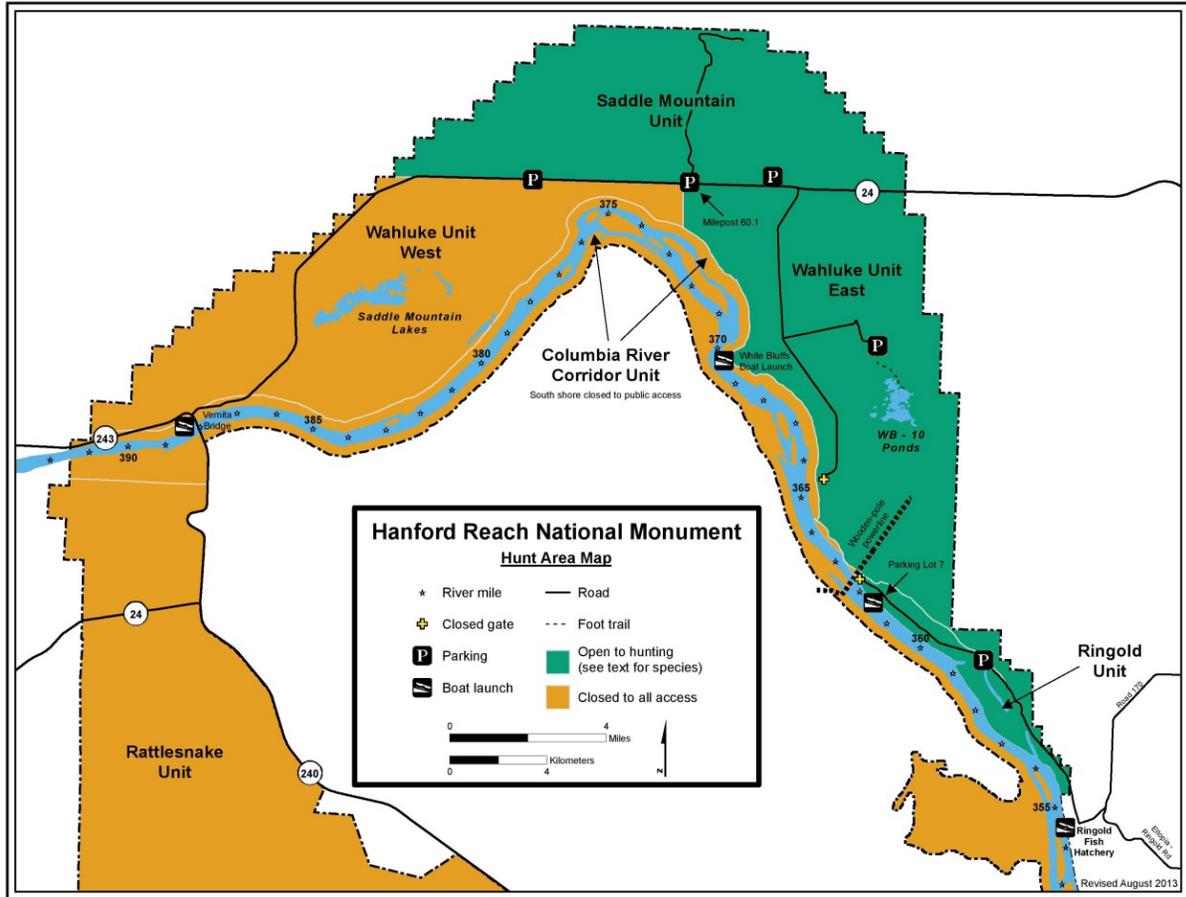


FIGURE 3. HANFORD REACH NATIONAL MONUMENT SHOWING AREAS WITH VARIOUS HUNTING ACCESS DESIGNATIONS.

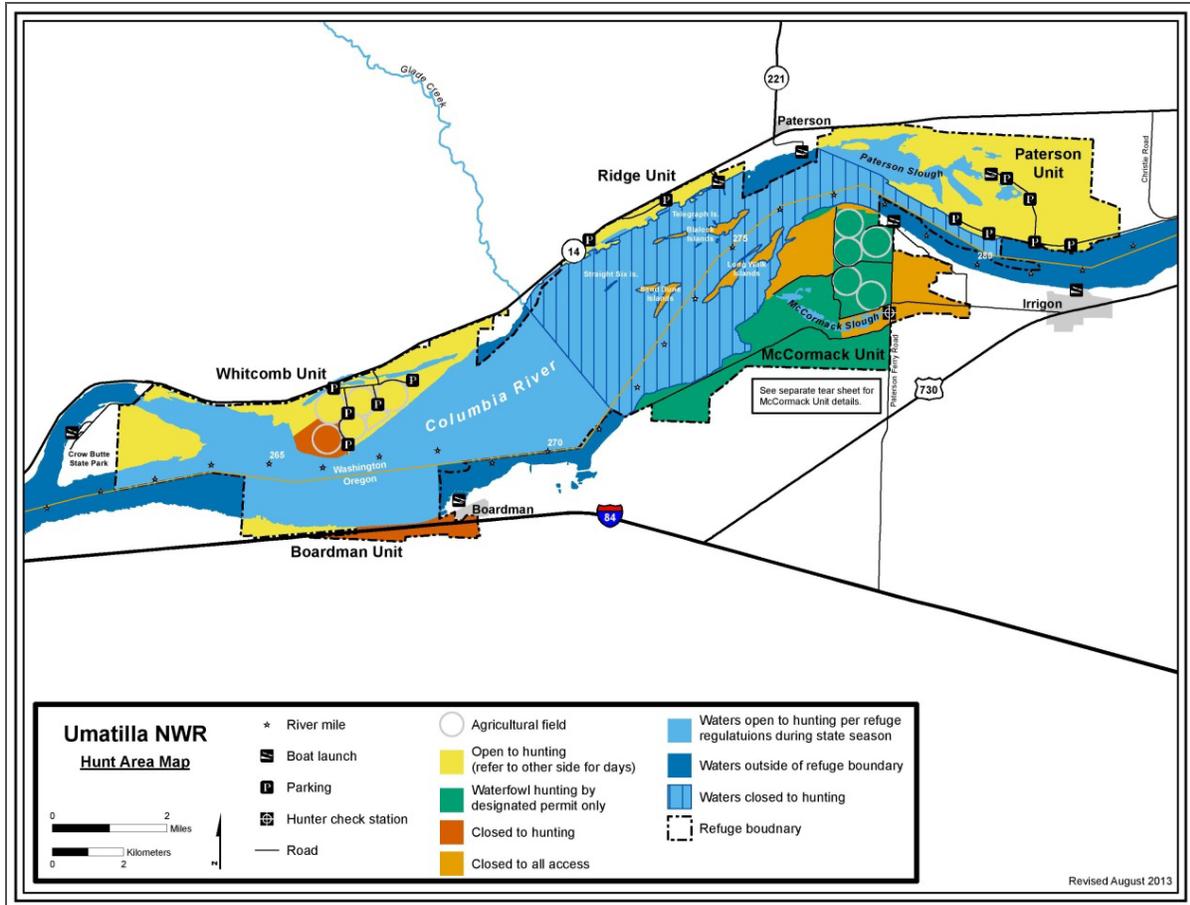


FIGURE 4. UMATILLA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SHOWING AREAS WITH VARIOUS HUNTING ACCESS DESIGNATIONS.

In addition to the WDFW and the USFWS, two agencies which are tasked with managing wildlife and hunting opportunities, various other public agencies own or manage land within Benton and Franklin Counties that may be open to hunting. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the [Army Corps of Engineers](#), and the Bureau of Reclamation are all federal agencies that allow hunting on portions of their land. Consult a public lands map or [GoHunt](#) for more information.

Washington’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also manages land that is open to hunting unless otherwise posted. Benton and Franklin Counties have a large amount of DNR acreage but it is often leased to private landowners. While leased land *may* still be open to hunting, hunters should always be aware that adjacent landowners are often managing DNR land as part of their business operations and should be respectful of property boundaries. Consult a public lands map or [GoHunt](#) for more information.

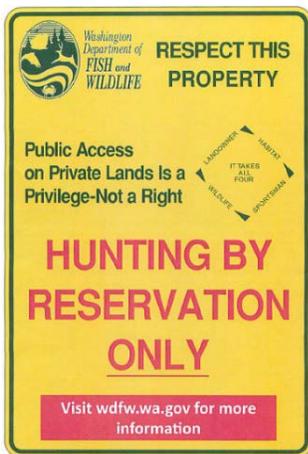
PRIVATE LANDS

General Information Hunters may be most familiar and comfortable with hunting on public land but WDFW also provides and maintains a Private Lands Access program that allows the public to hunt on land owned by cooperating private landowners. Often these landowners receive little to no compensation for their enrollment in the program and hunters should always respect their property and wishes. By being a responsible guest on these private lands, hunters can help insure that they remain open for years to come and will enhance WDFW’s mission to expand private lands access.

Information about private lands access sites including site-specific regulations, locations, season availability and contact information can be found [here](#) and at [GoHunt](#).

Four private lands programs exist and although each provides public, *walk-in only* access to private land, they function differently.

Hunt By Reservation



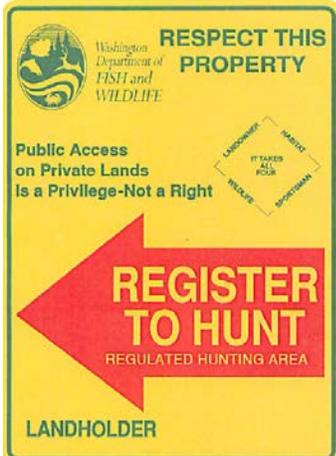
Hunt by reservation is the newest private lands access program in Washington and is coming to Benton and Franklin County this fall. The program requires hunters to register online at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access/private_land/type/56/. Hunters are required to print out and carry a permit, and are provided a map of the property. Hunt by Reservation contracts in Benton and Franklin Counties are currently in development, but multiple opportunities are expected to be available for both big game and bird hunting. More information about using the reservation site can be found [here](#).

Feel Free To Hunt

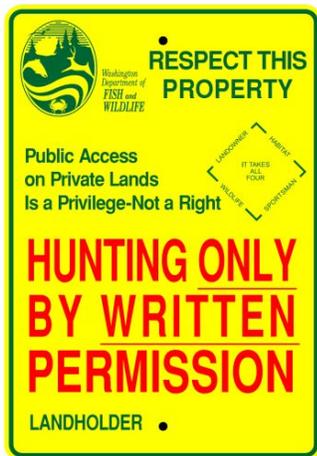


Feel Free to Hunt is the largest access program in District 4 with dozens of properties totaling around 100,000 acres. It allows hunters to access designated land at any time during established hunting season. Most District 4 Feel Free to Hunt property provides access for mule deer hunting with some potential for upland bird hunting as well.

Register to Hunt



District 4 has two Register to Hunt (RTH) sites totaling 11,700 acres, both in Benton County. Register to Hunt requires hunters to sign in at registration kiosks and carry a permit with them. District 4’s RTH sites primarily provide waterfowl and upland bird hunting opportunities.



Hunt By Written Permission

Hunt By Written Permission (HBWP) requires hunters to make contact with the landowner. Landowners then issue permits to hunters at their discretion and hunters are expected to carry this permit while they hunt. Landowner contact information can be found on the signs at the site. There are 7 HBWP properties totaling 20,000 acres within District 4 and can provide opportunities for both big game and bird hunting.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

A good starting point for hunters looking for a place to hunt is the newly redesigned GoHunt website at <http://apps.wdfw.wa.gov/gohunt/>. GoHunt is a valuable resource that provides hunters with information about public and private lands access points, GMU boundaries and harvest data, landscape features like roads and topography, and a great deal more.

DIRECTIONS TO MESA LAKE REGISTER TO HUNT AREAS**Access Site #1****DRIVING DIRECTIONS:**

In Franklin County, from HWY 395, take WA-17N toward Mesa/Moses Lake .4 miles, turn NW onto WA-17 .9 miles, turn W onto Pepiot Road .2 miles, turn slight right onto 1 Avenue S .1 mile, turn west on Sheffield Road .6 miles, turn west on gravel drive (Sunleaf) .5 miles to east parking lot.

PARKING/RESTROOM INFORMATION:

Gravel Parking Lot. No facilities.

OTHER INFORMATION:

Register to Hunt; 5 car limit during hunting seasons only. No overnight camping or open fires. See kiosk for further information/restrictions.

Access Site #2**DRIVING DIRECTIONS:**

In Franklin County, from HWY 395, take WA-17N toward Mesa/Moses Lake .4 miles, turn NW onto WA-17 .9 miles, turn W onto Pepiot Road .2 miles, turn slight right onto 1 Avenue S .1 mile, turn west on Sheffield Road 1.8 miles, turn south on Langford Road .8 miles, turn east on gravel .2 miles to west parking lot/crude boat launch.

PARKING/RESTROOM INFORMATION:

Gravel Parking Lot. No facilities.

OTHER INFORMATION:

Register to Hunt; 5 car limit during hunting seasons only. No overnight camping or open fires. See kiosk for further information/restrictions.