

2014

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Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**



# DISTRICT 5 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Grant and Adams Counties

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## **DISTRICT 5 GENERAL OVERVIEW**

The Ephrata District offers a variety of hunting opportunities but is most recognized for waterfowl hunting throughout Grant and western Adams counties and mule deer hunting within the Desert Unit (GMU 290). Pheasant, quail, and mourning dove hunting is popular within the Desert, Potholes, Goose Lakes, Lower Crab Creek, Banks Lake, and Quincy Lake Units of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (CBWA; Figure 1). Other opportunities within the district include bobcat, cougar, chukar, gray partridge, cottontail rabbit, coyote, and both general season and permit opportunities for mule deer; elk are occasionally harvested but resident populations do not occur in this district.

Habitat in the Ephrata District is variable. Within the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project (CBIP), the landscape is mostly flat, but east-west running sand dunes occur within the Desert Unit, which includes both Winchester and Frenchmen Hills Wasteways. Important crops for wildlife within the CBIP include corn (grain, sweet, and silage), spring wheat, alfalfa, and orchards. Within the CBIP hunters can expect to find mule deer (e.g. Desert Unit – GMU 290), abundant waterfowl, and fair numbers of pheasant and quail. Waterfowl habitat predominately revolves around wetlands, wasteways, and reservoirs that were created by the CBIP.

Lands surrounding the CBIP include highly fragmented shrub-steppe, dryland wheat, coulees, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands. In these areas, hunters can expect to find gray partridge, mule deer, and chukar in the steepest portions of the district (e.g. Sun Lakes and Quincy Lakes Units).

Dominant native plant species include big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*), and spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*).

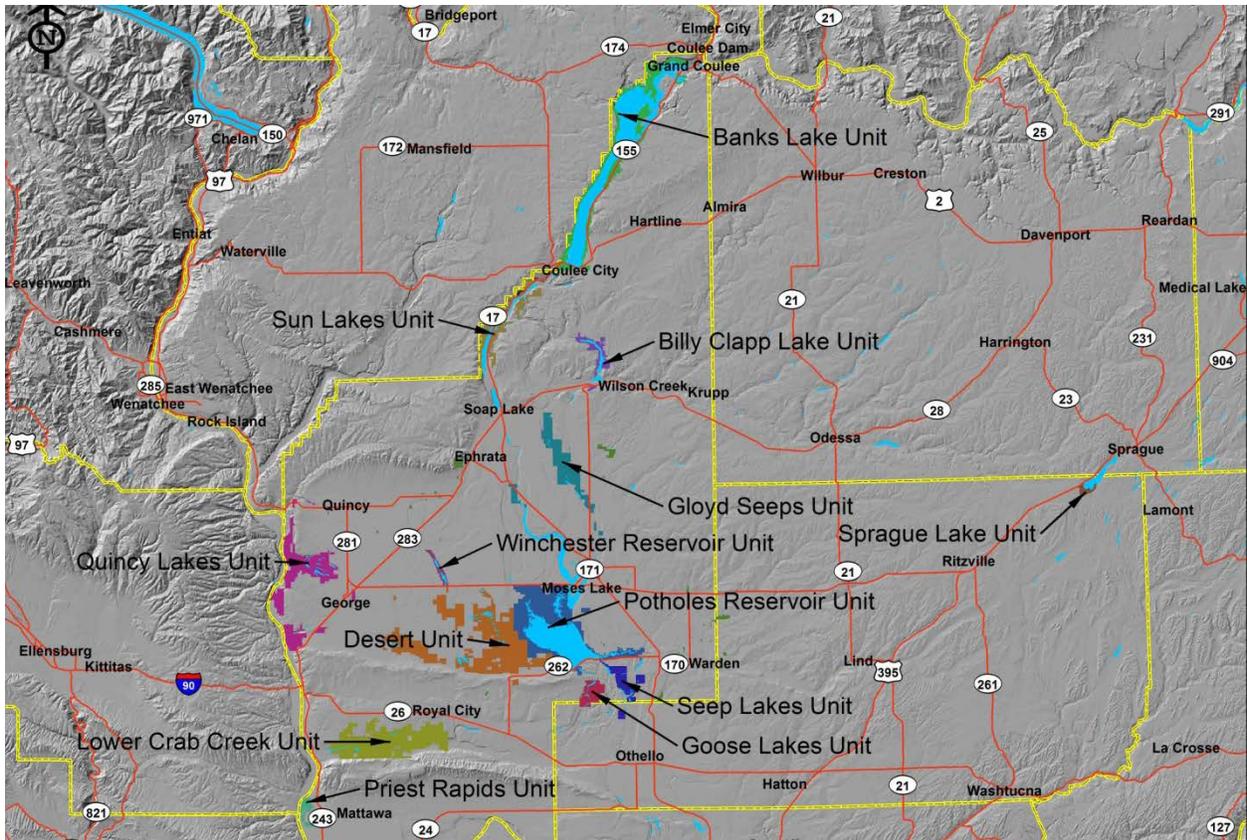


FIGURE 1. COLUMBIA BASIN WILDLIFE AREA UNITS.

### Habitat Management

Biologists continue working with wildlife area staff to target grant opportunities to gain funding to create wetland projects, manage wetland succession, recover wetland projects, and plant a limited acreage of food plots.

Wildlife Area Management Activities (Figure 2):

- 1) Gloyd Road 20 sharecropping: grain crops are sharecropped at this site to provide food for pheasants and quail.
- 2) Ephrata Lake acquisitions: to date WDFW has purchased 120 acres of land around Ephrata Lake. This lake is an important staging area for waterfowl during migration and is also important during the breeding season.

- 3) Middle Crab Creek habitat enhancement<sup>1</sup>: emphasis is being placed on opportunities to improve waterfowl nesting habitat in the Gloyd Seeps Unit to supplement an increase in wetland acreage due to irrigation operations. Approximately 200 acres are currently in fallow condition to control weeds in preparation for seeding to perennial grassland during 2014.

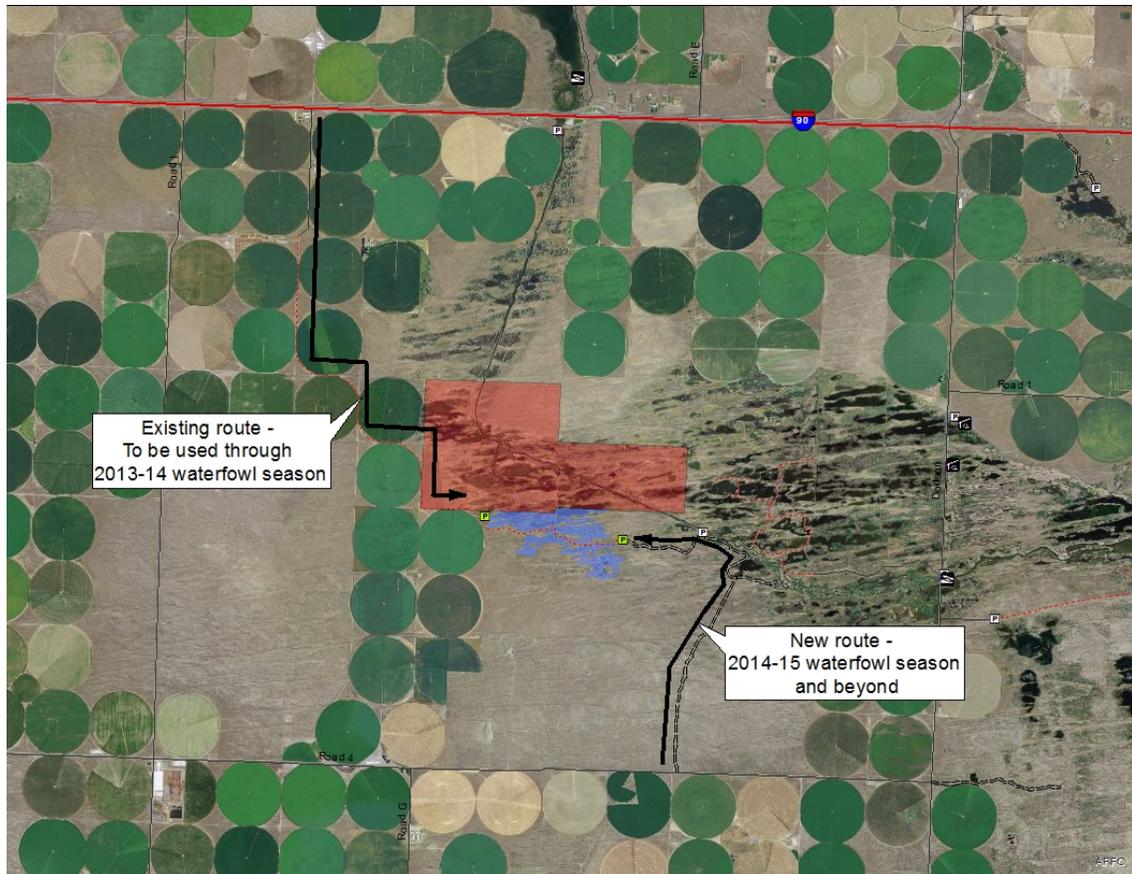
Additionally, wetland enhancement projects are currently underway and anticipated to be completed by the end of October. Whether additional water from the [Supplemental Feed Route](#) will be available for the projects this season is currently not known.

- 4) Mansfield Pond recovery and maintenance: efforts underway to reduce tall emergent vegetation by mowing, burning, and spraying, particularly along wetland edges, to allow for hunting opportunity and to increase habitat value. This will be a slow process but will ultimately result in improved hunting opportunities in this area. We've observed a considerable response by smartweed (*Polygonum* spp.) in the area when tall emergents such as common reed (*Phragmites australis*) are removed. A small food plot (0.5 acre) of millet/smartweed was established along the western bank of the pond.
- 5) Road 10 Gloyd Farm Unit wetland enhancement: small pond being enhanced to improve forage productivity for waterfowl and hunting opportunity. Smartweed production in this wetland complex has increased tremendously as a result of these management actions.
- 6) Westlake vegetation control: vegetation management, primarily aimed at improving northern leopard frog habitat, has added benefit of improving waterfowl habitat by opening up wetlands from dominance by tall emergent vegetation.
- 7) Winchester Restricted Access Area management: emphasis on mowing vegetation for hunting access. New restrictions have been developed for online reservation requirements from opening day through November. However, drop-ins are allowed after 9am if parking spaces are available. All hunting parties (reservation or drop-in) must register at the box located in the parking lot. Access has been changed for the 2014 season (see below).

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<sup>1</sup> WDFW is seeking funding to enhance nesting cover throughout the Gloyd Seeps Unit of the CBWA. The area has been selected for enhancement work largely because of the Bureau of Reclamation's Supplemental Feed Project

(BOR 2007; <http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/ea/wash/potholes/index.html>), which will increase wetland acreage throughout the area dramatically. WDFW intends to support this increase in wetland acreage with an increase in native perennial nesting and winter cover for wildlife. The effort is also intended to stem the advance of invasive species and to reduce erosion to the existing ephemeral streambank.



**NEW ACCESS ROUTE FOR WINCHESTER REGULATED ACCESS AREA**

- 8) Common Reed control: many acres of common reed controlled along Winchester Wasteway (Dodson to Potholes Reservoir) and throughout North Potholes. WDFW has received considerable positive feedback with regards to the “opening” of previously “closed-in” wetlands.
- 9) 239 Drain project recovery: herbicide treatment of common reed to recover shallow excavated wetland basins.
- 10) Harris Ponds maintenance: regular maintenance to maintain open water within shallow excavated wetlands.
- 11) Frenchmen Restricted Access Area management: Fifteen acres of millet were planted for the 2014 season. Additionally, changes in water regime in this project have promoted other quality seed producing annuals such as smartweed, beggarsticks, and dock. These plants are an important component of waterfowl diet. The winter wheat planting from August 2013 was flooded out partially but some wheat remains.



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MILLET PLANTING AT FRENCHMEN REGULATED ACCESS AREA – PHOTO TAKEN ON JULY 14.



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MIXTURE OF PLANTED MILLET AND NATURALLY OCCURRING SMARTWEED, BEGGARS TICKS, AND DOCK.



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WINTER WHEAT PLANTED IN 2013 AT FRENCHMEN REGULATED ACCESS AREA – PHOTO TAKEN ON JULY 14.

- 12) Buckshot Goose Field: this alfalfa field has an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) access pit blind. Contact Ephrata Regional Office for a key.
  
- 13) Artesian and Black Lakes: we are currently in the feasibility stage (engineering design, environmental compliance, and coordination and communication with partners such as Ducks Unlimited, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Ecology, and East Columbia Basin Irrigation District) of a wetland project for these historic lakebeds which no longer hold water. Once the feasibility stage is complete, we will be seeking funding for this project to develop over 100 acres of shallow wetland habitat for migrating waterfowl and hunting opportunity.

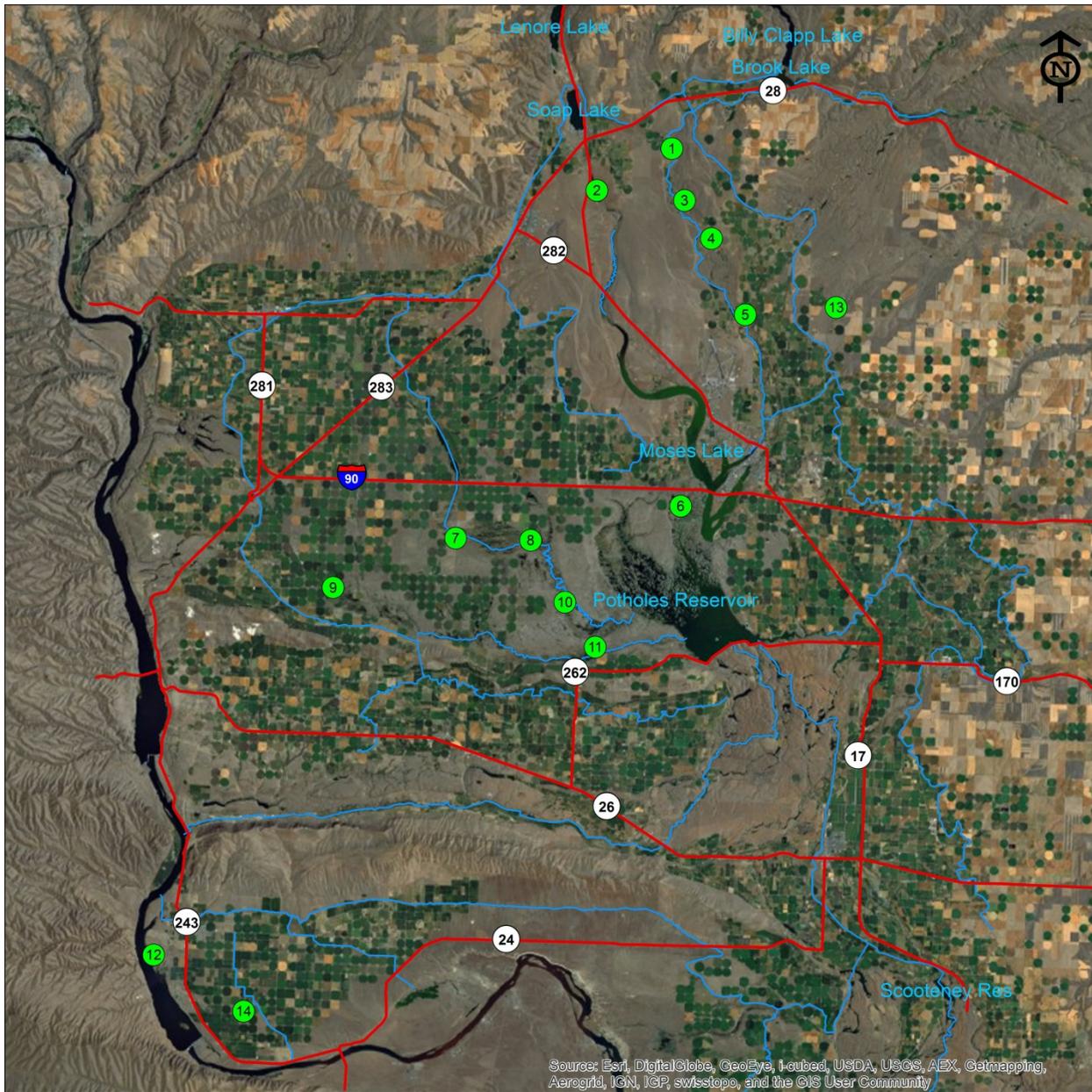


FIGURE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF WATERFOWL RELATED WORK IN EPHRATA DISTRICT. GREEN CIRCLES REPRESENT PROJECT AREAS.

## ELK

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Elk are extremely rare and have not historically been a management priority in District 5. Resident elk herds do not exist in GMU 272, GMU 278, and GMU 290. These trends are not expected to change in the near future. Because of the significant potential for crop depredation issues, WDFW does not encourage the establishment of elk herds in District 5. WDFW keeps elk herd numbers low by providing any elk opportunities during the general archery and modern firearm seasons.

In the Ephrata District, hunters killed 7 elk last season, all of which were taken by modern firearm hunters. Hunters in GMU 284 harvested the most elk (6) in this district. Because harvest levels have been extremely low until recently, biologists do not conduct annual surveys for elk in GMU 284. Elk that are harvested in GMU 284 are most likely part of a herd that is known to occur at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Consequently, harvest in GMU 284 is probably dependent on whether or not that herd migrates to GMU 284 during the hunting season rather than a function of population size and growth. The number of elk harvested in GMU 284 gradually increased from 4 elk in 2005 to 22 elk in 2011 and then declined to 6 elk in 2013. This fluctuation in harvest is further evidence of the dynamic nature of elk migration from Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. One elk was harvested in GMU 278.

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2014 SEASON

If hunters wish to hunt elk in District 5 during the 2013 season, they are most likely to be successful in GMU 284. However, the majority of this GMU consists of agricultural and other private lands, so access may be difficult. It is challenging to predict elk harvest levels in GMU 284 during the 2014 season because WDFW does not conduct surveys to monitor population trends for this herd.

## DEER

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Mule deer are the most abundant big game species within District 5. Although white-tailed deer are observed on occasion and constitute a portion (<5%) of deer harvest each year they occur at very low densities in areas of marginal habitat and are not managed with the objective of increasing their distribution or population size. Mule deer numbers in District 5 are relatively low throughout summer months, but increase in October as deer begin to migrate from areas outside the District (see Migration Patterns below). Mule deer habitat in District 5 can most commonly be characterized as small patches of shrub-steppe and Conservation Reserve Program

(CRP) lands bordered by cultivated crops (usually winter wheat and orchards). With the exception of enrolling new lands into CRP, there are limited opportunities to enhance mule deer habitat in District 5 and nearly all management objectives are achieved through harvest regulations.

The abundance of agriculture in District 5 creates the potential for crop depredation complaints if mule deer populations are allowed to exceed social tolerances. Therefore, the primary management goal in all GMUs is to increase deer herds to levels that maximize hunter opportunity and minimize landowner complaints. Additional management objectives include maintaining a post-hunt buck:doe ratio of 15:100. WDFW achieves these management objectives by providing general season opportunities for bucks with  $\geq 3$  antler points on one side and only providing antlerless harvest during the general archery season and by permit only in areas where crop depredation is a management concern (see Deer Areas below).

The exception is GMU 290 where the primary management objective is to produce a quality mule deer hunting experience. Although quality can mean different things to different hunters, it almost always includes the opportunity to harvest a mature buck. For that reason, primary management objectives in GMU 290 are to maintain a mule deer herd with a post-hunt buck:doe ratio of  $\geq 30:100$  and a post-hunt buck population where adult bucks ( $\geq 2.5$  years old) constitute no less than 50% of the bucks. WDFW achieves these management objectives by providing permit only opportunities and harvesting no more than 25% of the mature bucks on an annual basis. In addition, WDFW minimizes depredation complaints on agricultural lands by controlling population growth with antlerless harvest, which is also limited to permit only opportunities. The level of antlerless harvest that WDFW allows depends on whether or not the population is increasing, decreasing, or stable. See Appendix A for photos of bucks that were harvested or observed during post-hunt surveys in GMU 290 as well as FAQs for this unit.

Trend data in all District 5 GMUs indicate relatively stable mule deer populations with post-hunt buck:doe ratios that satisfy the management objectives. See the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#) for a more detailed analysis of mule deer population trends in District 5. Damage complaints associated with these herds have also been relatively low in recent years, indicating they have not exceeded the social carrying capacity that exists in agricultural settings. Therefore, current harvest restrictions and season lengths appear to be appropriate for these herds and will likely change little in the near future.

**WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?**

With the exception of the Desert (GMU 290) and Wahluke Unit (GMU 278), mule deer in the Ephrata District are largely migratory. Historically, radio-marked mule deer exhibited movements from neighboring GMUs into the Ephrata District (Figure 3). These movements are largely weather dependent with snowfall likely having the largest effect on fall and winter movements. Mule deer will reverse this migration and return to fawning grounds during spring. South and east movements of mule deer into GMU 272 from neighboring GMUs such as Big Bend, Saint Andrews, and Moses Coulee are also believed to occur but these movements are not as well understood.

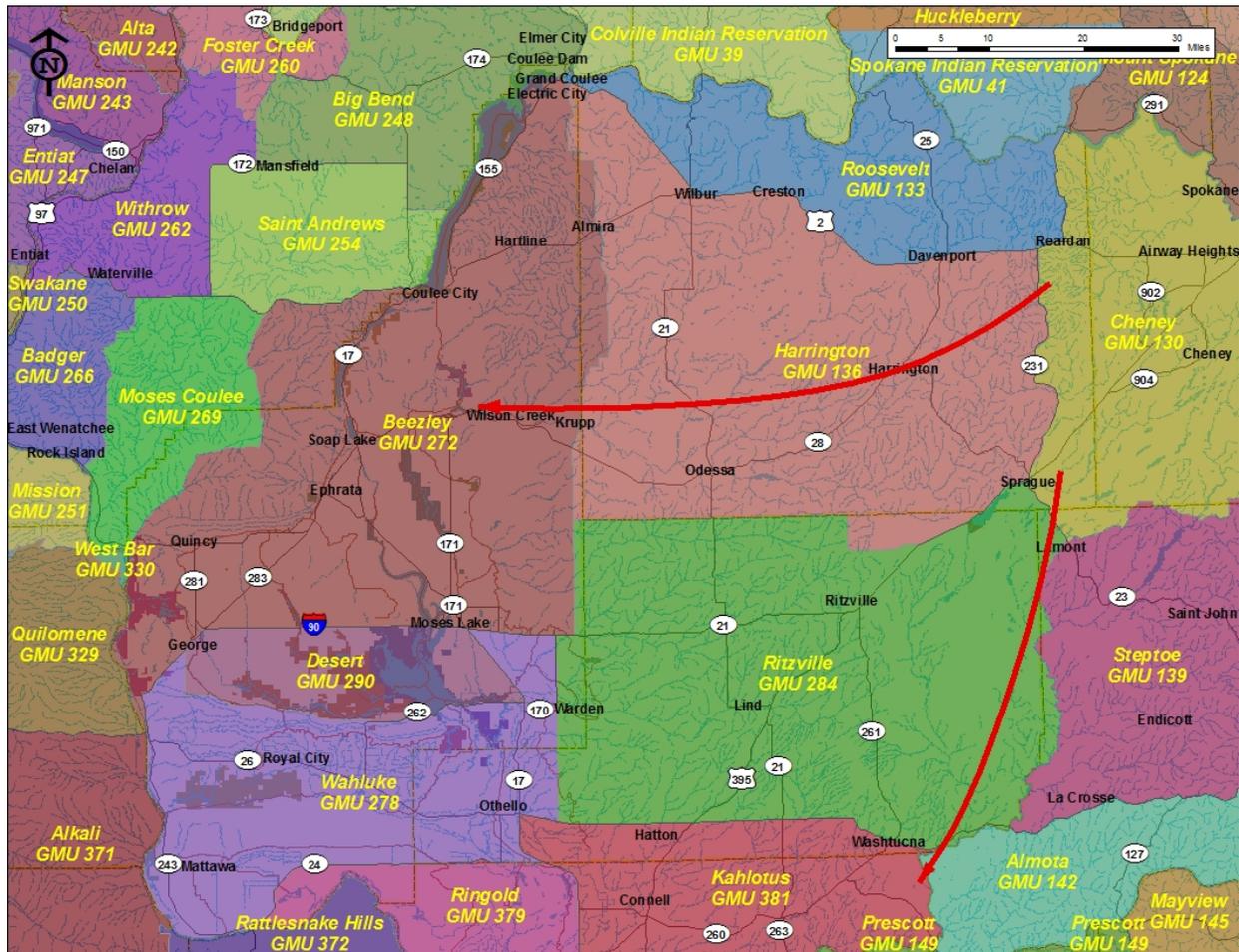


FIGURE 3. GENERALIZED PATTERNS OF FALL AND WINTER MULE DEER MIGRATION INTO THE EPHRATA DISTRICT.

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**WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2014 SEASON**

Most deer harvest occurs in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284 where post-hunt buck:doe ratios typically range between 20–30:100. Post-harvest surveys in both GMU's were at the low end (20:100) during the 2013 post-hunt survey ground counts. Winter conditions were favorable with regards to lack of snow cover but dry conditions resulted in a limited fall green-up of cool season grasses (Sandberg's bluegrass and cheatgrass) which may have forced deer to rely on winter wheat. Simply put, harvest is expected to drop slightly from the last couple years, which have produced higher than average harvest rates, but harvest should be close to the long-term average. Post-hunt fawn:doe ratios indicate herd productivity was moderate in all surveyed GMUs; these fawns will become the legal bucks of 2015.

GMU 272 includes 53,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex (Gloyd Seeps, Banks Lake, Sun Lakes, Billy Clapp, and Quincy Lakes units) most of which is open to hunting. The number of deer hunters hunting within GMU 272 ranges from about 1,200 to 1,600 with recent years hosting about 1,400 hunters. Success rates in GMU 272 range from about 20-30% with a long-term average of 25%. Muzzleloader hunters experience the highest success rates (29%), followed by modern firearm (24%) and archery (20%). Permit hunters in the Lakeview Unit typically see 50-70% success rates but the 2013 season success rate fell to 27%, probably due to the lack of snow cover which allowed mule deer to utilize winter wheat in the Beezley Hills rather than the orchards that this hunt is intended to protect.

GMU 284 is dominated by private property. Hunters should plan to seek out permission to access private lands and/or plan on hunting lands enrolled in the WDFW Access Program as little Wildlife Area land (~1,600 acres) occurs in this unit. The number of deer hunters hunting within GMU 284 ranges from about 650-1,100 with recent years hosting about 800 hunters. Success rates in GMU 284 range from about 30-50% with a long-term average of 39%. Modern firearm hunters experience higher success rates (37%), followed by muzzleloader (28%) and archery (27%). Permit hunters experience the highest success rates, ranging from 64-81% and a long-term average of 72%.

GMU 290 is a permit only unit, thus all hunting opportunities in GMU 290 (Desert Unit) are issued through the public draw. With average post-hunt ratios of 45 bucks:100 does, and 60% of bucks being classified as >2.5 years old, high success rates are expected to continue in 2013. Forty-one percent of land in GMU 290 occurs as the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, thus public opportunity is widely available. The area consists of riparian areas that are associated with the Winchester and Frenchmen Wasteways, and is surrounded by rolling, sandy dunes with varying densities of shrub cover. The majority of the private agricultural land in this unit occurs throughout the western half.

GMU 278 includes 36,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex (Lower Crab Creek Unit), which is open to hunting. Harvest in this unit falls between 20 and 70 deer, with recent years harvesting about 60 deer. Hunter numbers range from about 150 to 300, with recent years hosting close to 300 hunters, which may account for the increase in harvest rate. Success rates for this unit range from about 10-25% with a long-term average of 18%. Muzzleloader hunters experience the highest success rates (24%), followed by modern firearm (17%) and archery (10%).

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## DEER AREAS

There are localized areas in District 5 where deer congregate during harsh or prolonged winters and have the potential to cause crop damage. To address this issue, WDFW provides limited permit only opportunities to harvest antlerless deer that occur in close proximity to these areas. WDFW defines such areas as “Deer Areas”. By providing these opportunities, WDFW hopes to minimize crop depredation by deterring mule deer from congregating in Deer Areas. Deer Areas that occur in District 5 include Deer Area 2010 (Lakeview; Figure 4) located in GMU 272 and Deer Area 2011 (Benge; Figure 5) located in GMU 284. See the most recent [Big Game Hunting Seasons & Regulations Pamphlet](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions.

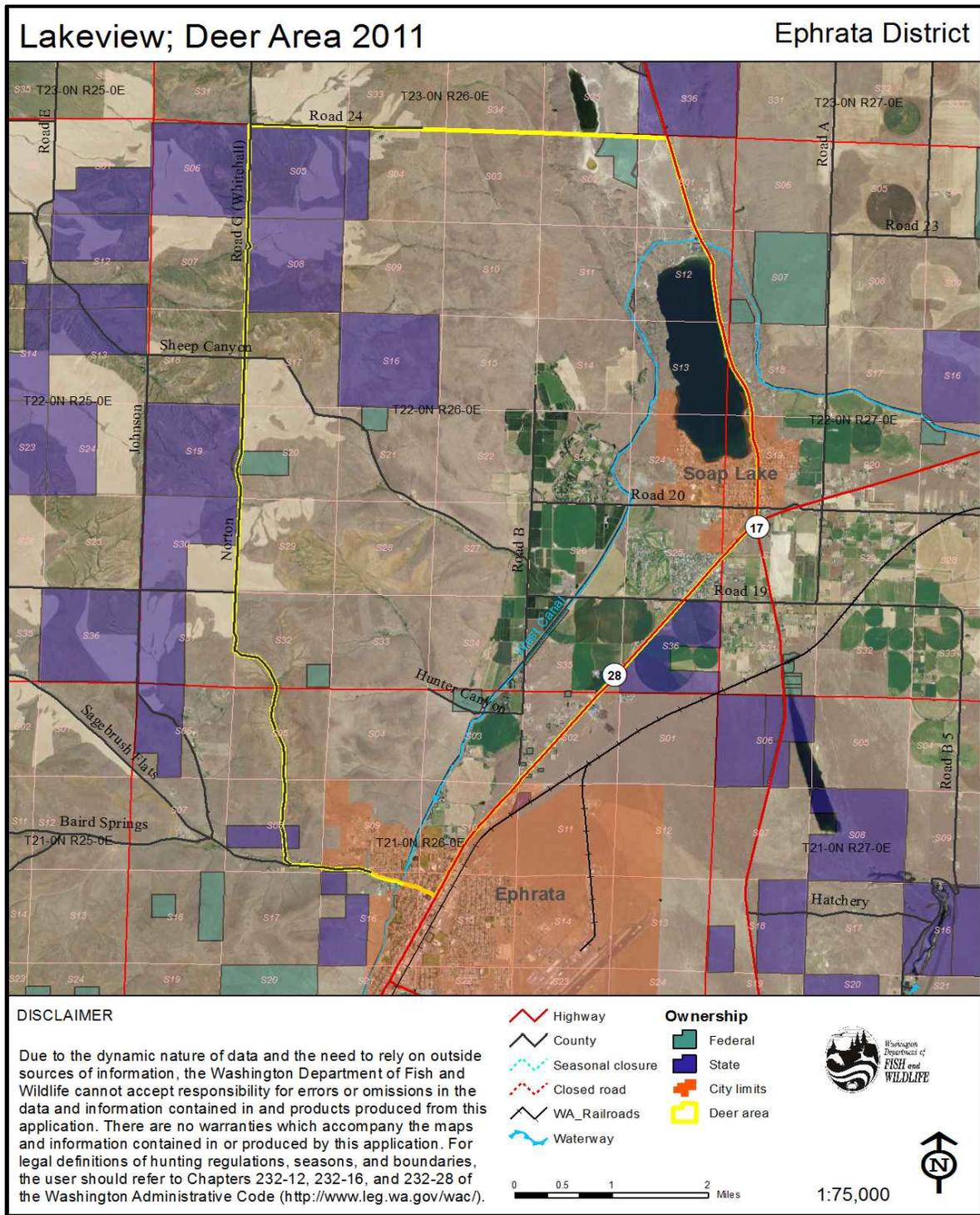


FIGURE 4. LAKEVIEW DEER AREA MAP.

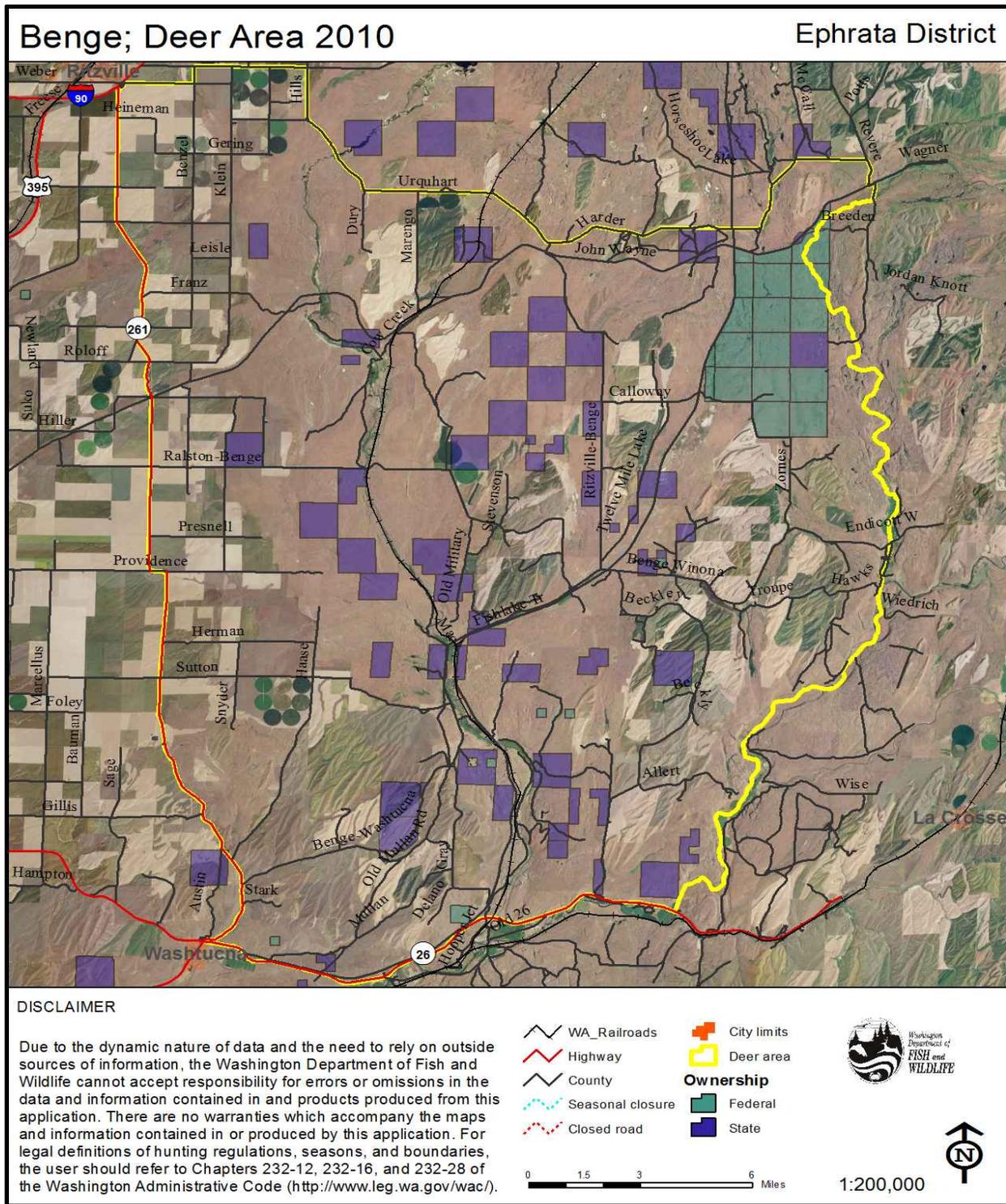


FIGURE 5. BENGE DEER AREA MAP.

**BEAR**

**GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS**

The Ephrata District does not have a resident population of black bears. The establishment of black bear populations in this district is not expected in the foreseeable future.

**WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2014 SEASON**

The Ephrata District is not an optimal area to target black bears. An occasional bear may disperse through this district and the most likely places to encounter these dispersers are the Beezley Hills and Moses Coulee.

**COUGAR**

**GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS**

Modeling efforts suggest a small population of adult cougar in the Ephrata District and annual harvest is very low. Cougar harvest comes mostly from GMU 272 (Beezley Hills). Populations are expected to remain stable in this area for the foreseeable future.

**WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2014 SEASON**

The Ephrata District is not an optimal area to target cougar. The most likely places to encounter these cats are the Beezley Hills, Moses Coulee, and adjacent to the Crab Creek drainage upstream from the town of Stratford.

**PHEASANT**

Grant County was Washington’s top pheasant producing county in 2013. Hunters bagged 8,353 roosters in Grant County and 1,543 in Adams County for a total harvest of 9,896 pheasants in District 5.

The largest wild populations of pheasants on WDFW lands in the Ephrata district are likely to be found within the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George (Figure 6). Mixed bags of wild and released birds are also likely to be had in lower Crab Creek, Gloyd Seeps, Quincy, and Dry Falls units. For wild birds, dense thickets of Russian olive and cattail associated with Frenchmen and Winchester Wasteways and ponds are likely to hold pheasants. Hunters will increase their odds greatly with

a well-trained dog to both flush and retrieve the birds in dense cover. Pheasants are strong runners so moving quickly and quietly can improve the odds of getting a close shot.

Conditions have been favorable for pheasant production beginning with a mild winter with little snow cover which allowed birds to survive winter in good condition. Spring conditions were dry, with few heavy showers which often result in mortality for young broods. But dry conditions also limit productivity of invertebrates, which are a critical dietary component of young pheasant chicks. Thus pheasant production in the irrigated portions of the district should be better than average while production in the dryland areas is likely to be slightly below average. In short, expect similar to slightly increased numbers of wild pheasants as observed during the 2013 season. Most hunters who invest considerable effort and cover a lot of ground will cross paths with a few wild birds and can increase their chances for a productive hunt by selecting non-toxic shot and diversifying the bag with waterfowl. Hunters may also choose to seek out pheasant release sites, see the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) for details. Non-toxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites.

## QUAIL

Grant County was Washington's second highest producing county in 2013; Adams County is not a destination quail hunting county. Hunters bagged 12,197 quail in District 5 in 2013 (10,867 in Grant County and 1,330 in Adams County).

Traditional quail hunting areas on WDFW lands in the Ephrata district include the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George, Lower Crab Creek between Corfu and the Columbia River, Gloyd Seeps between Stratford and Moses Lake, the Quincy unit near the town of Quincy, and Dry Falls unit at the south end of Banks Lake (Figure 6). Hunters will increase their odds greatly with a well-trained dog to either flush or point, and retrieve the birds.

Large coveys are difficult to find by mid-season on public lands and successful hunters will attempt to identify multiple coveys to pursue throughout the season. Riparian areas will offer the best hunting and hunters can increase their chances by securing access to private lands where pressure can be considerably lower. If pressure is high, some coveys can be found settling into shrub cover a considerable distance from heavily hunted areas. Hunters with wide ranging pointing breeds can be most successful at targeting these coveys.

Quail hunting is expected to be good this year. Winter temperatures were not far from the norm and the area lacked long periods of snow crust that can result in low overwinter survival. Summer conditions were great for brood survival.

## **CHUKAR AND PARTRIDGE**

During the 2013 season, hunters harvested 340 chukar and 313 gray partridge in District 5. The vast majority of the harvest for both species was from Grant County and harvest was down significantly from the previous year. The Ephrata District is not a popular destination for chukar/partridge hunters but a few birds can be found. Most chukar hunting in the Ephrata District occurs in the Coulee Corridor areas around Banks and Lenore Lakes and along the Columbia River breaks north of Vantage. (Figure 6) Chukar is a challenging but rewarding game bird to pursue. Though the Ephrata District has some chukar hunting opportunities there are much better areas of the state to focus ones' efforts. Gray partridge occur in low densities in the basin but are rarely targeted by hunters; instead they are taken incidentally while hunting chukar, quail, or pheasant. Most gray partridge will occur on private farm fields, particularly in the dryland wheat portions of Adams and, to a lesser degree, Grant Counties. Chukar and Gray partridge are resilient birds and thus likely fared well through the winter which had very little snow cover. Spring and summer conditions were fair/good.

## **DOVE**

Grant County was Washington's top dove producing county in 2013. Dove hunters harvested 16,027 doves, down slightly from last year. Grant County recorded the highest dove harvest with hunters bagging 14,690; hunters harvested 1,337 doves in Adams County.

Dove hunting is expected to be fair/good in 2014 but it is highly dependent upon weather conditions. If conditions are stable, the birds found during scouting should be around during the hunt, but unstable conditions often redistribute birds significantly. Hunters may improve their success by securing access to wheat fields for the morning hunt. Evening hunts can be productive in wheat fields or in traditional roosting areas. Look for large stands of trees (preferably with dead limbs) adjacent to water and surrounded by agriculture for best roost hunt results. Roost site hunting can be found along the north and west sides of Potholes Reservoir, the east side of Winchester Lake, and throughout the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex.

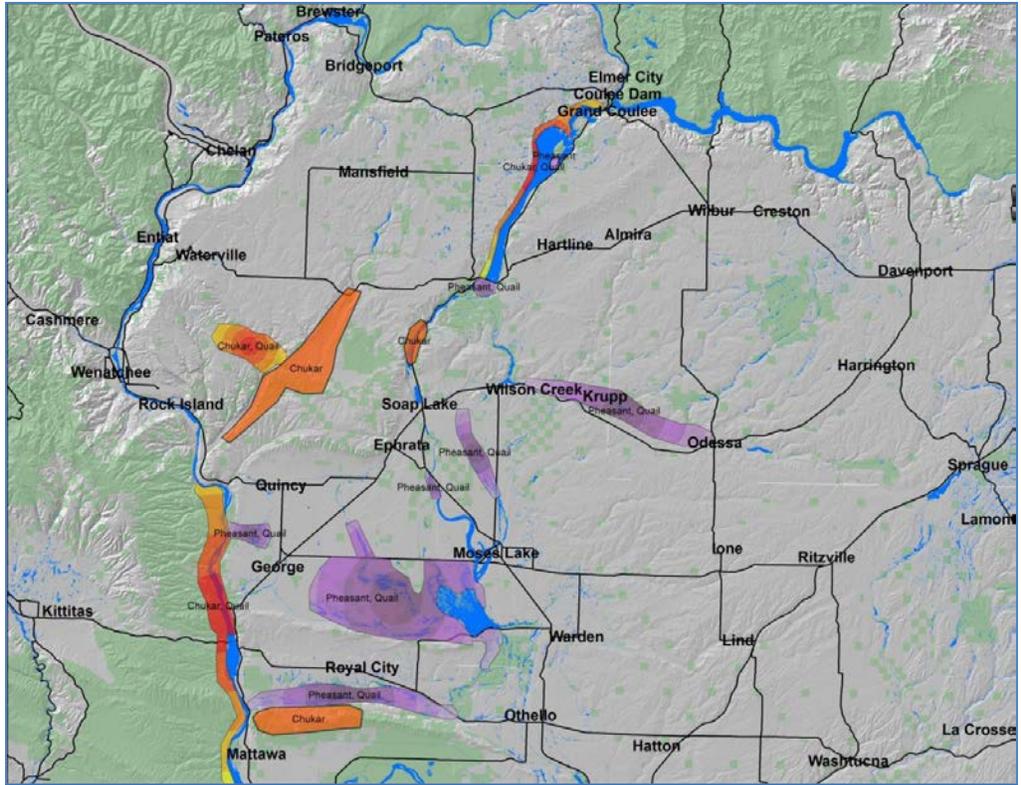


FIGURE 6. GENERALIZED UPLAND BIRD CONCENTRATIONS (PHEASANT, QUAIL, AND CHUKAR) THROUGHOUT THE EPHRATA DISTRICT.

## UPLAND BIRD MANAGEMENT

Upland bird management in the Ephrata District consists primarily of sharecropping and strategic use of bird feeders to increase over-winter survival. However, efforts are underway to enhance nesting cover throughout the Gloyd Seeps Unit of the CBWA. The area has been selected due to the Bureau of Reclamation’s Supplemental Feed Project<sup>2</sup> which will increase wetland acreage throughout the area dramatically. WDFW intends to support this increase in wetland acreage with an increase in native perennial nesting and winter cover for wildlife. Wildlife Area staff are currently working to establish over 200 acres of nesting cover. These fields required a fallow period to reduce the seedbed of noxious weeds and invasive vegetation, which is now completed. Seeding of native perennial grasses is planned for fall of 2014.

<sup>2</sup> BOR 2007; <http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/ea/wash/potholes/index.html>

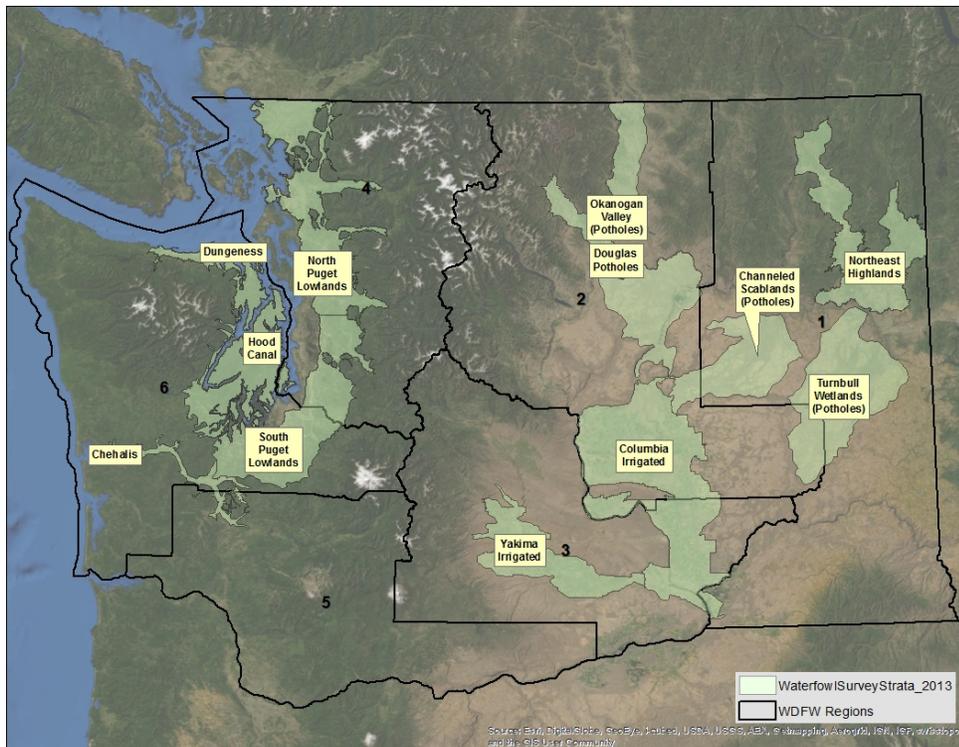
**WATERFOWL**

Ducks – Grant County was Washington’s top duck producing county in 2013. Last year hunters harvested 55,642 ducks in Grant County. Adams County hunters added 9,609 ducks for a district total of 65,251.

Geese – Grant County was Washington’s top goose producing county in 2013. Last year hunters harvested 12,852 geese in Grant County. Adams County hunters added 2,284 geese for a district total of 15,136.

**Waterfowl Population Status:**

The Washington Breeding Population Survey (BPOP), conducted in May, has been occurring since 2009 and covers the areas shown in Figure 7. This survey is an indicator of breeding effort as it estimates the number of waterfowl present during the breeding season. Results of this survey are provided for several of the more common waterfowl species which both breed and are commonly harvested in Eastern Washington.



**FIGURE 7. AREAS OF WASHINGTON THAT ARE COVERED DURING THE ANNUAL WATERFOWL BREEDING POPULATION SURVEYS.**

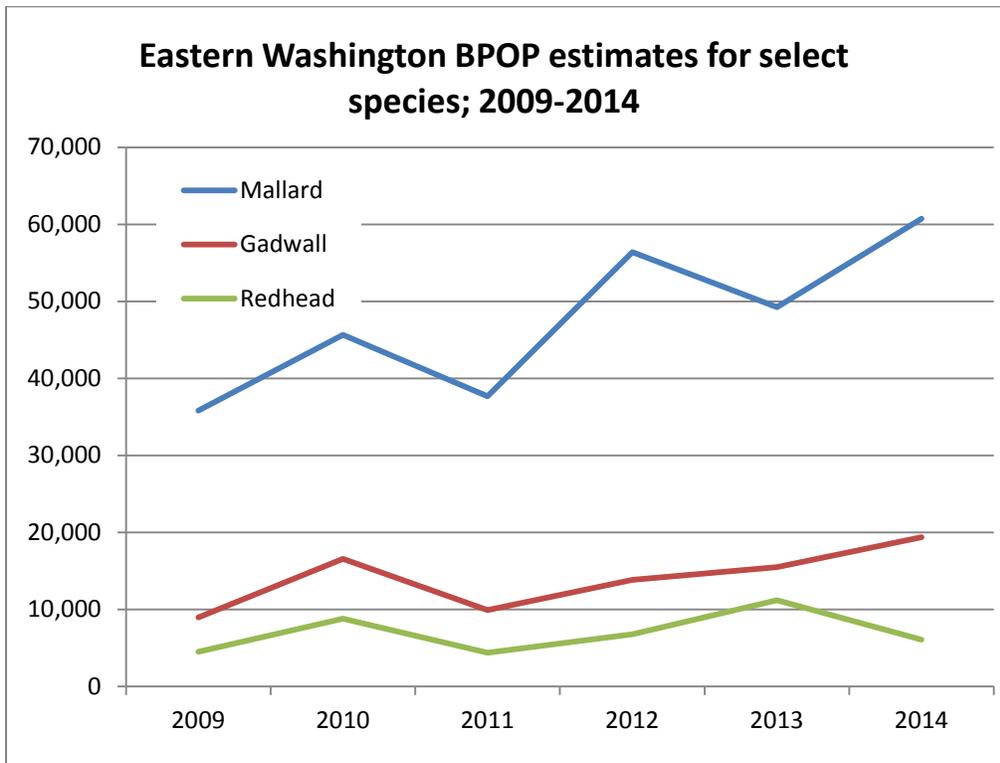


FIGURE 8. EASTERN WASHINGTON BREEDING POPULATION ESTIMATES FOR MALLARD, GADWALL, AND REDHEAD; 2009-2014.

In addition to the BPOP survey, WDFW also conducts regular brood routes throughout Eastern Washington. Routes in the Ephrata District include the East Low Canal, West Canal, Winchester Ditch, and Ephrata Lake (Figure 9). Results of that survey are included below and give an understanding of nesting success.

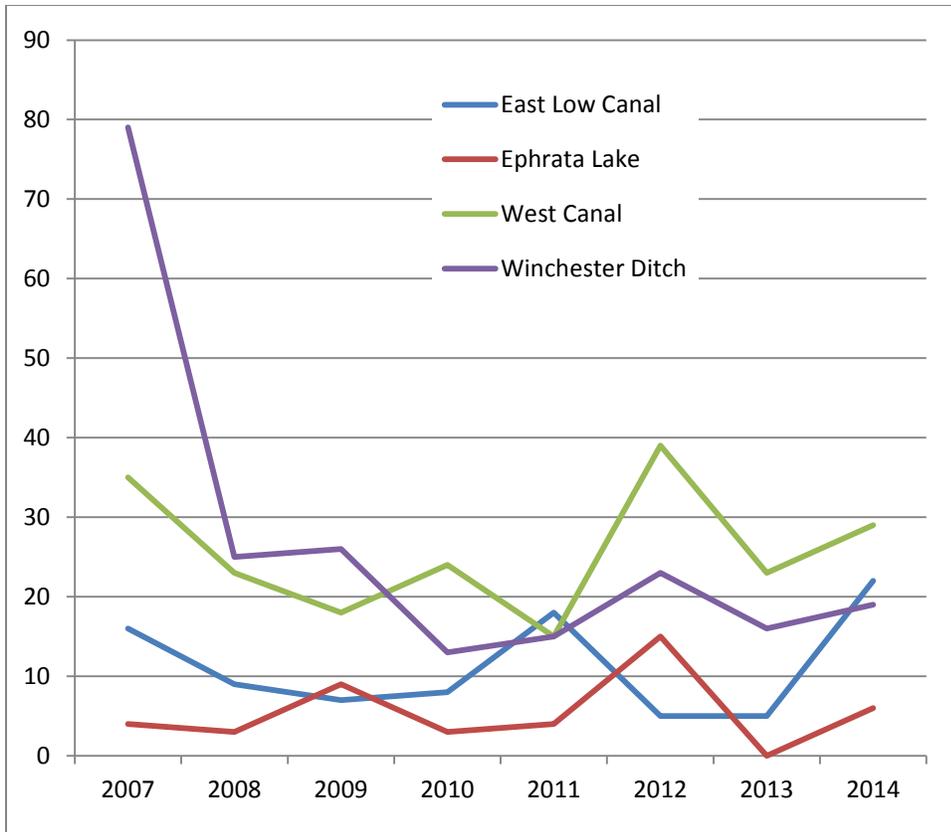


FIGURE 9. DUCK BROOD COUNT TOTALS FOR EPHRATA DISTRICT STRATA INCLUDING WEST CANAL, EAST CANAL, WINCHESTER DITCH, AND EPHRATA LAKE.

Winter Waterfowl Surveys, including the USFWS Midwinter Survey conducted during the first week of January, can be located at the link listed below. Areas covered during this survey are shown in Figure 10.

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region2/waterfowl\\_surveys.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region2/waterfowl_surveys.html)

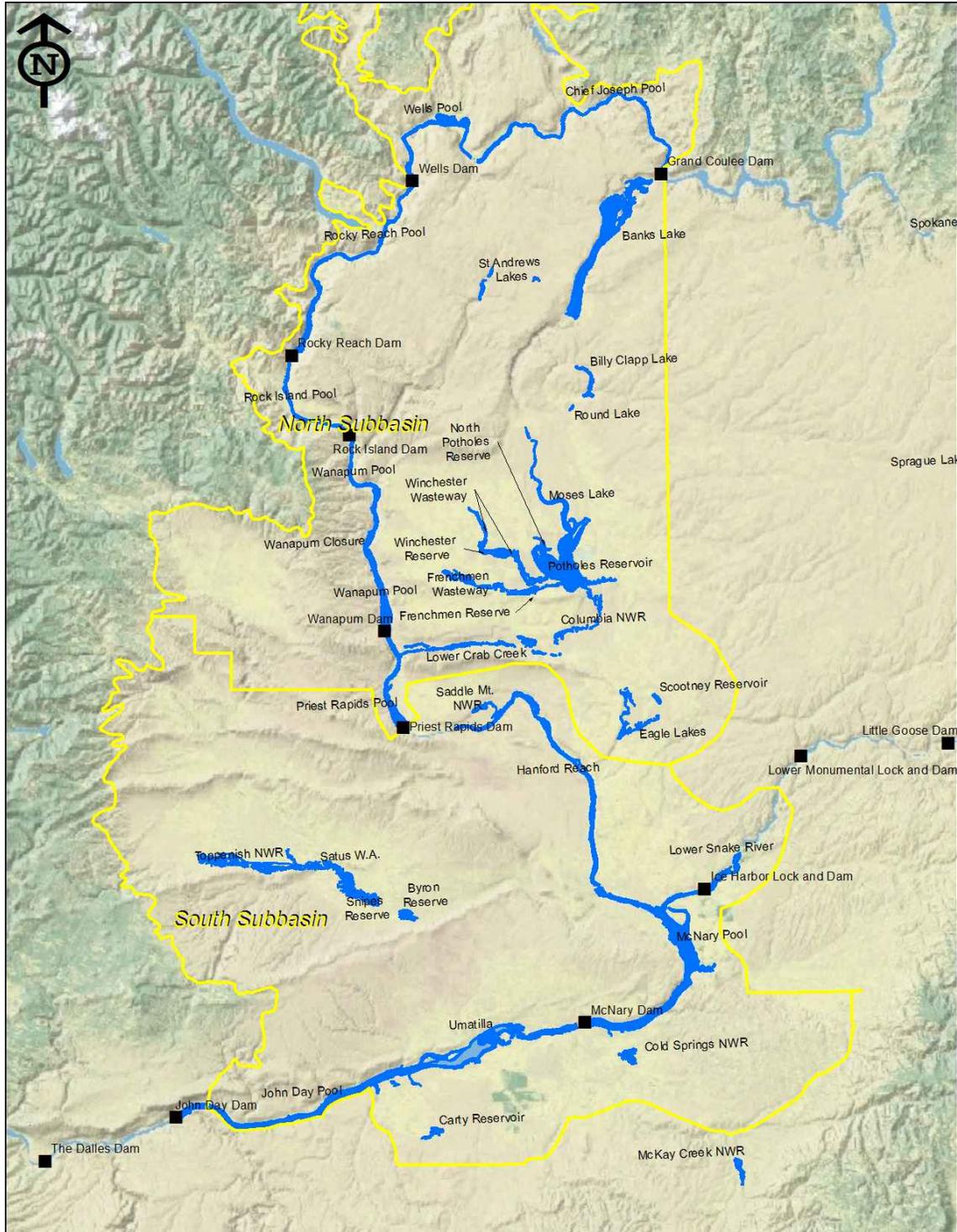


FIGURE 10. SURVEY STRATA USED DURING WINTER WATERFOWL SURVEYS. THESE AREAS REPRESENT LOCATIONS OF POTENTIAL WATERFOWL CONCENTRATIONS.

**Waterfowl Migration Chronology and Concentration Areas:**

Migration will bring the best waterfowl hunting in the basin (Figure 11). November will bring large numbers of mallards, wigeon, gadwalls, teal, scaup, redheads, and canvasbacks. Until this time hunters must rely on locally produced birds and early season migrants, such as American wigeon and green-winged teal. December typically provides the peak of mallards, ringnecks, and canvasbacks, while other dabbling and diving species continue their journey south. Goose hunting will typically improve in November when early season migrant Canada geese (Lesser and Taverner’s) begin to scatter from their initial staging area at Stratford Lake to alfalfa or grain fields within feeding distance from Moses Lake and the Columbia River.

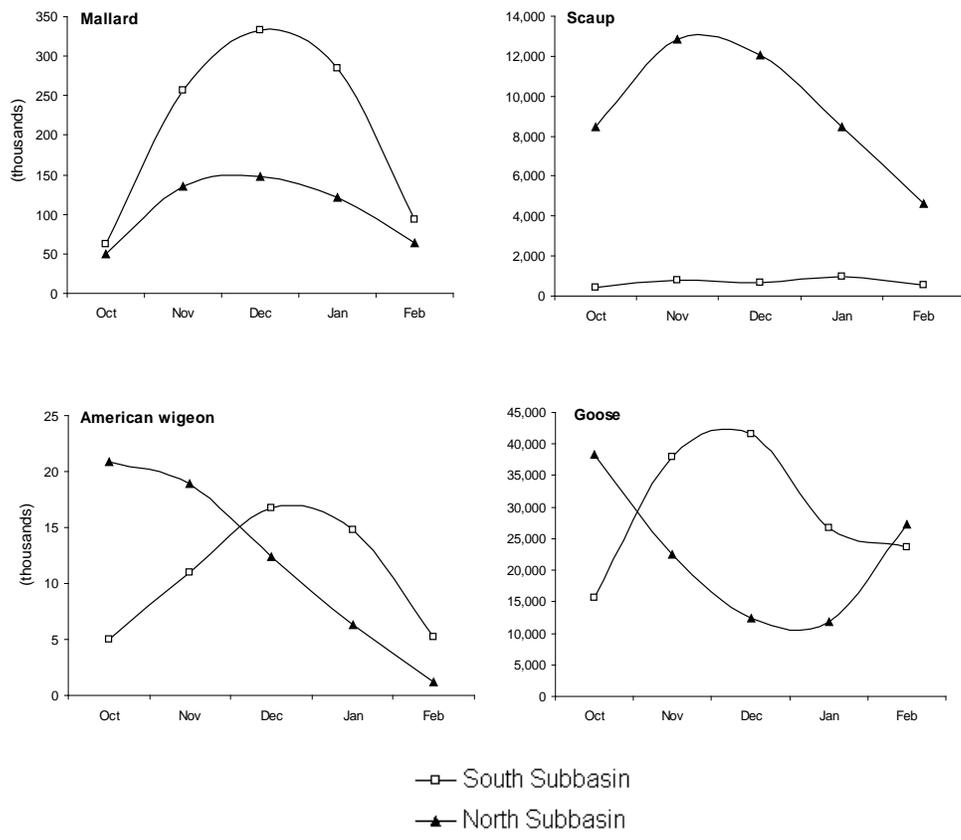


FIGURE 11. MIGRATION CURVES FOR SEVERAL SPECIES WHICH WINTER IN LARGE NUMBERS ON THE COLUMBIA PLATEAU. REFER TO FIGURE 12 ABOVE FOR MAP OF SUBBASIN BOUNDARIES.

**Understanding Waterfowl Migration:**

The waterfowl hunting season the Ephrata District is largely dependent upon bird production in Alberta, but locally produced birds remain important. Hunters must use caution when interpreting the spring habitat conditions reports. The first step in understanding the relationship between breeding conditions and the expected harvest is to understand where Columbia Plateau wintering birds are produced. Munro and Kimball (1982) report that the Northern Pacific breeding area (includes: Alaska, British Columbia, and Yukon-west Mackenzie minor reference area) provides the bulk of the mallards harvested in Washington State. The second most important breeding area contributing to Washington State harvest is Northern Alberta, followed by Southwest Alberta, and lastly by locally produced birds in Washington and Oregon (Figure 12). Band recoveries of locally banded birds harvested in Washington exhibit a similar pattern, though over time, these patterns may change and these band recoveries represent a long-term dataset (1949-2012; Figure 13).

Of additional consideration, Rabenberg (1982) reports that “breeding pair and production indices from southwestern Alberta were negatively correlated with Basin<sup>3</sup> mid-winter mallard populations”. Thus the degree to which birds produced in Southwestern Alberta migrate through the Basin may be variable or may not be fully understood. Perhaps the important consideration is that poor breeding conditions on the prairie parklands has been shown to displace birds to the north-northwest to northern Alberta, Alaska, and the Northwest Territories (Buller 1975, Rabenberg 1982). Birds that are displaced to these areas have a higher likelihood of migrating through the Basin during fall and winter. This is evidenced by the peak of mid-winter populations in the “Basin” following severe drought across southern Canada and the Dakotas during the early 60s.

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<sup>3</sup> “Basin” includes all important waterfowl wintering areas adjacent to, or in-between, Moses Lake, Washington and Hermiston, Oregon.

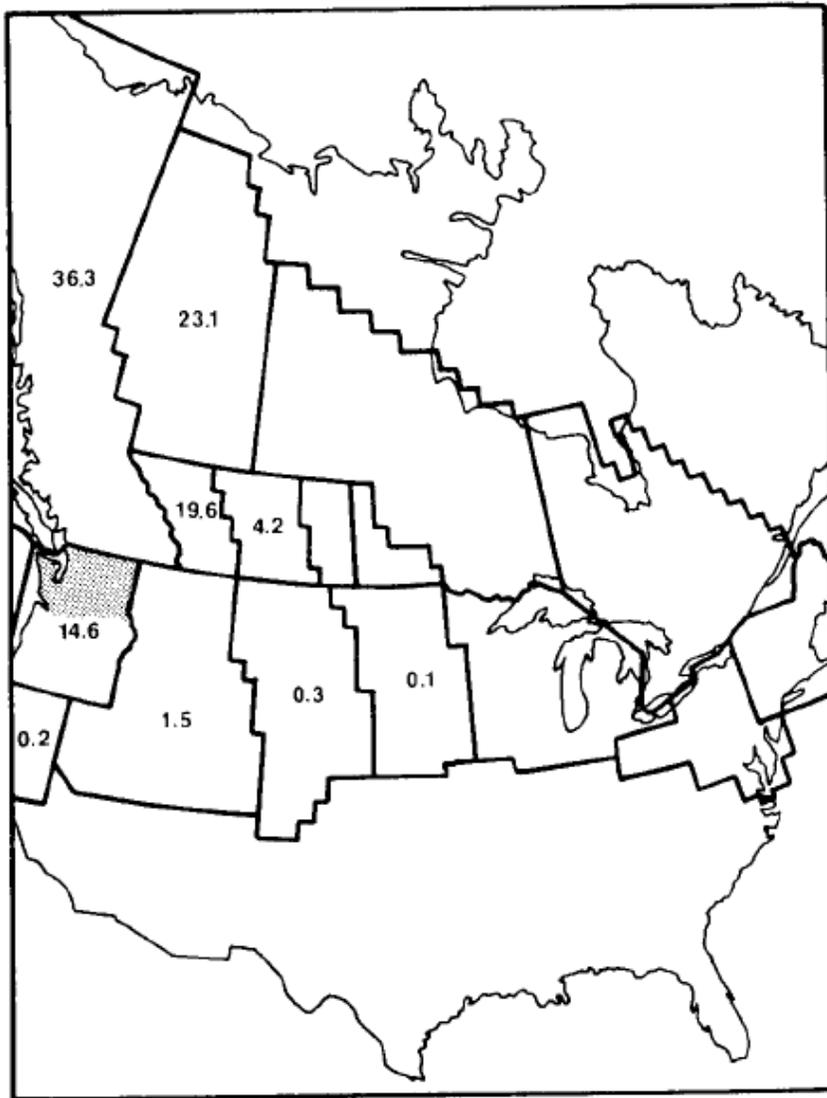


Fig. D-11. Percent derivation of the mallard harvest in *Washington* (shaded) from major breeding reference areas.

FIGURE 12. FROM MUNRO AND KIMBALL 1982 – POPULATION ECOLOGY OF THE MALLARD. VII. DISTRIBUTION AND DERIVATION OF THE HARVEST. THESE DATA DESCRIBE WHERE THE DUCKS HARVESTED IN WASHINGTON STATE ARE COMING FROM. NOTE THE IMPORTANCE OF NORTHERN AND SOUTHWESTERN ALBERTA, AND BRITISH COLUMBIA.

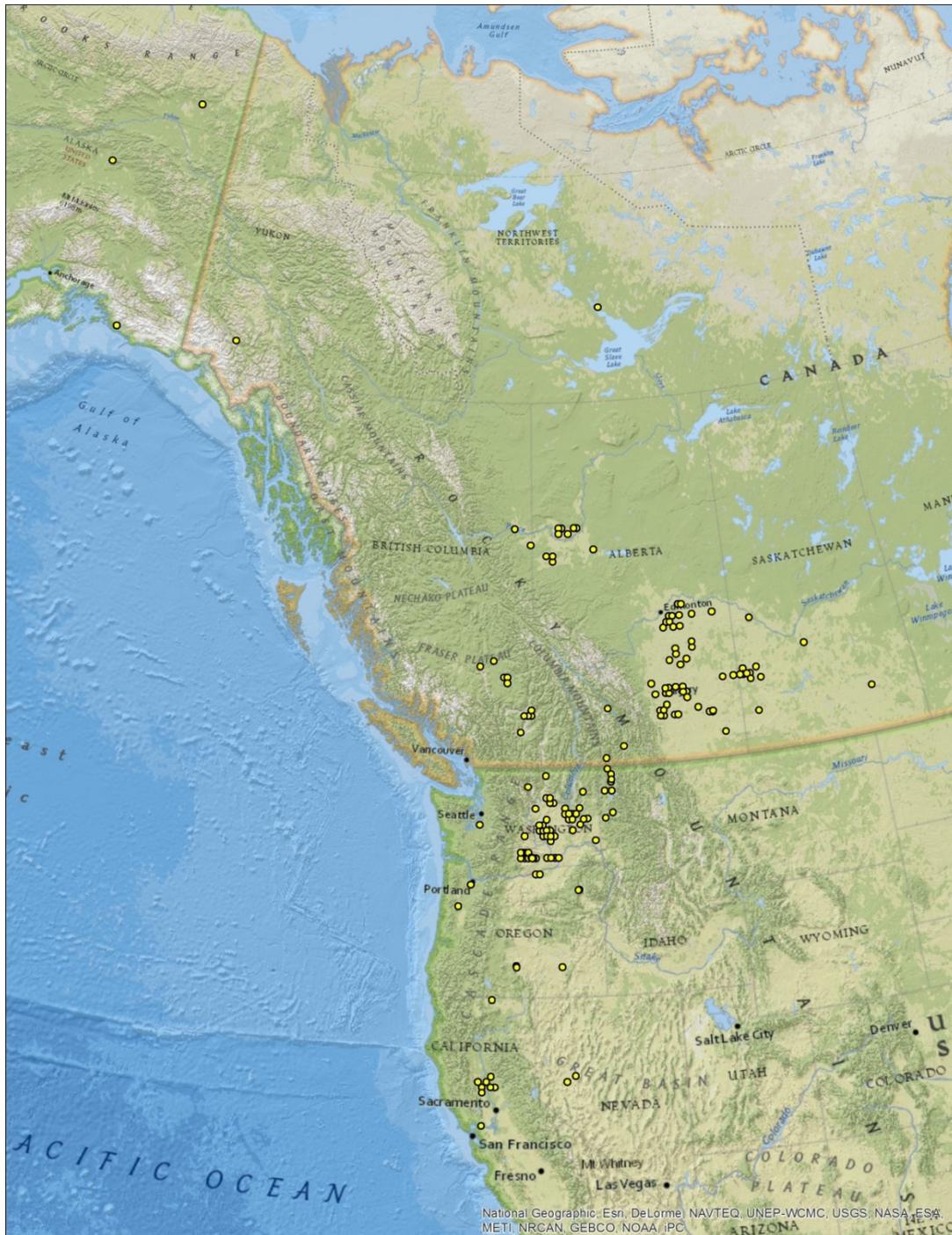


FIGURE 13. LOCATIONS (YELLOW DOTS) WHERE LOCAL MALLARDS (DUCKLINGS) WERE BANDED PRIOR TO BEING HARVESTED IN WASHINGTON STATE. BASED ON BANDING EFFORTS FROM 1949-2012.

Based on Mallard Breeding Population Estimates and 2014 breeding habitat conditions from USFWS Trends in Duck Breeding Populations; 1955-2014 (Figure 12), waterfowl hunting in the Columbia Plateau should be good this year. Perhaps the most compelling reasons to expect a good season in the Ephrata District is the 72% increase in mallard numbers in the ‘Central and Northern Alberta – NE British Columbia – NW Territories strata’ and the 27% increase in the ‘Southern Alberta strata’. But hunters must be aware that weather conditions can be as responsible for waterfowl harvest as bird numbers, so hope for unstable weather patterns bringing short-lived winter storms followed by warming trends.

**Table 2. Mallard breeding population estimates (in thousands) for regions in the traditional survey area.**

Region	2014	2013	Change from 2013		Change from LTA		
			%	P	LTA <sup>a</sup>	%	P
Alaska-Yukon Territory-							
Old Crow Flats	501	338	+48	0.018	377	+33	0.031
C. & N. Alberta-N.E. British							
Columbia-NWT	1,757	1,020	+72	<0.001	1,084	+62	<0.001
N. Saskatchewan-							
N. Manitoba-W. Ontario	1,126	1,427	-21	0.329	1,130	0	0.984
S. Alberta	1,444	1,141	+27	0.011	1,073	+34	<0.001
S. Saskatchewan	2,553	2,576	-1	0.907	2,073	+23	<0.001
S. Manitoba	602	448	+34	0.007	385	+56	<0.001
Montana & Western Dakotas	1,014	794	+28	0.106	516	+96	<0.001
Eastern Dakotas	1,903	2,627	-28	0.001	1,035	+84	<0.001
Total	10,900	10,372	+5	0.292	7,673	+42	<0.001

<sup>a</sup> Long-term average, 1955-2013.

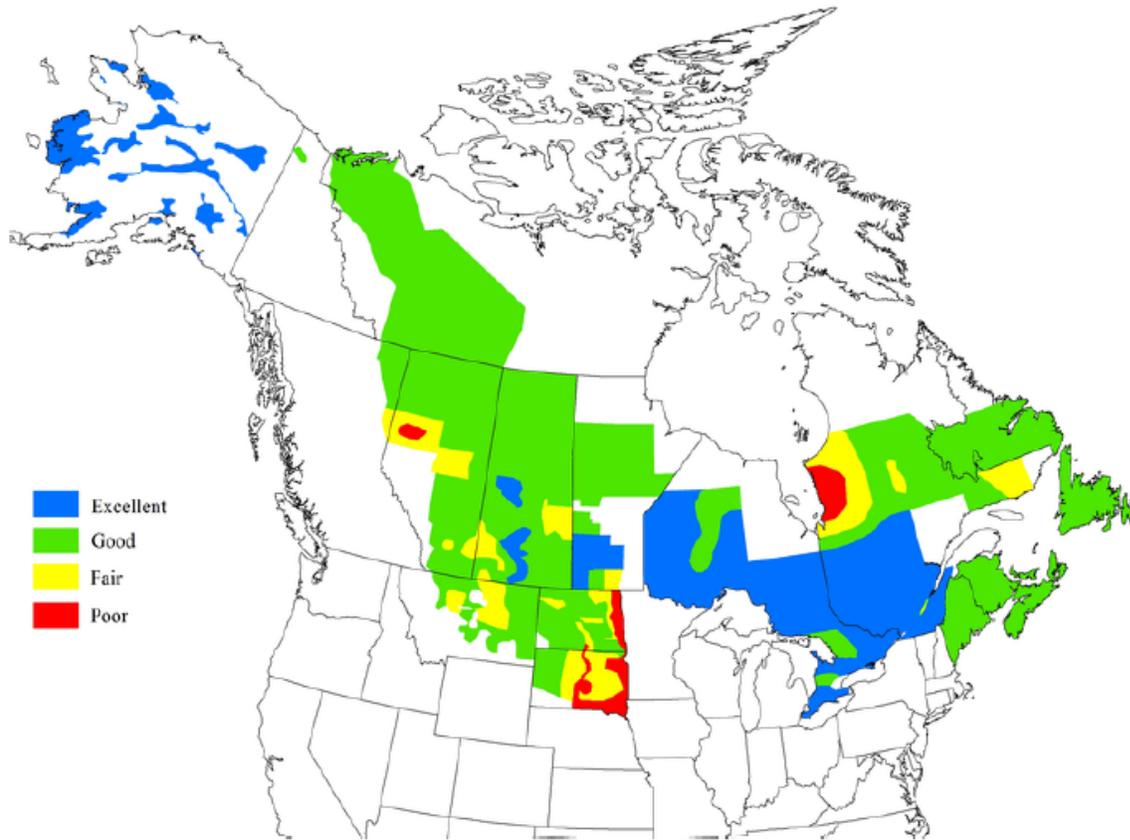


Figure 4. Breeding waterfowl habitat conditions during the 2014 Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey, as judged by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service biologists.

FIGURE 12. BREEDING POPULATION ESTIMATES AND HABITAT CONDITIONS FROM USFWS TRENDS IN DUCK BREEDING POPULATIONS; 1955-2014.

**Hunting:**

Scouting is often the key to successful waterfowl hunting. Ample opportunity exists for public waterfowl hunts but hunters should first identify where birds are feeding and roosting. Feeding flights for ducks typically occur very early in the morning and late in the evening and last for an hour or so. There is always good opportunity to harvest waterfowl during opening weekend in the Columbia Basin. A harvest rate of slightly above three ducks per person is common from year to year for the first weekend of the general waterfowl season. Mallard, teal, American wigeon, and gadwall are among the species most commonly encountered. Also, wood ducks can be found in fair numbers concentrating in stands of flooded Russian olive trees (typically associated with the Winchester and Frenchmen wasteways) in the early season. Late in the

season, when snow is on the ground and conditions are harsh, ducks are likely to feed more during the day while the snow is soft, or will seek out fields that are grazed by cattle, so they can access the snow-buried corn kernels. Knowing when and where ducks are feeding and which direction they depart will help hunters determine the best locations to intercept the duck traffic with a spread of decoys.

Select areas to hunt based on the species you want to target. Diving ducks are typically hunted along the Columbia River, particularly at Wells Pool, Wanapum Pool, and Priest Rapids Pool. They forage over beds of submerged aquatic vegetation such as pondweeds and milfoil. American wigeon will associate with diving ducks because they are *kleptoparasites*, meaning they wait for the diving ducks or coots to bring up a bill-full of vegetation, and then quickly rush in to steal their meal. Dabbling ducks are more commonly targeted on the plateau where grain corn and wheat fields attract mallards and pintail and shallow wetlands attract teal, American wigeon, and gadwall. Canada geese feed primarily in wheat and alfalfa fields, so requesting permission from private landowners is often necessary to secure good goose hunting.

Setting up a decoy spread on a pond between the feeding and roosting sites will generally result in some good shooting, particularly when conditions are favorable (e.g. wind, snow, fog). Typically the larger roosting sites will be the Wanapum Closure (Columbia River), Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, and Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Marsh Units (Figure 13). Hunters should be mindful that water (and muck) depths are highly variable and it takes a lot of trial and error to learn where you can and cannot set out decoys. For some areas, boat access is a must. Winchester and Frenchmen Wasteways (the two major drainages entering west side of Potholes Reservoir) are crossable in some areas with chest waders but use caution as deep holes do exist and patches of muck can be difficult to exit, particularly when packing decoys.

One of the more popular waterfowl hunting areas is Potholes Reservoir. The abundance of small sand dune islands (Figure 14), where hunters find cover, makes this an attractive area to many hunters. Most hunters use the northern portion of the reservoir where they find shallower water and numerous islands. Hunting pressure and competition for the best locations on Potholes Reservoir is high. Hunters that are new to the reservoir should be aware that water levels do increase dramatically through the hunting season (Figure 15).

Winchester Lake is another location where hunters can expect to see good numbers of waterfowl but hunting pressure is relatively high there. Winchester Lake sits in a prime location to get traffic from mallards that feed on grain corn in the surrounding area. Ducks typically come from Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, Moses Lake, and/or the Wanapum Closure to feed in fields, and they occasionally attempt to shorten their commute to the roost by stopping at Winchester Lake instead. This area can be very good at times.



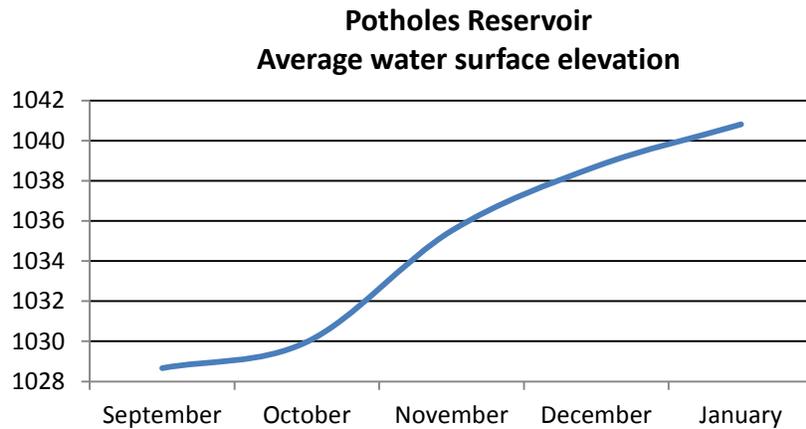


FIGURE 15. POTHOLE RESERVOIR WATER SURFACE ELEVATION (IN FEET) DURING WATERFOWL SEASON. NOTE THAT WATER SURFACE ELEVATION IS MEASURED AT O’SULLIVAN DAM AND SOME LAG IN FLOODING WILL OCCUR IN THE UPPER PORTIONS OF THE RESERVOIR.

Dogs are often an absolute necessity for retrieving throughout most of the Ephrata District but Regulated Access Areas (RAA) have some shallow ponds which could be hunted with a pair of chest waders. Hunters frequenting the Winchester RAA should use caution on pintails, which can be abundant and thus easy to exceed bag limits. Time restrictions and number of vehicles allowed for the RAA can be found in the hunting pamphlet. These sites are now ‘Register to Hunt’ so be sure to register at the box provided in the parking area. See Figure 16 below for a map of RAAs.

Waterfowl hunters should also be aware of private land grain fields enrolled in the Hunter Access Program. This program is intended to provide public field hunting opportunity for ducks and geese but also may provide opportunity to harvest pheasants and occasionally gray partridge. Fields are typically identified and enrolled during November, after the fields are harvested; timing of enrollment and field locations will vary annually. Call or visit the Ephrata regional office at (509) 754-4624 for details about this program and the Regulated Access Areas.

Regulated Access Areas in the District (Winchester RAA and Frenchmen RAA) provide limited entry opportunities. Hunting of the Winchester RAA will be managed through an online reservation system beginning during the 2014 season. Reservations will be required to use a parking spot prior to 9am, starting from opening day and lasting through November. Drop-in’s will be allowed after 9am if a parking spot is available. Reservations not arriving by 9am will forfeit their reservation, no exceptions. Note: The access into Winchester Reserve has changed.

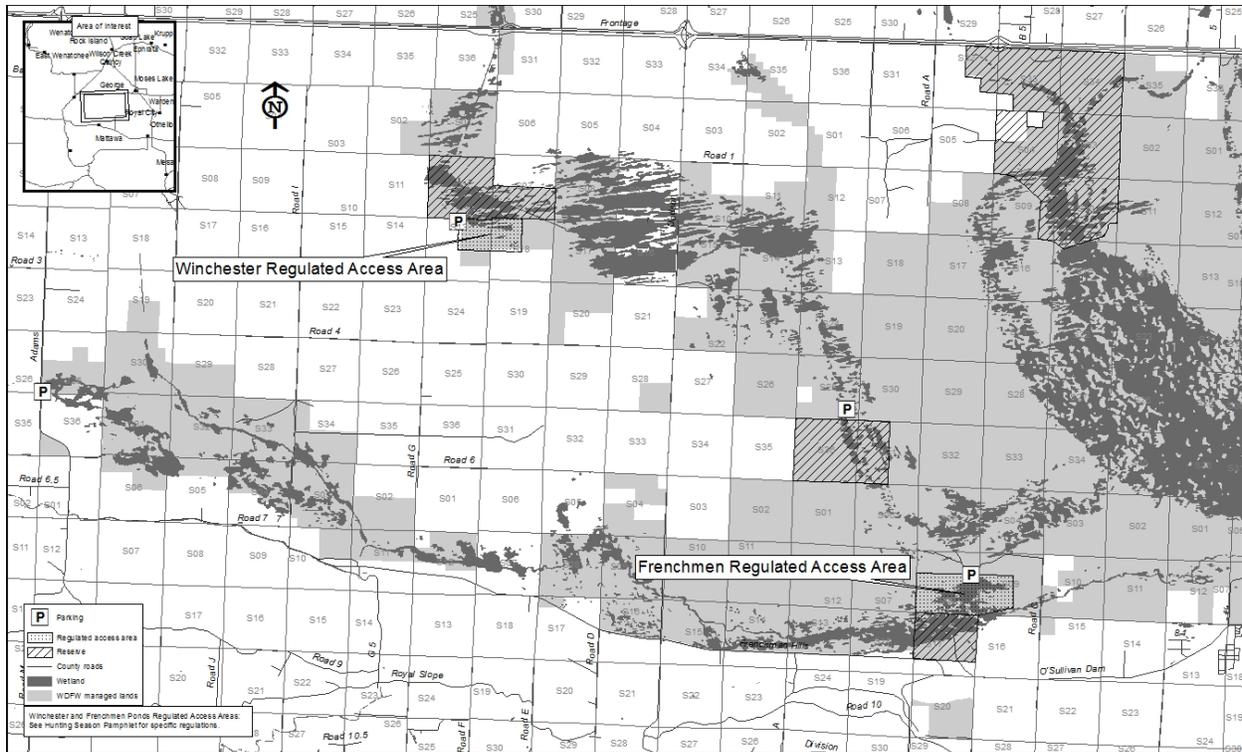


FIGURE 16. LOCATIONS OF THE FRENCHMEN AND WINCHESTER REGULATED ACCESS AREAS WEST OF POTHOLES RESERVOIR.

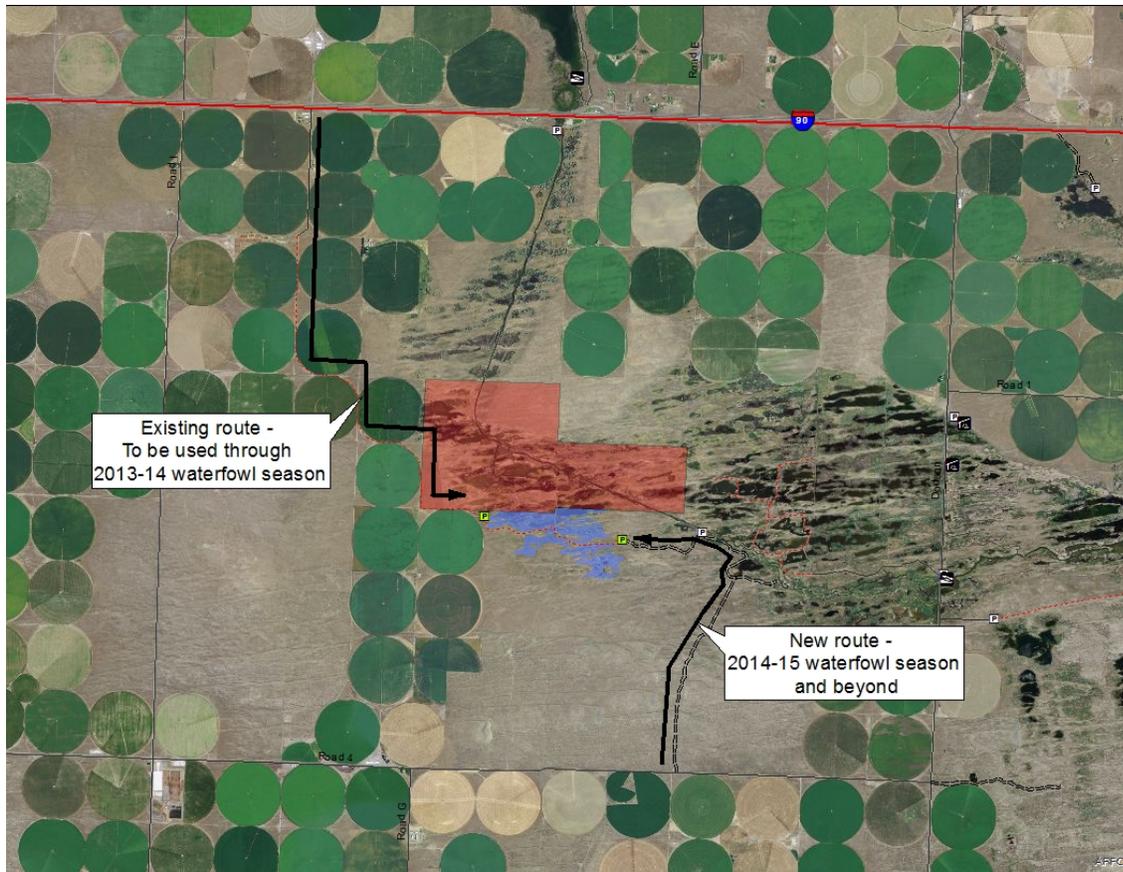


FIGURE 17. CHANGE IN ACCESS ROUTE FOR THE WINCHESTER REGULATED ACCESS AREA, EFFECTIVE DURING THE 2014-15 SEASON AND BEYOND.

Lastly, when targeting mallards, as most waterfowl hunters do, it pays to understand where the grain corn is likely to be found. Figure 18 below was created using the USDA NASS Cropland Data layers for corn (2006-2012). These data layers display where corn was grown during a given year. The layers are stacked and displayed at 75% transparency, so corn fields only planted once during the 2006-2012 time period would display as dull yellow, whereas corn fields planted many times during the 2006-2012 time period would display as bright yellow. Unfortunately, the data layers do not discriminate between corn varieties (sweet, silage, grain) but this map does show some important waterfowl foraging areas having a preponderance of bright yellow and may prove to be a useful tool when scouting.

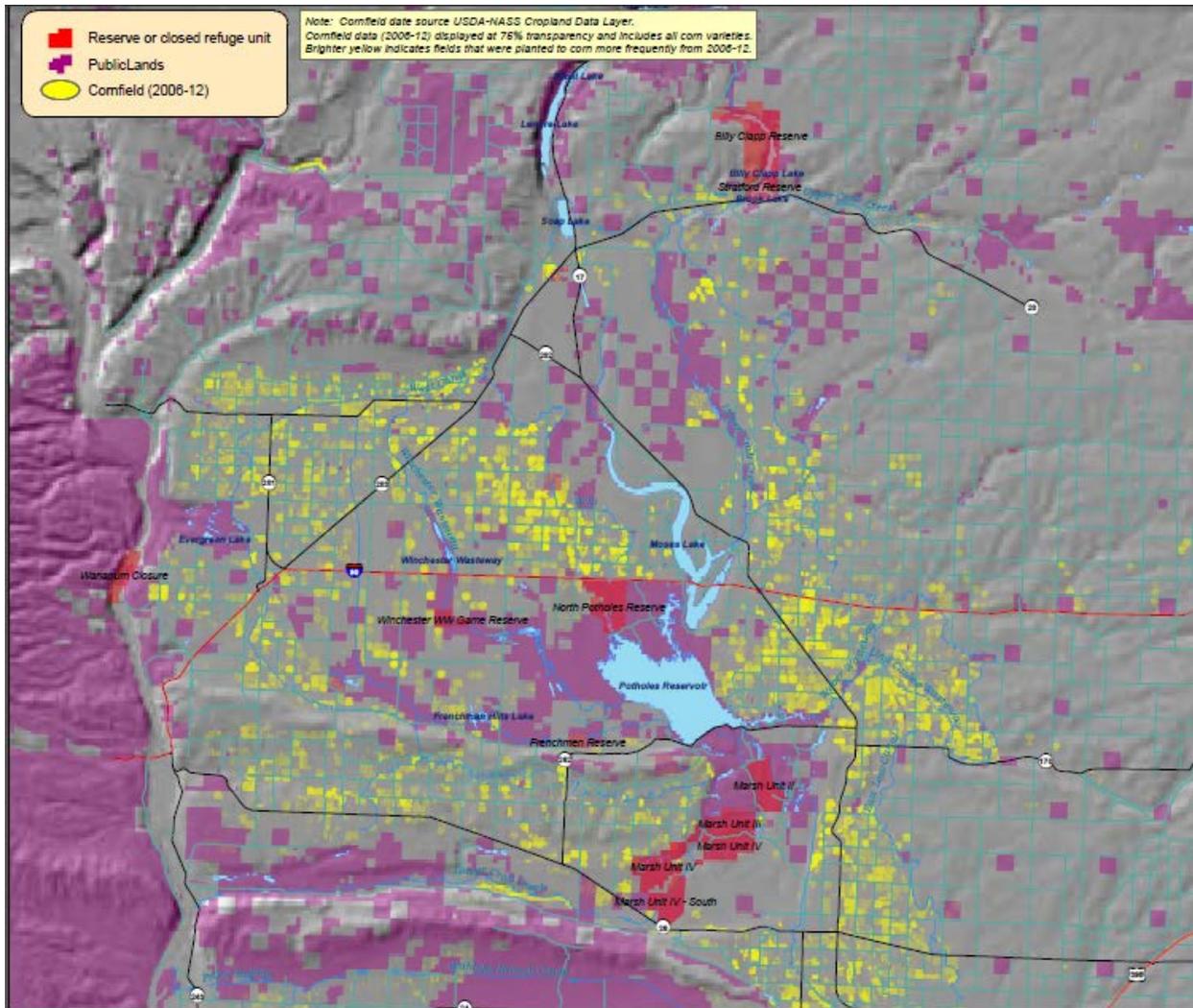


FIGURE 20. JUXTAPOSITION OF CORN PLANTING RELATIVE TO WATERFOWL SANCTUARY AREAS. THE BRIGHTER THE YELLOW, THE GREATER THE FREQUENCY THE FIELD IS PLANTED IN CORN.

## SMALL GAME

Small game in the Ephrata District consists primarily of bobcat, raccoon, fox, crows, cottontail rabbits, and coyotes. There are no sizeable populations of forest grouse or wild turkey in this district. Formal surveys to assess population status of small game species are not conducted in the Ephrata District. Bobcats occur in the Ephrata District but harvest is relatively low. Raccoons occur in fair numbers in association with wetlands and residential developments when adequate native habitat exists. Fox farms occurred adjacent to the Columbia Plateau during the

early 1900s but declines in fur prices during the 1950s resulted in fox being released into the wild. A few descendants of these individuals occur within the Ephrata District today, however these introduced fox are still considered uncommon. Crows are typically hunted in areas where damage occurs, such as orchards (typically nuts), thus hunting opportunities for crows within the Ephrata district are limited. Cottontails are widespread and abundant in areas of optimal habitat. In native landscapes, hunters should look to rock outcrops, greasewood patches, or other thickets where suitable escape cover occurs. Cottontails can be found on farm ground as well, particularly within and around equipment storage areas or rock piles. Hunters targeting cottontails should be aware of the endangered pygmy rabbit which looks similar to cottontails and is found in shrub-steppe habitat. There is much opportunity for coyote hunting throughout most of the Ephrata District. Grant County had the second highest harvest of coyotes during the 2013 season. Yellow-bellied marmots can be hunted but most hunting opportunity occurs on private lands where rock piles and agriculture are in close proximity. Hunters should also be aware that Washington ground squirrels are protected and they can occur in large numbers in the Ephrata District.

## **PUBLIC LANDS**

### **WDFW Managed Land:**

Wildlife Areas – The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area contains about 192,000 acres and provides habitat for a multitude of species. For more information on this wildlife area, please visit the WDFW Lands [website](#). Visitors to the wildlife area need to be aware that a Discover Pass is required to access all WDFW lands.

Release Sites – The Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program was designed to help supplement harvest and maintain hunter opportunity in Washington. Several pheasant release sites are found in the Ephrata District. For more information on this program and release sites in this district, please visit the Enhancement Program's [website](#).

### **Department of Natural Resources:**

The Washington Department of Natural Resources maintains land that is open to the public for recreational purposes. Visitors to DNR land should be aware that a [Discover Pass](#) is required for access. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on DNR land can be found [here](#).

### **National Forest:**

There is no national forest in the Ephrata District.

**Bureau of Land Management:**

Some BLM land is found in the Ephrata District and is open to public hunting. For more information on BLM property or to order maps, please visit the [blm.gov](http://blm.gov) website.

**Other:**

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) maintains property that is open to public use for recreational purposes, much of this land is managed by WDFW but not all. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on BOR land can be found [here](#).

**ADA Access:**

The Ephrata District maintains some access for Americans with disabilities. These sites occur at Rocky Ford Creek (Drumheller Pond) and Buckshot Ranch. Hunters must have a Disabled Hunter Permit (and in most cases permits from the land managers) in order to access hunting areas behind locked gates by driving on the roads that are normally open only to walk-ins. For additional information, please call or write to Dolores Noyes, WDFW, 360-902-2349, FAX: 360-902-2392 or Email: [Dolores.Noyes@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Dolores.Noyes@dfw.wa.gov).

Rocky Ford Creek – Travel south from Ephrata on SR 282 for 7.2 miles. Turn right onto Neppel Rd (Old Moses Lake Hwy). Go 0.1 mile and turn right at the public fishing sign. Continue 0.5 mile to the access site. The access duck blind is on a small pond off the creek. A vehicle can be used to drop off a disabled hunter next to the blind. The ground around the blind is rough and access into the water is best with a small hand launch boat or raft. An accessible vault toilet is in parking lot located nearby for the walk-in fishers. Use of blind is by reservation only. Obtain key from Regional Office, 509-754-4624.

Buckshot Ranch – Drive south on SR 243 along the Columbia River from Vantage toward Mattawa. Turn right (west) onto Road 26 SW and go about 1 mile to the Priest Rapids/Buckshot Wildlife Area. Follow the gravel road into a parking area and turn right between two fence posts. Follow dirt road north 0.25 miles to fence on left side to a locked gate on left. Drive through the gate into the crop field towards the old pump house. Ground level roll-in goose pit blind is available with seasonal success dependent on weather. Call to reserve, 509-754-4624. Obtain gate key from Ephrata Office.

WDFW is currently working with the local Washington Waterfowl Association chapter to administer an ALEA grant to develop two ADA hunting blinds.

## **PRIVATE LANDS**

### **Land Ownership:**

Whether hunting, hiking, or wildlife viewing it is important that we all respect private property rights and ALWAYS ask permission before entering private lands. Fortunately, technology has made this process considerably easier and land ownership can now be ascertained from the internet using the following resources. Simply log on and use the interactive map program to zoom into your area of interest. Clicking on the parcels will reveal land owner information.

<http://adamswa.mapsifter.com/>

<http://grantwa.mapsifter.com/>

The disadvantage of these resources is lack of portability and difficulty scanning a large area for availability of public land. However, these are by far the best available resource for identifying ownership of specific locations. The best resource available for identifying where public land occurs is the Department of Natural Resources public lands quadrangles (1:100k). See the link below to order a copy for a fee.

[http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Topics/Maps/Pages/public\\_land\\_quadrangle\\_maps.aspx](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Topics/Maps/Pages/public_land_quadrangle_maps.aspx)

### **Private Lands Program:**

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through a negotiated agreement. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases monetary compensation. In addition, lands under agreement are well known by WDFW enforcement staff. Currently, the private lands access program includes four basic access agreement types: Feel Free to Hunt, Register to Hunt, Hunting Only by Written Permission, and Permit Only Area. More information on where these enrolled lands occur can be found at WDFW's GoHunt site, <http://wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/gohunt/index.html>. Over 200,000 acres of private property in the Ephrata District are accessible to hunters through these agreements. When accessing these lands, hunters should obey all the rules posted for that specific piece of property. Hunters should also be aware that, unless property is enrolled in these agreements, they may not access private property and they may be prosecuted if they trespass.

Private Lands Access	Grant Co	Adams Co
Feel Free To Hunt	18,000	16,000
Hunt By Written Permission	49,000	110,000
Hunt By Reservation (Online)	18,000	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87,000</b>	<b>126,000</b>

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Bird Dog Training:**

The Ephrata District does not currently have any areas designated for bird dog training. Thus all training on WDFW land must occur within the established bird dog training season, August 1 – March 31.

**Target Shooting:**

Per WAC 332-52-145, target shooting is allowed in developed recreational facilities (Table 2) or areas with an unobstructed, earthen backstop capable of stopping all projectiles and debris in a safe manner. Targets are defined as ‘items that are commercially manufactured for the specific purpose of target shooting’. Because of extensive misuse of WDFW managed lands (primarily litter related), some areas have been closed to target shooting, particularly in the Lind Coulee, Potholes, and Seep Lakes Units of the CBWA. Information for shooting range facilities is provided below.

**Table 1. List of target shooting facilities in the Ephrata District.**

County	Name	Contact
Adams	Lind Golf & Gun Club	509-671-3314
Adams	Othello Gun Club	509-488-3768
Adams	Ritzville Gun Club	Gun Club Road, Ritzville
Adams	Washtucna Gun Club	509-646-3263
Grant	Boyd Mordhorst Memorial Range	509-345-2550
Grant	Coulee City Sportsmen	509-632-5137
Grant	Marlin Trap Club	509-982-2445
Grant	Moses Lake Gun Club	509-765-1382
Grant	Quincy Gun Club	509-787-5506

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Hunting Season Prospects 2014

District 5 – Grant and Adams Counties

Desert Unit (GMU 290) Photos



**Desert Unit (GMU 290) Frequently Asked Questions:****Q: Where should I start looking for a mature buck?**

A: The highest density of mule deer typically occurs between Dodson Road and Potholes Reservoir, bounded on the north by Interstate 90 and on the south by Frenchmen Hills Road. We recommend exploring all access points around this area when getting to know the unit, then branch out from there.

**Q: What is the area like?**

A: The unit sits within the heart of the Bureau of Reclamation, Columbia Basin Irrigation Project, which delivers water to over 600,000 acres of farmland in the area. As a result many small ponds and streams have been incidentally created in this area. Hunters should be familiar with the orientation of Frenchmen and Winchester Wasteways as they pose a significant barrier and can only be crossed by boat or with chest waders in places. There are many small ponds associated with these wasteways that are used by waterfowl hunters.

The Desert Unit provides a rich source of natural vegetation so though mule deer utilize agricultural fields such as alfalfa, the crops may not be the best place to seek out your deer. Bitterbrush, which is common within the Desert Unit, is an important mule deer food item during winter. Be familiar with the distribution of bitterbrush patches, particularly during the later seasons if snowfall has occurred.

The Desert Unit sits on deep sandy soils. These soils have been wind-blown, resulting in long east-west running dunes which characterize the landscape (and provide great vantage points to scan for deer). These dunes and sandy soils can make walking difficult at times and will certainly make packing out an animal a lot of work.

**Q: What size bucks am I likely to encounter?**

A: The typical buck harvested from the Desert Unit is a 4x4 with a 24” spread. Many hunters report having seen larger bucks than the one they harvested.

**Q: Are there any areas that I cannot hunt?**

A: Hunters need to be aware of the locations and boundaries of Winchester Reserve, Frenchmen Reserve, and North Potholes Reserve (Figure 19). Private lands within the Desert Unit are only open to hunting if the hunter first obtains landowner permission.

**Q: Where should I stay?**

A: The town of Moses Lake is the nearest location with many amenities (motels, restaurants, etc.). Camping is allowed on WDFW lands; most folks camp within the parking areas. Expect crowds during the opening weekend of duck and pheasant hunting.

**Q: Is there any other hunting going on in the area?**

A: The entire unit is open to hunting. Expect to see waterfowl hunters and upland bird hunters throughout the area. However, these hunters are typically associated with the wasteways and associated ponds, once you get far enough into the shrub dominated uplands, you will find far fewer people.