

2014

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Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 11 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Thurston and Pierce Counties and GMU 667 of Lewis County

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DISTRICT 11 GENERAL OVERVIEW

The core Game Management Units (GMUs) that comprise District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Land ownership in the District includes private residential and agricultural (e.g. GMUs 652 and 666), and both private and public industrial timber lands (e.g. GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.

Varied hunting opportunity exists within District 11 from waterfowl hunting on waterways of Puget Sound to deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW's Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Areas (GMU 667), and DNRs Capitol State Forest (GMU 663) and Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654) provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting. Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Hancock Timber Resource properties in GMU's 653 and 654 all provide excellent big game opportunities, but they require the purchase of access permits to enter (obtained thru those respective companies).

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier Elk Herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainier high country and follow river drainages to low elevations during the hunting season. Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in the South Puget Sound Region.

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston County. A map of Pierce County firearm restrictions can be seen on the Pierce County website's Public GIS tool. Sheriff's Restrictions can be found here: <http://matterhorn3.co.pierce.wa.us/publicgis/>, while Pierce County regulations can be found here: www.co.pierce.wa.us/documentcenter/view/3810. No shooting and controlled shooting zones in Thurston County be seen here: <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/sheriff/docs/ShootingZones20090818.pdf>.

ELK

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier Elk Herds are partially contained in District 11, providing ample opportunity to harvest elk. Elk availability should continue to increase in GMUs 652, 653, and 654 as the North Rainier Elk Herd continues to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 10 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in that unit. Hunters report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt.

The larger portion of each elk herd migrates down from high alpine meadows in Mt Rainier National Park to lowland winter range. Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. Hunters are encouraged to scout for elk leaving the Mt Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area and the White River into the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

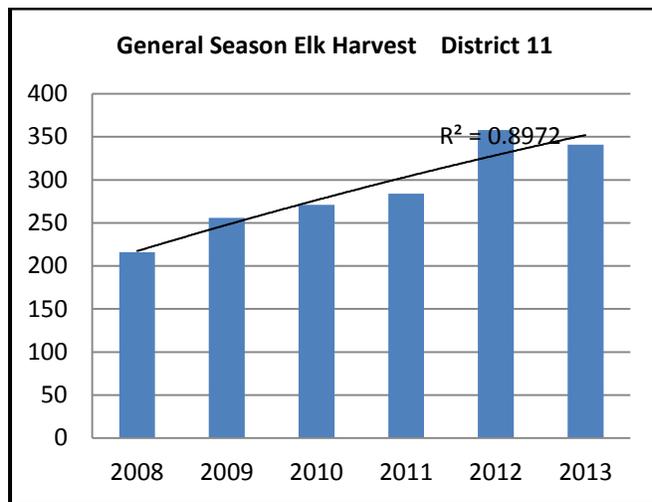
The Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests and University of Washington Charles Lathrop Pack Experimental and Demonstration Forest (Pack Forest) in GMU 654 are good prospects for deer or elk and can be accessed by boot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. Vehicle access during the hunting season in Elbe Hills is allowed only for hunter's having a disabled access permit (see Disabled Hunting on the WDFW website for more information). UW Pack Forest managers caution hunters to be aware of students conducting research in the forest any time of the year. Maps of Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forest as well as other Washington Department of Natural Resource public lands in the South Puget Sound can be found at <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Pages/PubMaps.aspx>.

Sub-herds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and Skookumchuk Wildlife Area (GMU 667). Hunters are encouraged to scout the area from the [Skookumchuk Wildlife Area](#) south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is only allowed under specialized permits which require a mining escort (two senior and two disabled hunter offered in 2014; 5 permits each; see WDFW hunting regulations). Limited elk can occasionally be found and hunted on the West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area in south Thurston County (GMU 666), on JBLM property in Pierce County (GMU 652; see previous discussion on hunting requirements), and off Delphi Road SW in western Thurston County (GMU 666). Elk cannot be hunted on property owned by USFWS in the Black River refuge (e.g. former Weaks Dairy).

Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Rd SW and Waddell Creek Rd SW). However, hunters must request permission to access private lands, and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g. visit property and ask for permission). A permit hunt is offered this season within the elk management area 6013 of GMU 652 (10 any weapon antlerless permits). Elk Hunt Area 6013 is comprised primarily of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes and supports approximately 100-150 total elk. Access can be limited and hunters interested in this permit are encouraged to seek access onto private property in the 6013 hunt area.

Three damage permit hunts are also provided in the Hanaford area (designated elk area 6069; 5 permits each). Finally, regional master hunter elk permits (hunt number 2722) have been used in the District when additional harvest was needed. Overall, opportunity to harvest an elk is high in these damage areas considering the increasing trend in elk with access being the primary limitation.

General season elk harvest has been gradually increasing over the past several years across District 11. This makes for good prospects for harvesting an elk throughout the district in 2014. Archery hunters had an 8.9% success rate in 2013 (down from 11% in 2012), modern firearm hunters a 10.3% success rate (comparable to the 10.5% in 2012), multiple weapons owners a 17.7% success rate (down from 24.2% in 2012), and muzzleloaders a 14.8% success rate (down slightly from 15.1% in 2012).



DEER

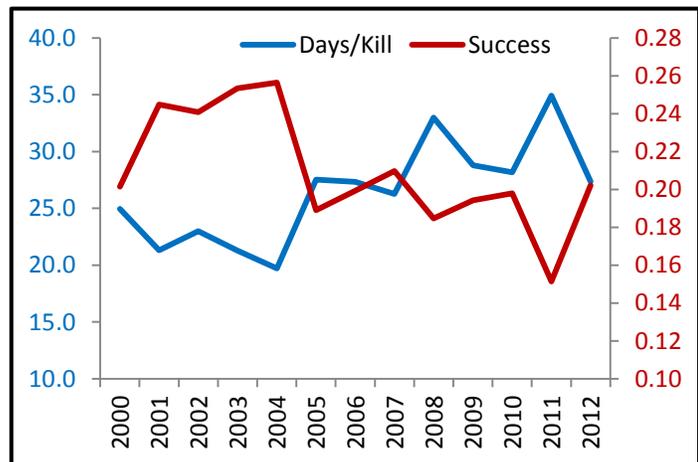
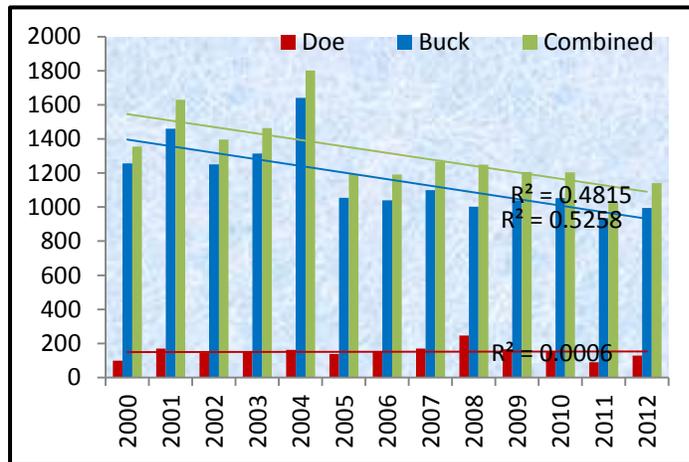
Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited; surveys are not done annually and when they are done, they consist of one survey done in the highest quality location (Vail Tree Farm). Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667) and Hancock Timber Resources Group ownership (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653) continue to be worthy hunting areas for both deer and elk.

A limited access recreation program is in effect for Vail Tree Farm. Hunters are required by Weyerhaeuser to purchase an access permit in order to access Vail Tree Farm. Permits allow

access from August 1 to December 31. A maximum of 750 permits are sold to access the 155,000-acre Vail tree farm at a cost of \$150 each. Weyerhaeuser also offers for bid six leases allowing access rights for one full year. All forestry operations will continue during the permit and lease season. Additional information can be located on the Weyerhaeuser website or by calling 866-636-6531. Hancock Timber Resources also require an access permit for motorized access to the Kapowsin, Eatonville, and White River and tree farms. Prices for 2014 are as follows: **Kapowsin** = \$375; **Eatonville** = \$275; **White River** = \$250. For more information on hunting/accessing Hancock Timber Resource land call 800-782-1493.

High elevation trophy black-tail hunting experiences can be found in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654 accessed by US Forest Service road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (outside ski boundaries).

District 11 deer are managed as two separate population management units: PMU 62 comprised of GMUs 652, 666, and 667, and PMU 67 comprised of GMUs 653 and 654. PMU 62 experienced a gradual decline in harvest from 2000-2004 (peak) followed by a fairly constant harvest since. This decline is likely attributed to declines in harvest on the Vail Tree Farm in the early 2000s as well as manipulation of permit availability. Catch per unit effort has also remained constant since 2005, with the exception of 2011. In summary, hunting prospects in PMU 62 will remain similar to 2013.



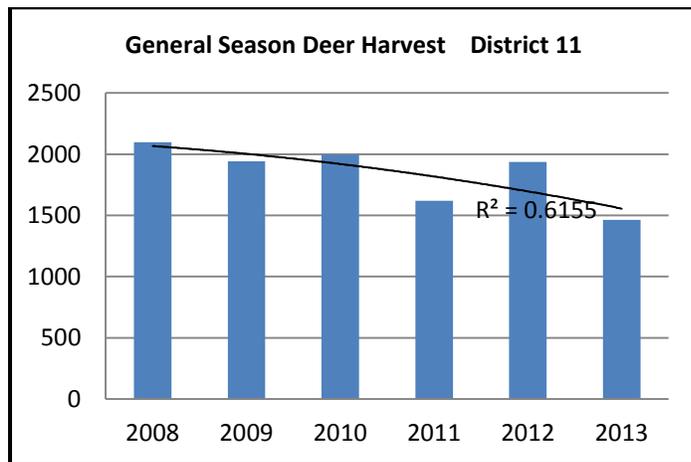
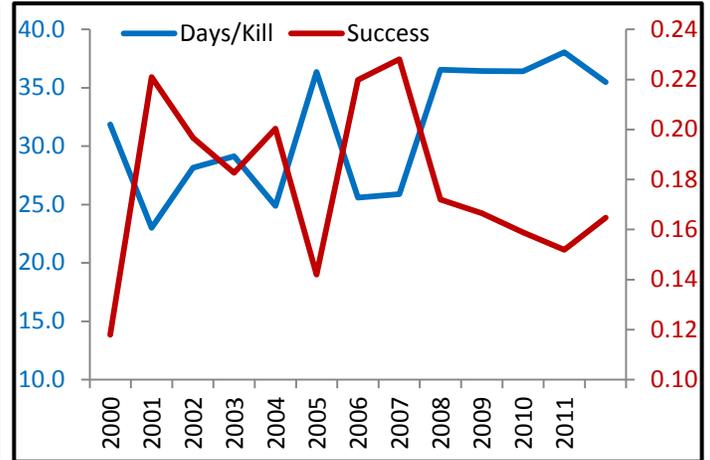
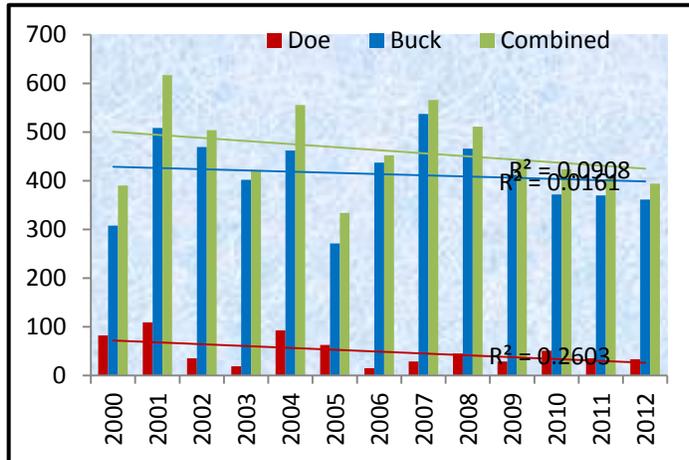
PMU 62 BLACK TAILED DEER HARVEST DATA

PMU 67 has also experienced a declining trend in harvest since 2000 but only a modest decline over the past five years. Harvest per unit effort is showing disturbing trends in PMU 67 with success rates falling and effort increasing since 2008. Warm weather during 2010-2013 hunting seasons, in particular over weekends, is likely partially to blame.

Hunting Season Prospects 2014
GMU 667 of Lewis County

District 11 – Thurston and Pierce Counties and

Hunters' best option is to wait for cloudy, colder weather. General season deer harvest across District 11 is showing the same declining trend. In 2013, archery hunters experienced an 18% success rate, modern firearm hunters a 24% success rate, multiple weapon hunters a 26% success rate, and muzzleloaders a 13% success rate during general season within the district. These are all slightly up from 2012 which is a positive prospect for deer hunters.



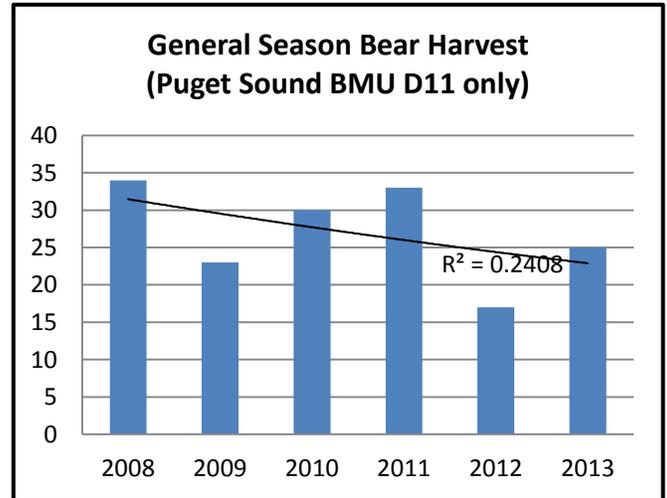
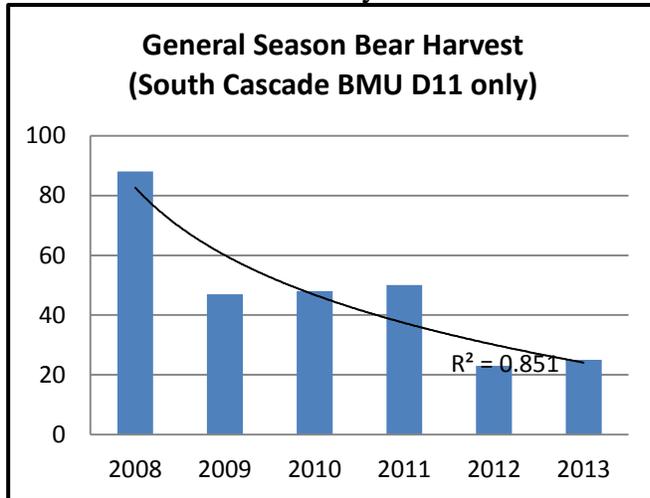
BEAR

District 11 comprises GMUs in two Black Bear Management Units: Puget Sound (GMU 652, 666, and 667) and South Cascades (GMU 653 and 654). There is opportunity within District 11 to hunt bear both in the fall general and spring special permit hunting seasons. However, trends in both hunts are declining and thus prospects in the district may not be as good as previous years.

Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group ownership (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653), Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), and Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Parks (GMU 654) offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district. (See comments earlier regarding access permit requirements for Weyerhaeuser and Hancock properties).

A spring black bear special permit season is provided on Hancock's Kapowsin Tree Farm within GMUs 653/654. A total of 150 permits will be available for the 15 April to 15 June, 2015 season. Those successfully drawn for a permit must purchase an access permit from Hancock. Ninety one hunters successfully harvested six black bear in 2013 under the spring permit hunt for a hunter success rate of 6.6% (compared to 93 hunters harvesting 8 bear in 2012 for an 8.6% success rate). These rates are low compared to other spring bear hunts statewide whose success rates range from 20-50%. Thus prospects for harvesting black bear in spring remain marginal on the Kapowsin Tree Farm.

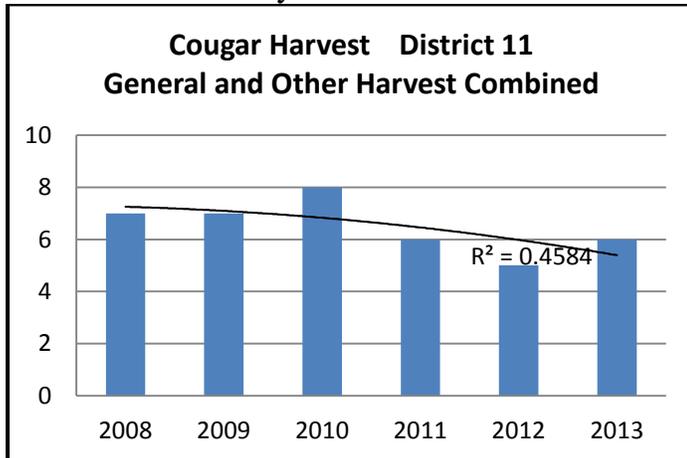
General season bear harvest trends in the District 11 portion of the South Cascades BMU (e.g. GMUs 653 and 654) have been generally declining over the past several years. After a 52% decline in harvest from 2011 to 2012, harvest rose slightly in 2013. General season bear harvest in the District 11 portion of the Puget Sound BMU (e.g. GMUs 652, 666, 667) shows a weak declining trend over the past several years with a significant increase in 2013 harvest following the 46% decline recorded from 2011 to 2012.



COUGAR

Cougar are widespread in the forest lands of District 11; areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for cougar. WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012 with a liberalized season coupled with harvest guidelines (see wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar). Cougar seasons will run from 1 September to 31 March for any weapon, and may close January 1 if harvest meets or exceeds the harvest quota in particular GMUs as specified in the game pamphlet. GMUs 652 and 666 have no quota limit, GMUs 653 and 654 have a quota of 4-6 cougar, and GMU 667 has a quota of 3-4 cougar.

In general, cougar harvest in District 11 has remained relatively constant since 2008. A total of 6 cougar were reported harvested in the district from all sources in 2013 (compared to 5 in 2012). The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides one of the highest cougar harvests of all western Washington GMUs. Thus, prospects for hunting cougar in the district are very good.



WATERFOWL

The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, as well as in Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. With the exception of 2013, waterfowl numbers have been on the upswing in the United States and that trend continued in 2014. According to USFWS, the total duck population as counted on traditional survey areas was 49.2 million breeding ducks, which is 8% higher than last year’s estimate of 45.6 million, and 43% above the long-term average. The total pond estimate was 7.2 million, similar to last year’s estimate of 6.9 million and 40% above the long-term average of 5.1 million.

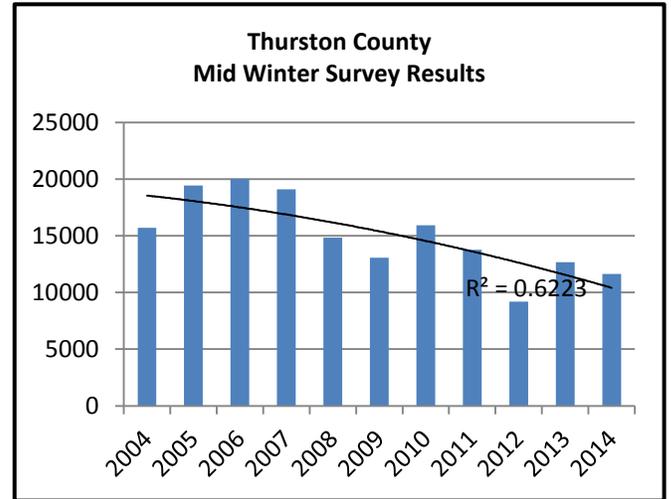
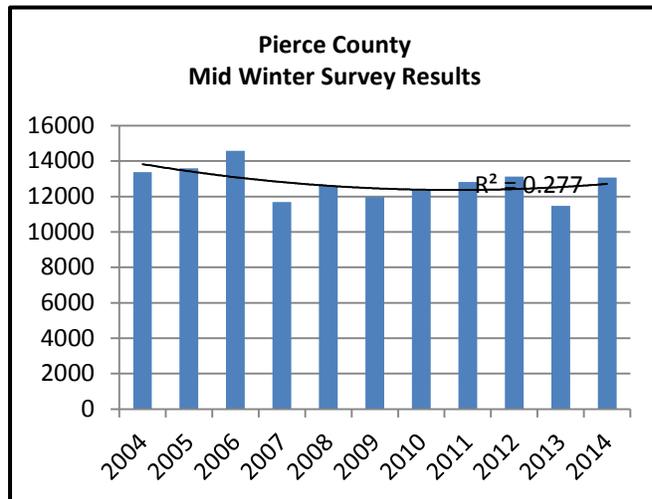
Additionally, most breeding population estimates of several species commonly found in District 11 remained stable from 2013 to 2014 in the primary North American breeding areas as follows (USFWS; <http://www.flyways.us/status-of-waterfowl/population-estimates>):

Species	Breeding Population Estimate Trend
Mallard	similar to 2013 and 42% above the long-term average
Green-winged teal	similar to the 2013 estimate and 69% above the long-term average
Gadwall	similar to the 2013 estimate and 102% above the long-term average
American wigeon	18% above the 2013 estimate and 20% above the long-term average
Northern shovelers	similar to 2013 estimates and 114% above the long-term average
Northern pintails	similar to 2013 estimates but 20% below the long-term average
Scaup	similar to the 2013 estimate and similar to the long-term average

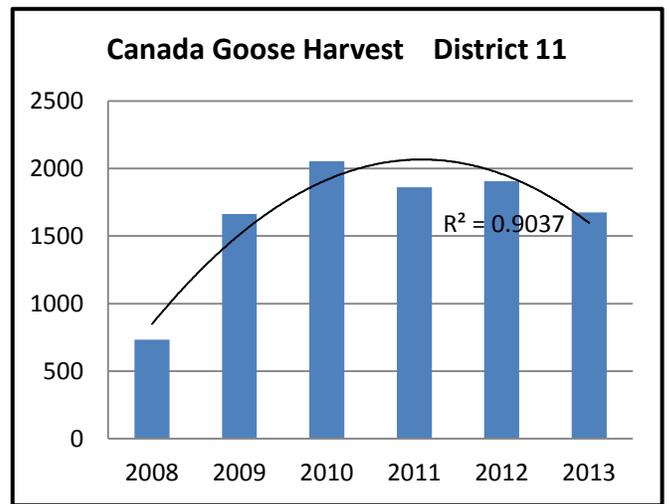
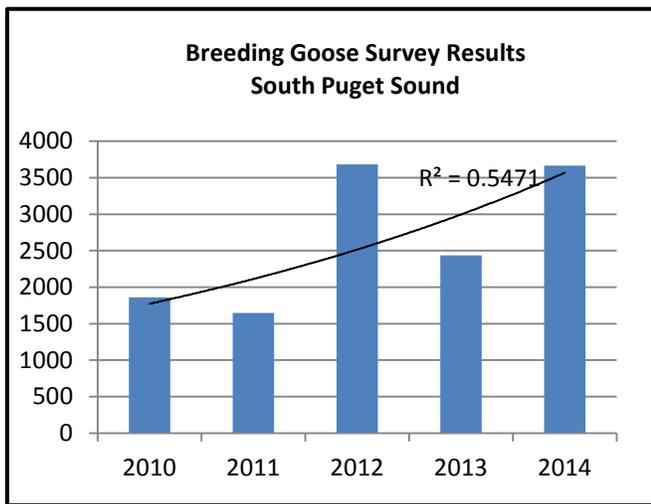
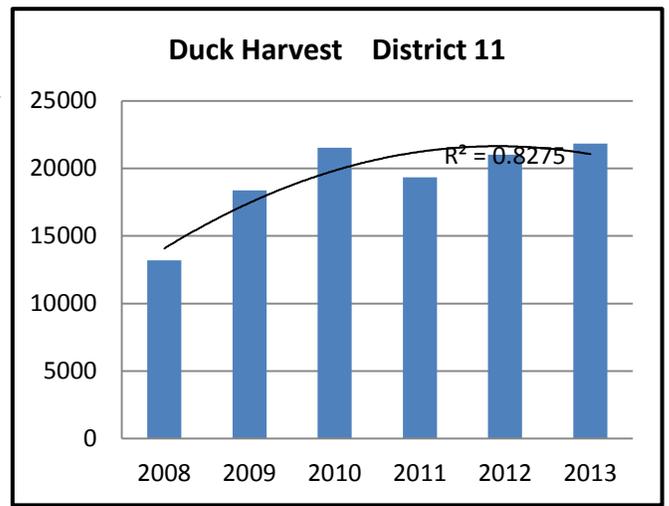
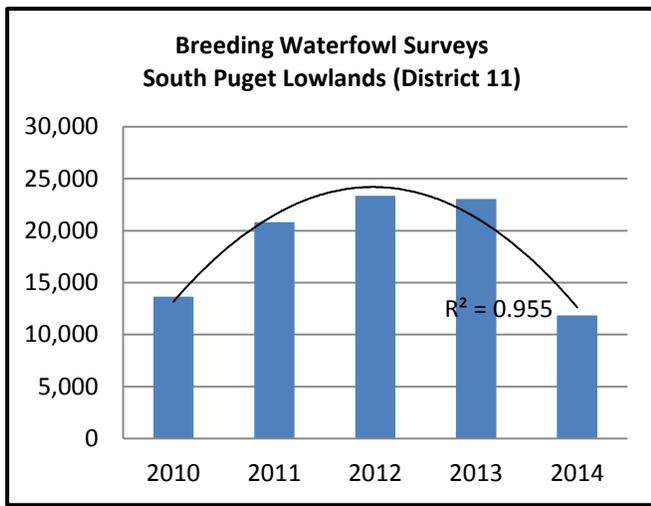
Thurston County supports significantly more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily as a result of Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. However, District 11 continues to see a decline in mid-winter waterfowl counts in Thurston but not Pierce County, which has remained relatively stable. This may be a result of changing hydrology patterns that have

resulted in less water on historically flooding agricultural fields and more water on smaller sized ponds in Thurston County. Overall, the South Puget Sound lowlands support almost twice as many waterfowl as any other Western Washington location. Breeding season waterfowl survey results for the South Puget lowlands was roughly half the total over the past three seasons. This may be attributed to an earlier than normal spring migration and nest season in 2014, which resulted in a reduction in migratory waterfowl visible during the survey window rather than a true reduction in waterfowl.

Midwinter counts within District 11 have shown a gradual decline over the past ten years in Thurston County while Pierce County has remained fairly constant. Breeding season surveys in the South Puget Sound also showed a significant decline in 2014 after a three year increasing trend. Surveyors reported lower than normal water conditions in Pierce County this spring which may contribute to reduced numbers of waterfowl. After a significant increase in duck harvest in 2008, harvest has slightly increased over the past five years, a trend which should continue in 2014. Although goose harvest slightly declined in 2013, goose breeding season surveys in 2014 increased in the district and thus prospects for harvesting geese is good.



*INCLUDES ONLY THOSE SITES THAT WERE CONSISTENTLY SURVEYED OVER THE YEARS REPORTED.



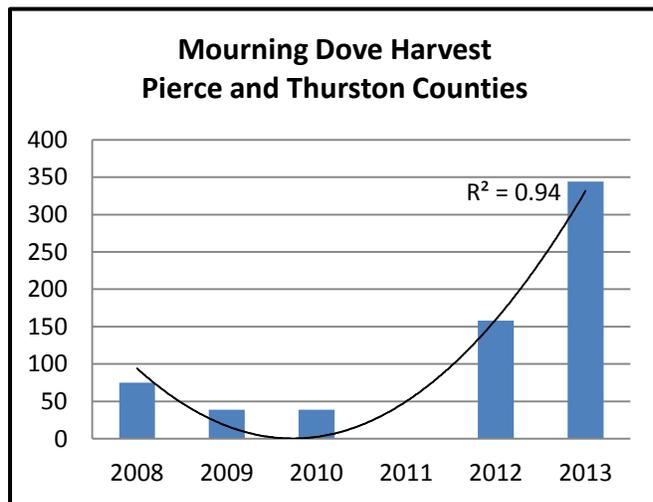
Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies in the district that are surrounded by housing; hunters are urged to obey all hunting regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county firearm restriction area (see introduction). Rapjohn Lake in Pierce County has a register-to-hunt program and requires hunters to hunt from two established blinds. Registration for the blinds is on a first come basis and is established by parking in one of the two mandatory parking lots at the WDFW Rapjohn Lake Access Site.

Best waterfowl hunting areas: [Nisqually Wildlife Refuge](#); Puget Sound marine inlets associated with western islands of Pierce County and Henderson, Budd, and Eld Inlets of Thurston County; Centralia Mine, Lewis County. Flooded agricultural fields in the western half of the district can be good prospects for waterfowl hunting; however, hunters must seek landowner access permission prior to hunting these sites. Note that a majority of the water bodies on Key

Peninsula, Pierce County, are within a firearm restriction zone, thus prohibiting waterfowl hunting. The Centralia Coal Mine has a limited, high quality hunt. Hunters are urged to contact TransAlta directly with questions regarding participation (360-736-9901). For information on hunting Nisqually Wildlife Refuge go to http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Nisqually/visit/visitor_activities/hunting.html or call (360) 753-9467.

MOURNING DOVE

District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area, although harvest significantly increased in 2012 and 2013. Average harvest was 38 birds a year from 2008 to 2011 and then spiked to 344 birds in 2013. The best dove hunting in District 11 in declining order is in Lewis, followed by Pierce, followed by Thurston, with Lewis and Pierce having almost four times as many birds harvested than Thurston County.



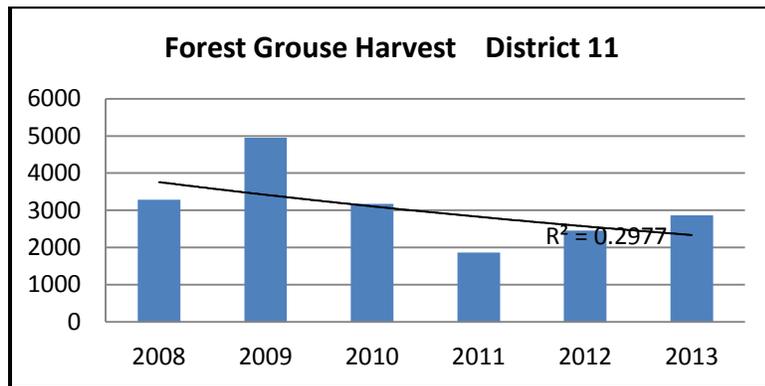
FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails, and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting will be near fruiting shrublands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Logging roads are particularly good locations since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. In particular, look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind

gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse.

Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500', particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (5-25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 663). Forest grouse have been experiencing a weak downward trend in District 11 over the past 5 years, but they increased slightly in 2013. Pierce County provides an average of 2,000 grouse harvested per year while Thurston County averages 1,000 annually.

A hunter must purchase either a big game license or a small game license to hunt grouse; grouse hunting is also included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs 1 September thru 31 December with a daily bag limit of 4 of any species and a possession limit of 12 of any species.



PHEASANT

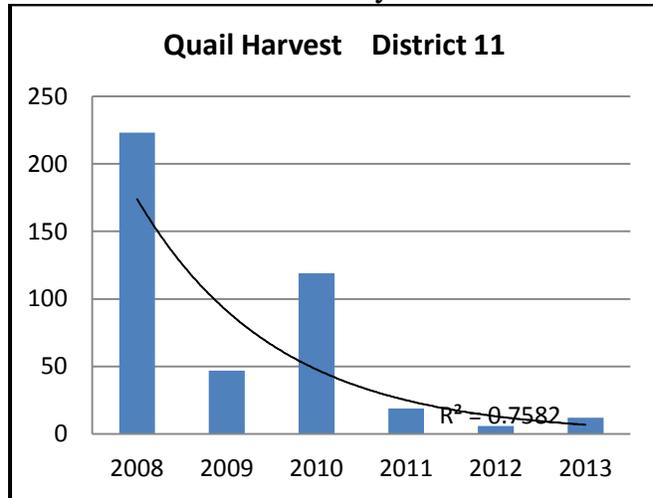
Game-farm produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites which are mapped on the [Go Hunt](#) website and in the [Western Washington pheasant program booklet](#). The release program utilizes state (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federal (JBLM) managed lands. There are special access processes in place for [JBLM](#), so please visit their web site. Note that [non-toxic shot](#) is required on all pheasant release sites statewide. The general pheasant season is open from 8:00am to 4:00pm, 27 September to 30 November, 2014, with a daily bag limit of 2 (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek Wildlife Areas from December 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as general season. Pheasants are not released as part of the extended season. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. An overview of the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program including a description and

maps of all release sites can be found on the WDFW website
at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/pheasant/western/>.

An estimated forty thousand pheasant will be released in 2014 across southwestern Washington pheasant release areas. This represents a 2000 bird increase over 2013. Approximately 1900 pheasants (4.9% of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays beginning 17 September thru Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 3900 pheasants (9.8% of total production) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 60-70 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays. Some areas of Scatter Creek are off limits to hunters due to endangered species recovery work so please *obey all posted signs*. Approximately 5200 pheasants (13.1% of total production) will be released on JBLM. Military training dictates which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM thru NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744), at which time they will be informed about the pheasant hunting process including which fields are open for hunting.

QUAIL

Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout Western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 has been trending downwards since a 5-year high in 2008, with a slight increase from 6 harvested in 2012 to 12 harvested in 2013 in Thurston County (no quail have been harvested in Pierce County for the past three years). Regardless of this trend, quail harvest in Thurston County is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in Western Washington that support a quail harvest. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of South and East Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain Quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of Key Peninsula, Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. However, access may be limited. The western Washington California Quail season runs 27 September thru 30 November with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and possession mixed bag limit of 30. The Mountain quail season runs 27 September thru 30 November with a daily bag limit of 2 and possession limit of 4.

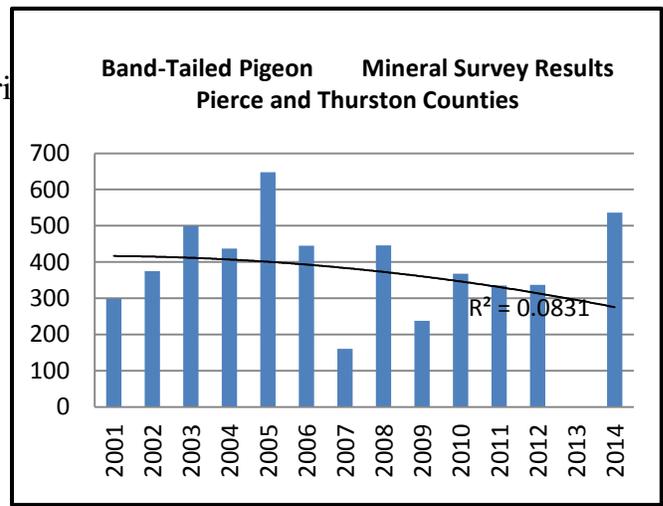
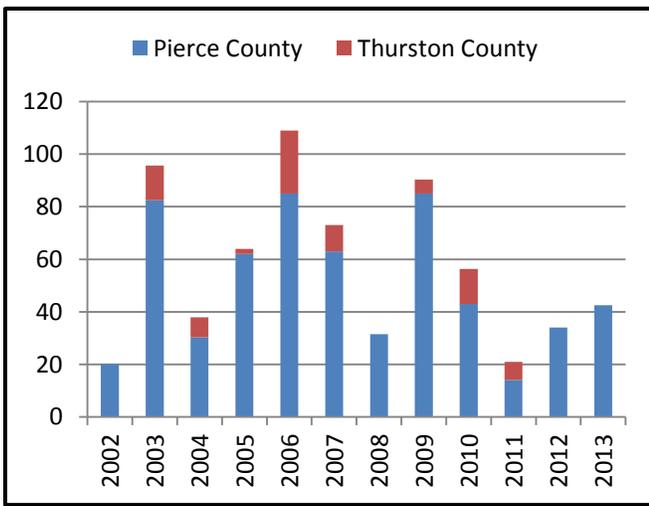


TURKEY

District 11 is not managed for wild turkeys and the species remains relatively rare. WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula, Pierce County; Rochester, Thurston County; and along the Johnson Creek Corridor, Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. The 2008-2013 average turkey harvest in District 11 is 12, with almost all that harvest in Skookumchuck (GMU 667), followed by a few in Deschutes (GMU 666). The statewide turkey season runs 15 April thru 31 May. Male turkeys and turkeys with visible beards only are legal with a western Washington limit of one (except two turkey limit in Klickitat County).

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Total harvest in Washington in 2013 was 129 pigeons, with Pierce County (District 11) providing the third highest harvest at 42 birds, just behind Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties. Pierce County also supports the third highest average annual harvest of pigeons since 2002. No pigeons were harvested in Thurston County the past two years, and it ranks low in regards to harvest compared to other western counties. Bandtail numbers collected during July surveys at traditional mineral sites rose significantly in 2013 and 2014 across District 11, although the long-term trend shows a weak decline. Thus, prospects remain decent for pigeon hunting in Pierce County but not necessarily in Thurston County. The best hunting locations for band-tails in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and Luhr Beach area (Pierce County), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines.



COTTONTAIL RABBIT

District 11 provides some of the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce and Thurston counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the district remained stable from 2008 to 2011, spiked significantly in 2012, but then declined in harvest in 2013. The average harvest since 2008 has been 268 cottontails harvested across the district annually. Both Thurston and Pierce County have been experiencing a decline in cottontail harvest over the past 5 years. Pierce experienced a 31% decline in harvest and Thurston a 28% decline since 2008. Success per unit effort has declined significantly in Pierce County since 2008, while in Thurston the trend has significantly improved. What this suggests is that a real reduction in availability of cottontails is taking place in Pierce whereas trends in Thurston are more related to lack of hunter participation. Despite decreasing trends in Pierce County it remains one of the best places in the south Puget Sound to hunt cottontails.

