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DISTRICT 15 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson Counties

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DISTRICT 15 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 15 is located in Region 6 and consists of all or portions of six game management units (GMUs): 621 (Olympic), 624 (Coyle), 627 (Kitsap), 633 (Mason), 636 (Skokomish), and 651 (Satsop). A portion of GMUs 621 and 624 fall within District 16. Administratively, District 15 includes Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties, and is one of four districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that collectively comprise the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) Region 6.

The landscape in District 15 is dominated by industrial forest land and the most common habitat is characterized by multi-aged forests consisting primarily of Douglas fir and red alder. However, other habitats do occur, ranging from alpine in areas adjacent to Olympic National Park to marine in areas within the Salish Sea.

A range of hunting opportunities are available in District 15, including elk, deer, bear, cougar, mountain goat, waterfowl, including sea ducks, and grouse. Also, a variety of small game species like rabbit, quail, coyote, and bobcat are present. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest for most game species in District 15 during the 2014 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2013 season and the five-year average. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Species	Harvest		
	5-yr avg.	2013	2014
Elk	30	28	34
Deer	1,653	1,530	1,660
Bear	91	70	61
Cougar	8	14	10
Ducks	6,858	6,898	5,164
Canada Goose	361	510	466
Snipe	18	0	24
Grouse	2,902	1,893	2,257
Mourning Dove	207	574	0
Quail	32	37	12
Snowshoe Hare	4	11	0
Cottontail Rabbit	112	120	54

TABLE 1. ESTIMATES OF THE 2013, 2014, AND 5-YR AVERAGE ANNUAL HARVEST FOR MOST GAME SPECIES HUNTED IN DISTRICT 15 ARE SHOWN. WATERFOWL AND SMALL GAME HARVEST TOTALS WERE TABULATED FROM ALL OF MASON, KITSAP AND JEFFERSON COUNTIES.

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

All elk that occur in District 15 are Roosevelt elk. District 15 contains those portions of the Olympic elk herd occurring in GMUs 621, 624, 633, 636 and 651. GMU 627 is not included in any elk herd plan and no known elk herds currently occur in this unit. The quality of elk hunting in District 15 can generally be described as fair. GMU 651 provides the only general season elk hunting opportunity in the district, while elk hunting in GMUs 621 and 636 are by permit only. Elk in GMU 624 primarily reside near the town of Sequim in District 16. GMU 651 is managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing elk numbers while also minimizing negative elk-human interactions, including elk depredation to agricultural crops. GMUs 621 and 636 are managed with the primary goal of increasing elk numbers while also minimizing negative elk-human interactions, including elk depredation to agricultural crops. Management of the Sequim herd in GMUs 621 and 624 is primarily based on minimizing negative elk-human interactions, including elk depredation to agricultural crops.



Elk in the District 15 portion of GMU 621 can primarily be found along the main river valleys, including the Dosewallips, Duckabush, Hamma Hamma, Lilliwaup, and North Fork Skokomish rivers. Elk in the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers either remain in the lower river valleys and on adjacent valley ridges year round or migrate to their summer range in the Olympic National Park. The Hamma Hamma and Lilliwaup herds are generally non-migratory. The North Fork Skokomish herd is primarily resident to the upper North Fork Skokomish River valley in the Olympic National Park above Lake Cushman, often wintering near the northern end of Lake Cushman before migrating to summer range in the Mount Skokomish Wilderness. GMU 621 was closed to all elk hunting in the mid-1990s for conservation reasons and is now open to hunting by permit only. There is not a good estimate of abundance in GMU 621. However, based on herd counts and the increase in elk damage/conflict reports, we are probably at or near our management objective for this unit.

Elk in GMU 636 can primarily be found in the upper Wynoochee River valley, the Skokomish River valley and near the town of Matlock. Although some herds remain non-migratory, migratory movement has been documented from the upper Wynoochee to the Olympic National Park and the North Fork Skokomish River at Lake Cushman, as well as movement up the South Fork Skokomish river valley into the Olympic National Park. GMU 636 was closed to all elk hunting in the mid-1990s for conservation reasons and later opened on a limited basis to hunting by permit only. Although there is not a current estimate, anecdotal data suggests the elk population in GMU 636 is likely below management objectives overall, but in some cases individual herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict.

Elk in GMU 651 are distributed across the GMU among roughly 13 non-migratory sub-herds. However, herd size/number remains dynamic. Although we do not have a current estimate, anecdotal data suggests the elk population in GMU 651 is likely below management objectives overall, but in some cases individual herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict.

Additionally, the WDFW management goal is to maintain 15 to 35 bulls per 100 cows in the pre-season or 12 to 20 bulls per 100 cows in the post-season (WDFW 2015). Ideally, bull ratios would be collected when all age-classes of bulls are freely intermixed with cows, providing the least biased estimate of bull to cow ratios. However, the ability to sight bulls can be influenced by bull behavior. During pre- and post-rut periods, mature bulls are often segregated from cow/calf groups, reducing the likelihood of their detection during aerial surveys. Conversely, during the rut mature bulls may exclude other bulls from cow/calf groups due to social intolerance of rutting bulls toward each other. Thus bull to cow ratios collected during pre- and post-season surveys are likely minimum estimates. Bull to cow ratios in District 15 were at or below management objectives in recent years, averaging 38:100 cows in the fall and 29:100 cows in the spring for GMU 621, including the Sequim herd, 20: and 18:100 cows in the fall and spring, respectively in GMU 636, and 15: and 14:100 cows in the fall and spring, respectively in GMU 651.

For more detailed information related to the status of Washington's elk herds, hunters should read through the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report, which is available for download on the Department's website or by [clicking here](#).

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?



Photo Courtesy of A. Lund, a successful GMU 636 elk hunter.

Hunting is influenced by multiple factors, including elk abundance, weather, land access, hunting pressure, and hunting season regulations. Most elk hunting in District 15 is by permit designed to minimize hunting pressure or for safety reasons. In 2015, permits are available for all three weapon types to hunt in GMUs 621 (29 bull permits) and 636 (11 bull permits). Most elk hunting in GMU 624 is accomplished through the Master Hunter program targeting the Sequim herd. General season hunting during the archery and modern firearm seasons is allowed in GMU 651,

including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. In 2015, a general late-season muzzleloader elk hunt was added to GMU 651. Although both GMUs 627 and 633 are open for general season elk hunting, hunters should avoid these GMUs as no recent observations of elk have been reported for these units.

Hunting pressure is lowest in GMU 636 and highest in GMU 651. Many of the elk herds spend a considerable amount of time on small private land parcels often associated with pastures, so access to hunt may be limited in some areas. Further, local timber companies are starting to require an access permit to hunt their timber lands. For hunters looking for areas with the least amount of pressure and little to no private land access issues, we recommend applying for an elk permit in GMU 636 and hunting the upper Wynoochee valley area or in GMU 621 and hunting mostly DNR land near the Lilliwaup Swamp. Both of these areas will require some effort to hunt, as motorized access is often limited, but because of this the hunting pressure can be lighter.

Tribal hunting occurs in all three GMUs and often accounts for 50% or more of the total elk harvest in District 15 (see Figure 2), so the actual hunting pressure in these units is greater than WDFW hunting season statistics and permit levels might suggest.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2015 SEASON

Elk and hunter numbers are not likely to fluctuate dramatically between years and the 2015 hunting season regulations and permit levels have not changed much. There are 29 permits available for GMU 621 hunters (eight archery, four muzzleloader, and 17 modern firearm). Average hunter success in this unit can be a little misleading because of the small permit levels, but five-year averages by weapon type are 22% success for archery, 27% for muzzleloaders, and 37% for modern firearm hunters. Actual success has been reported as low as 0% in some years.

There are 11 permits available for GMU 636 elk hunters (five archery, three muzzleloader, and three modern firearm). Average hunter success in this unit can be a little misleading because of the small permit levels, but five-year averages by weapon type are 17% for archery, 0% for muzzleloaders, and 30% for rifle hunters. Actual success is often 0% in some years. General season hunting during the archery and modern firearm seasons is allowed in GMU 651, including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. New in 2015, a late-muzzleloader season was added to GMU 651 and the one quality bull permit available to rifle hunters in GMU 651 was dropped.

The number of elk harvested in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 is shown in Figure 2, while general season trend data for hunter numbers and success in GMU 651 is presented in Figures 3 and 4.

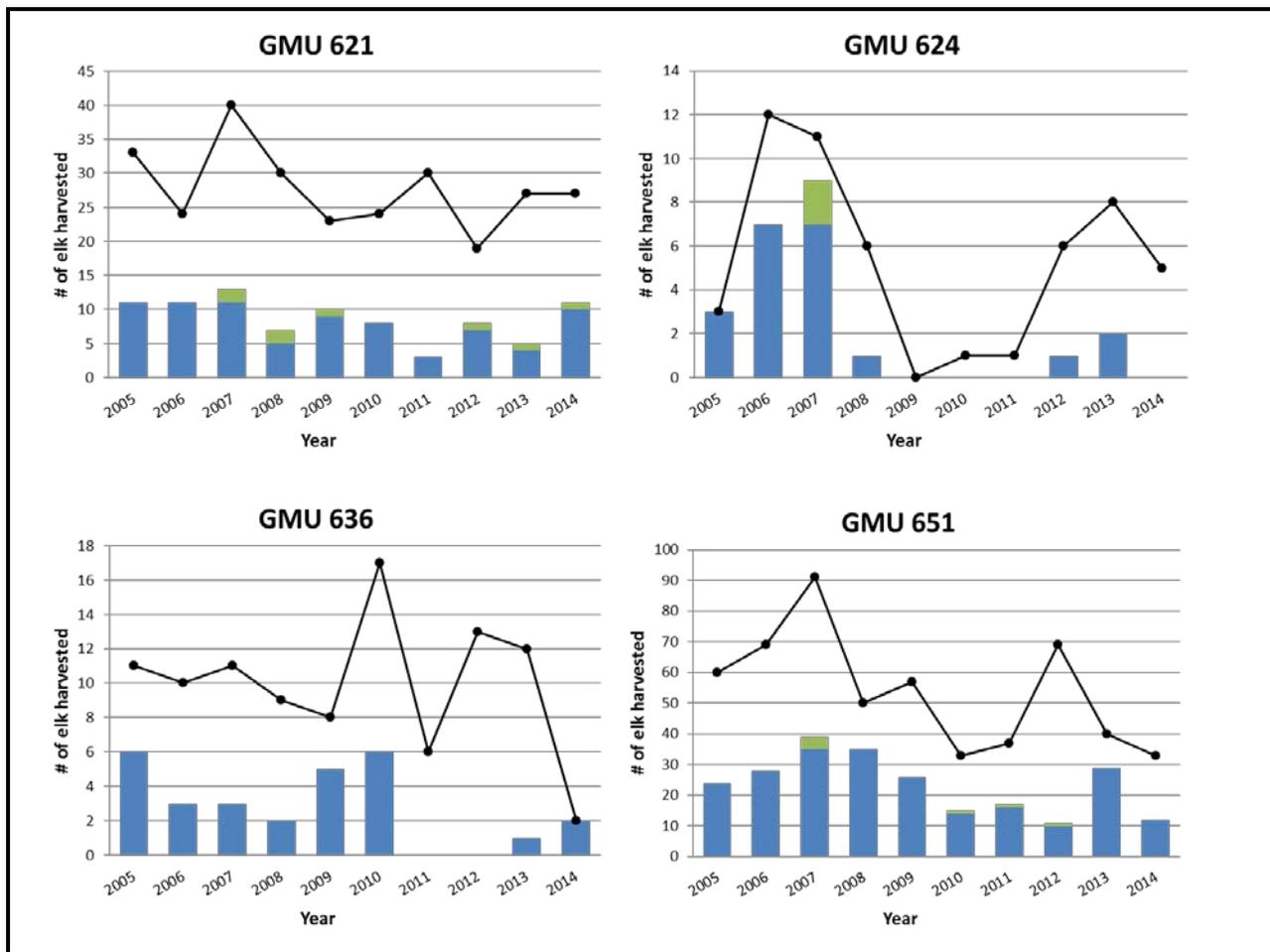


FIGURE 2. THE NUMBER OF BULL (BLUE) AND COW (GREEN) ELK HARVESTED DURING STATE PERMIT SEASONS AND TOTAL NUMBER OF ELK HARVESTED FROM ALL SOURCES (BLACK LINE) IN GMUS 621, 624, 636, AND 651 DURING 2005–2014. TRIBAL HARVEST WAS NOT AVAILABLE FOR 2014.

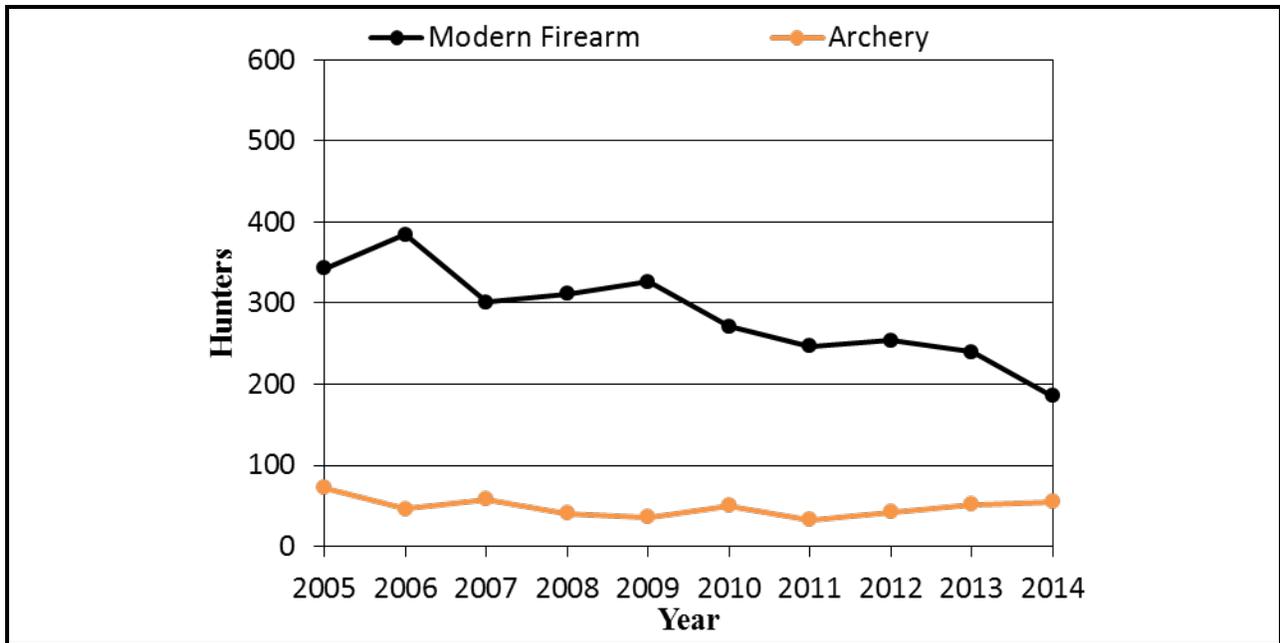


FIGURE 3. TRENDS IN ELK HUNTER NUMBERS DURING THE GENERAL MODERN FIREARM AND ARCHERY SEASONS IN GMU 651, 2005–2014.

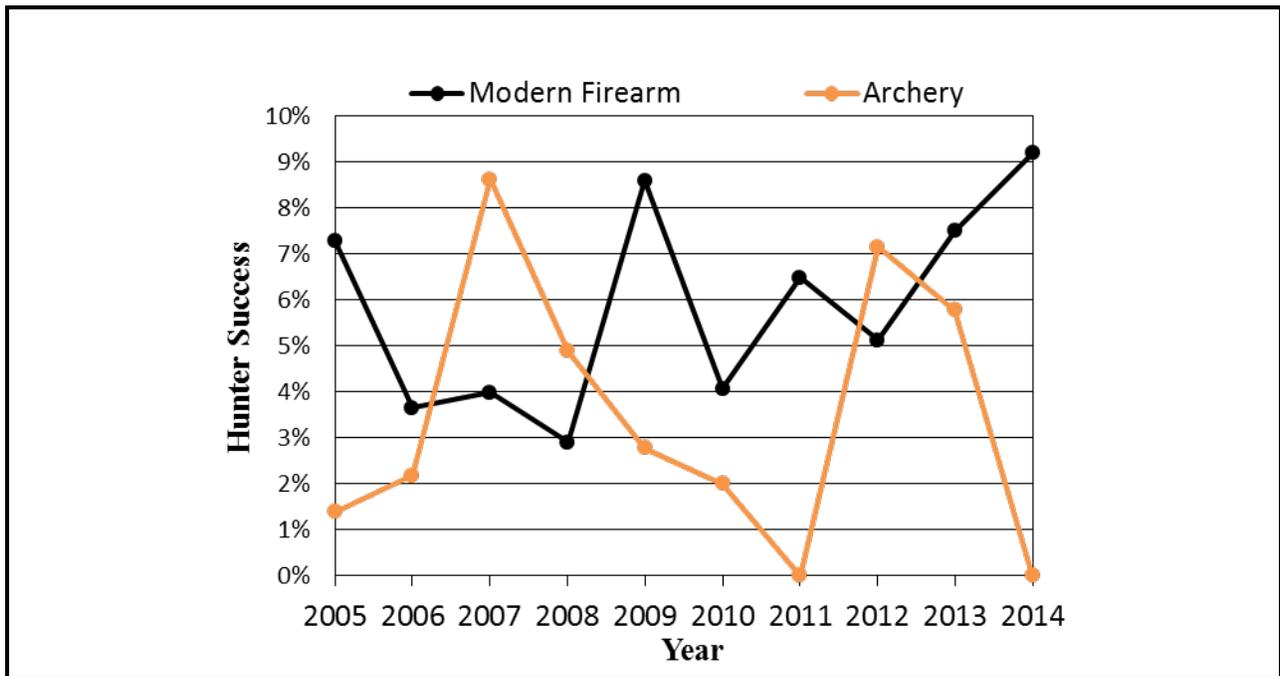


FIGURE 4. TRENDS IN HUNTER SUCCESS RATES DURING GENERAL MODERN FIREARM AND ARCHERY ELK SEASONS IN GMU 651, 2005–2014.

ELK AREAS

There are two Elk Areas that occur in District 15: Elk Area 6061 (Twin Satsop) and Elk Area 6071 (Dungeness). Elk Area 6061 was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic elk damage issues, while Elk Area 6071 was established to limit elk hunting for safety reasons.

Current hunting regulations allow the harvest of 3-point minimum bull or antlerless elk during the general early archery season in Elk Area 6061, while elk hunting in EA 6071 is usually conducted through the Master Hunter program on a limited basis.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Notable hunting changes for the 2015 season include:

1. The number of archery permits in GMU 621 was decreased to eight permits
2. The number of modern firearm permits in GMU 621 was increased to 17 permits
3. The number of muzzleloader permits in GMU 636 was increased to three permits
4. The number of archery permits in GMU 636 was increased to five permits
5. A late-season muzzleloader hunt was added to GMU 651.
6. The one Quality Bull permit in GMU 651 was dropped.
7. Private timber companies in District 15 are going to fee access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Hunters should be aware of these changes and are advised to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the company's current policy. See private lands access section below for more information.

BACTERIAL HOOF DISEASE

In response to the increasing trend of reports of elk with hoof disease, the Department is currently working with specialists from a variety of state and federal agencies to identify the cause and anticipated impacts of this condition. Elk afflicted with hoof disease commonly show severely overgrown and deformed hooves, as well as marked emaciation. The cause of this condition is believed to be associated with infectious treponeme bacteria, which have been linked to digital dermatitis in domestic sheep and cattle. Although most reports have come from areas south of District 15, reports of limping elk have been recorded in District 15 and WDFW has confirmed the presence of hoof disease in one elk from GMU 651.

Hunters that see limping elk are encouraged to report their observations using the WDFW online reporting tool. The reporting tool can be located on WDFW's Wildlife Health website (http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/health/hoof_rot/) or by [clicking here](#).

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) are the only species of deer that occur in District 15. They are managed to maintain productive populations, while providing for multiple uses, including recreational, educational, and aesthetic (WDFW Game Management Plan 2008). District 15 includes all or portions of GMUs 621, 624, 627, 633, 636, and 651. Buck harvest is generally any antlered buck, although the Skokomish (636)

GMU has been managed as a 2-point or better unit. Beginning in 2015, the 2-point minimum restriction will be lifted from GMU 636. Antlerless harvest is limited to certain weapon types and/or by permit.

Overlapping with the early archery season, the Olympic Wilderness areas in District 15 are also open to modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters during the High Buck hunt. We don't have good data to estimate either participation or success during this hunt, but assume both are quite low in comparison to general season hunting. Harvest is restricted to 3-point minimum bucks.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 15. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and CPUE are used as surrogates to a formal index or estimate of population size. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and we are currently evaluating new approaches to monitoring black-tailed deer populations that are independent of harvest data.

For more detailed information related to the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read through the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report which is available for download on the Department's website or by [clicking here](#).

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

In 2015, there are ample general season deer hunting opportunities for archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm hunters in District 15 (Table 2). Field observations and recent harvest trends suggest good deer hunting potential exists in GMUs 621, 627, and 633. GMU 651 remains a popular hunting unit.

Good deer hunting can be found in lower elevation habitats in GMU 636, but deer density in this unit appears to decline at higher elevations; we suspect this is largely related to habitat quality and available forage.

2015 General Deer Seasons						
GMU	Modern Firearm		Archery		Muzzleloader	
	Early	Late	Early	Late	Early	Late
621	Oct. 17-31, Any buck	Nov. 19-22, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov 25-Dec 15, Any Buck
624	Oct. 17-31, Any buck	Nov. 19-22, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Nov. 25-Dec 31, Any Deer	Oct 3-11, Any Buck	Closed
627	Oct. 17-31, Any buck	Nov. 19-22, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Nov. 25-Dec 31, Any Deer	Oct 3-11, Any Deer	Closed
633	Oct. 17-31, Any buck	Nov. 19-22, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov. 25-Dec. 15, Any Deer
636	Oct. 17-31, Any buck	Nov. 19-22, Any buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Nov. 25-Dec 31-31, Any Deer	Oct 3-11, Any Buck	Closed
651	Oct. 17-31, Any buck	Nov. 19-22, Any Buck	Sep. 1-30, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov. 25-Dec. 15, Any Buck

TABLE 2. 2015 GENERAL HUNTING SEASONS AND LEGAL DEER DESCRIPTIONS FOR GMUS 621, 624, 627, 633, 636, AND 651.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2015 SEASON

It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 15 where severe winter weather conditions that result in large winter die-offs rarely occur. Consequently, populations available for harvest are expected to be similar in size to the 2014 season.

Hunter numbers also typically do not change dramatically from one year to the next, unless there is a dramatic shift in hunting regulations or access. Consequently, the best predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Figures 5 through 7 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 15 and what they can expect to encounter with regard to hunter success and hunter numbers.

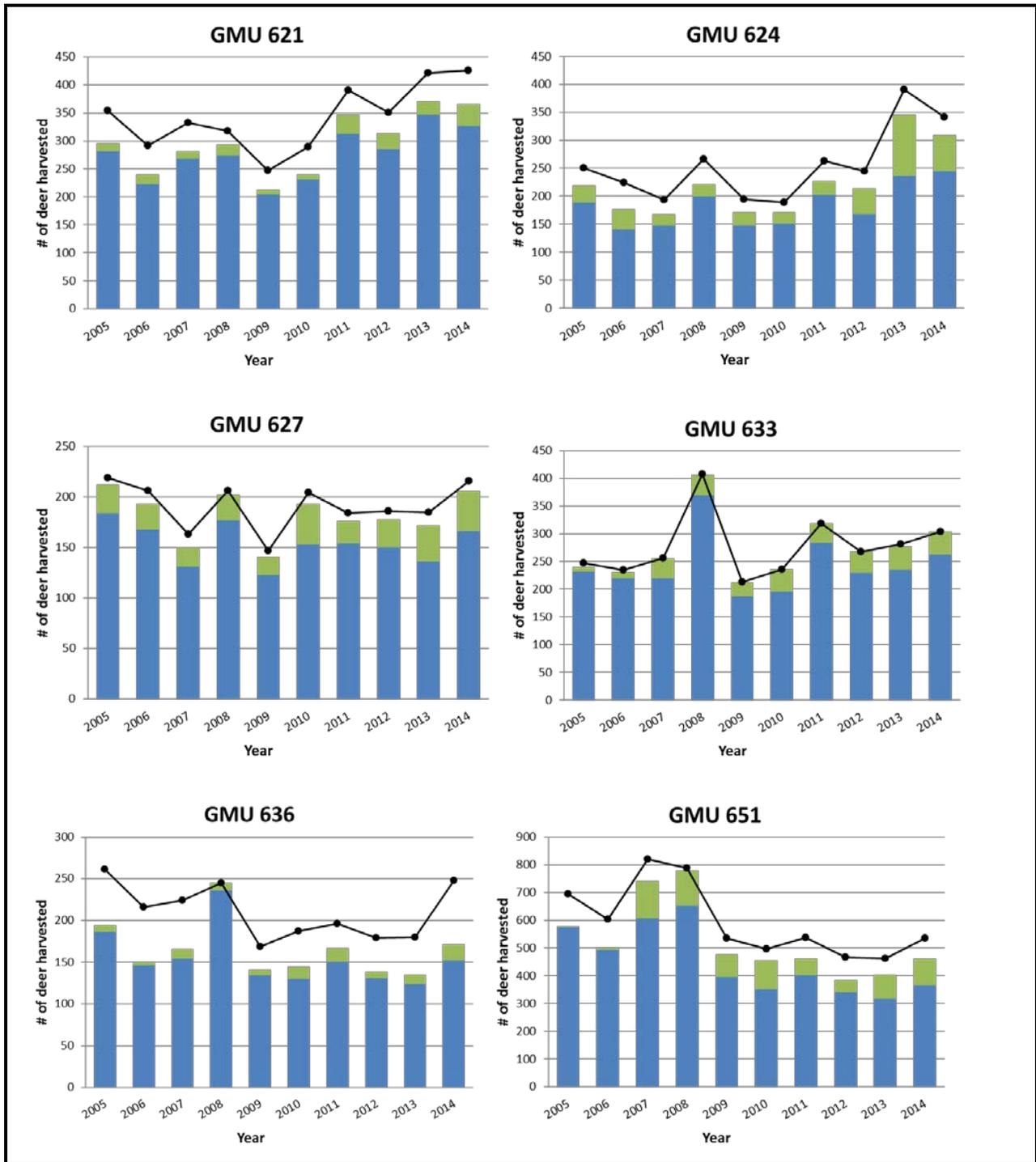


FIGURE 5. TRENDS IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF BUCK (BLUE) AND ANTLERLESS (GREEN) DEER HARVESTED DURING GENERAL MODERN FIREARM, ARCHERY, AND MUZZLELOADER DEER

SEASONS COMBINED, 2005–2014. TOTAL DEER HARVEST (BLACK LINE) INCLUDES HARVEST FROM ALL SOURCES. 2014 DOES NOT INCLUDE ANY TRIBAL HARVEST.

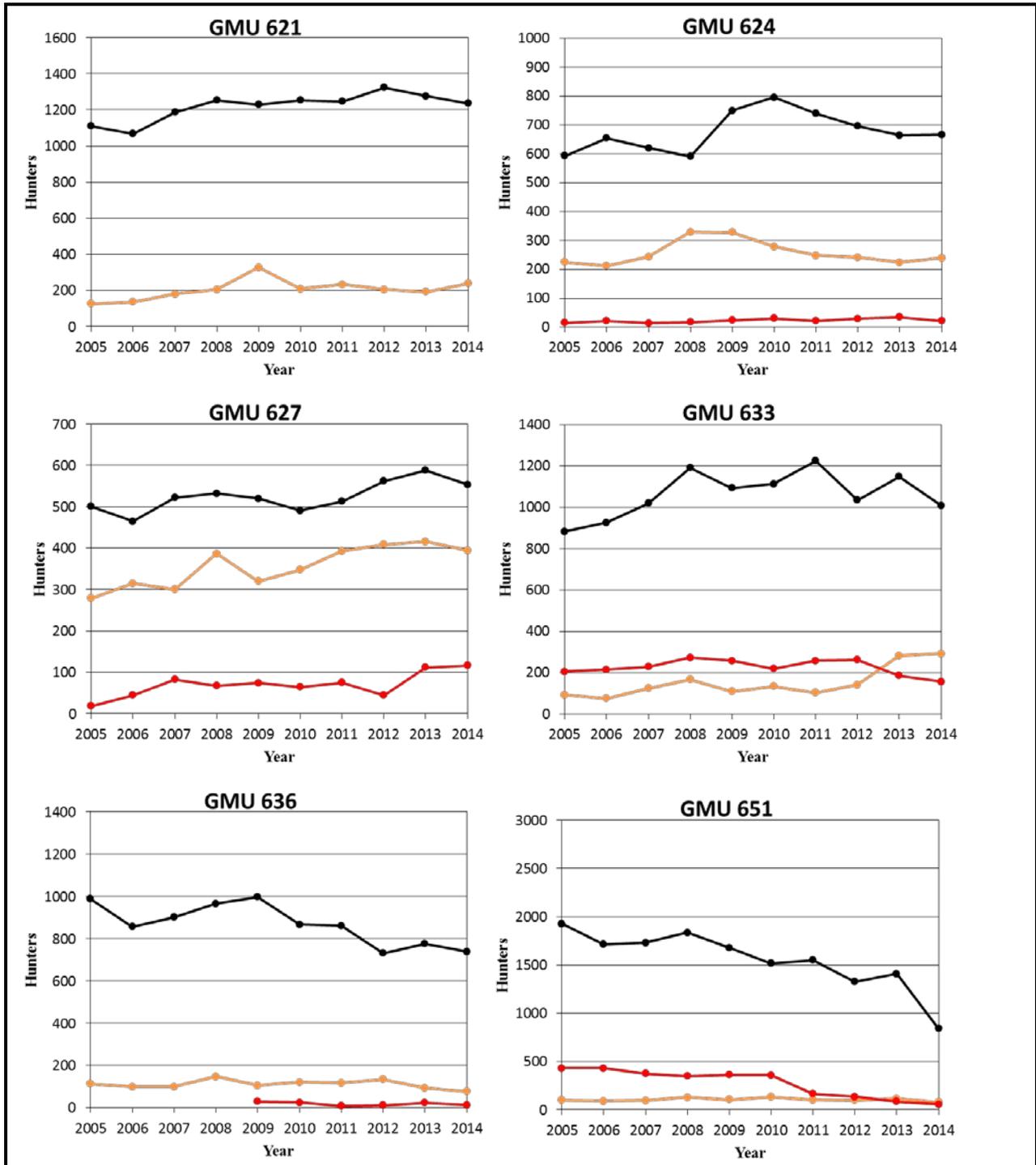


FIGURE 6. TRENDS IN HUNTER NUMBERS DURING GENERAL MODERN FIREARM (BLACK), ARCHERY (ORANGE), AND MUZZLELOADER (RED) DEER SEASONS IN DISTRICT 15, 2005–2014.

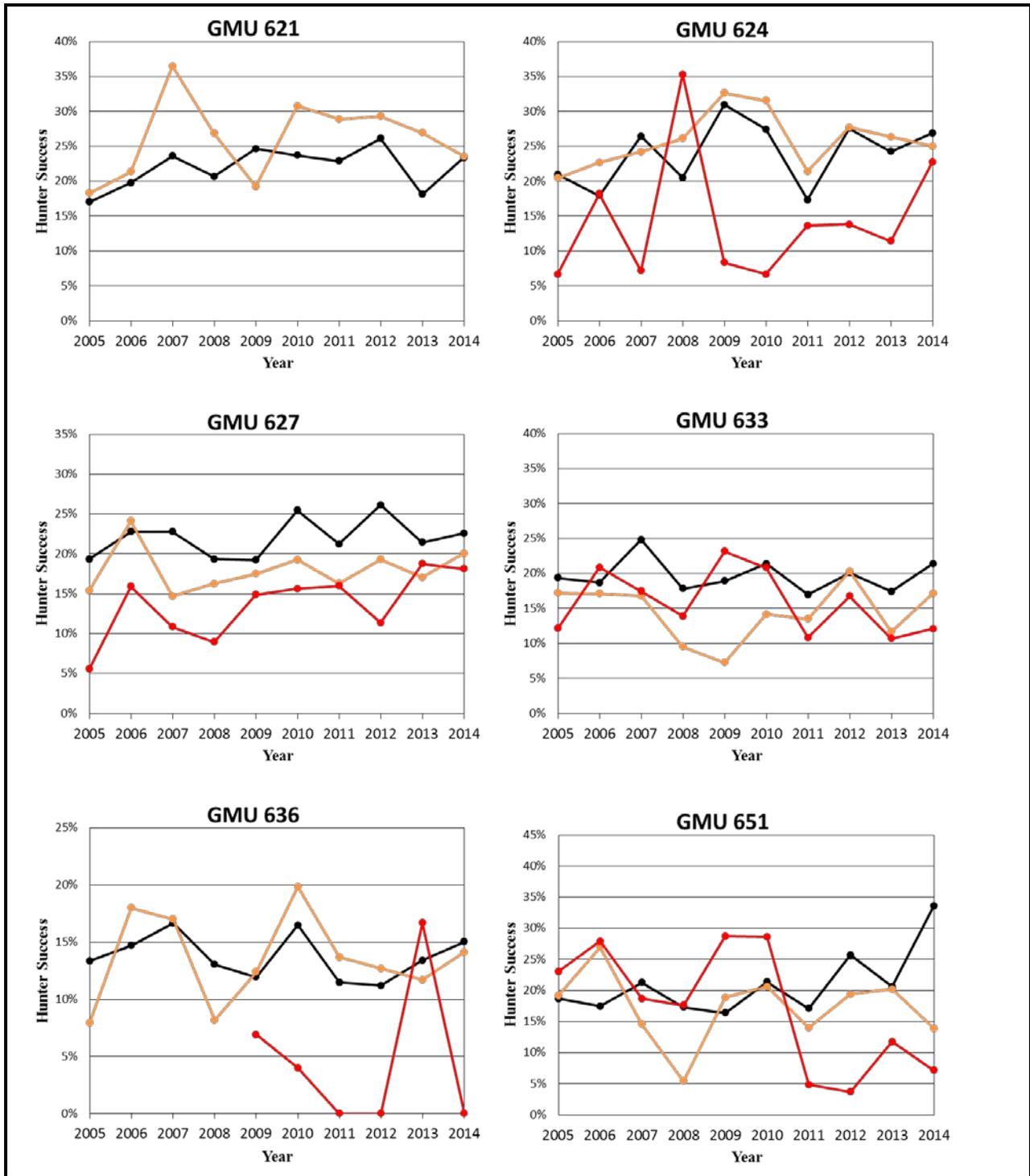


FIGURE 7. TRENDS IN HUNTER SUCCESS RATES DURING GENERAL MODERN FIREARM (BLACK), ARCHERY (ORANGE), AND MUZZLELOADER (RED) DEER SEASONS IN DISTRICT 15, 2005–2014.



DEER AREAS

Deer Area 6020 is located in GMU 624 and was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic damage issues and is open to general season any deer harvest for all three weapon-type user groups. Additionally, 40 second deer permits are available for archery hunters in this area.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

1. The two-point minimum restriction was lifted from GMU 636.
2. To avoid an overlap in weapon types during the late season, the late muzzleloader hunt was dropped from GMU 627 and the late archery season was dropped from GMU 633.
3. The early archery season was extended to the end of September,
4. The early muzzleloader season shifts to October 3-11.
5. Private timber companies in District 15 are going to fee access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Hunters are advised to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the company’s current policy.
6. A number of changes were made to special deer permits for the 2015 Hunting Season (Table 3):

GMU	Antlerless Modern	Antlerless Muzzle	Youth Modern	65+ Muzzle	Disabled Modern	Disabled Muzzle	2014 #
621	35	40	20	20	10	15	60
624 ¹			10				0
627			10				20
633	15	20	10	10	5	5	0
636	10	10	5	5			25
651	30	30	15	15	10	10	110

TABLE 3. SPECIAL PERMITS AVAILABLE FOR GMUS 621, 624, 627, 633, 636, AND 651 IN 2015.

¹Excludes Deer Area 6020 2nd Deer Permits

MOUNTAIN GOAT

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Mountain goats were introduced into the Olympic National Park (ONP) from Alaska in the 1920s. During the 1980s, the Olympic National Park relocated 407 goats to other ranges outside the Olympics, and from 1983 until 1997, 119 goats were taken outside the ONP during legal hunting seasons (Jenkins et al). WDFW closed the Olympic goat hunt in 1997. The most recent estimate of goat abundance for the ONP indicates the population has rebounded since the relocation efforts and was estimated to be 344 ± 72 in 2011 and increasing (Jenkins

et al). WDFW and USFS conducted goat surveys on the eastern front of the Olympic range in areas primarily outside the ONP, and returned a sightability corrected estimate of 66 (90% CI: 51-81) total goats in 2012 and 94 (90% CI: 82-112) total goats in 2014.

A permit hunt was established in 2014 with two designated hunt areas in the eastern Olympics, the Brothers and Mount Washington hunt units. A total of six permits were distributed between the two hunt units and two adult nannies were reported taken during these permit hunts in 2014. Tribal hunting pressure remains relatively low.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

All of the Olympic goat permits were transferred to a new Conflict Reduction Mountain Goat Special Permit category. Olympic Goat hunt units, Mount Washington and the Brothers, were combined into one large unit called the East Olympic Mountains A and B. Six goat permits will be offered during the 2015 hunting season divided between two goat seasons: early, Sept. 15-25, and late, Sept. 26 – Oct. 5. These permit hunts should be viewed as management hunts, with the principal management objective to reduce goat numbers in areas where conflicts are occurring and in areas adjacent to the ONP. As with any mountain goat hunt, hunters can expect rugged, strenuous hunting conditions as they pursue goats in the designated Olympic goat hunt unit. Although we have little current information on goat distribution and movement, based on our most recent surveys we suggest hunters focus efforts near Mount Ellinor, Mount Washington, Mount Pershing, or the Brothers.

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears occur throughout District 15, but population densities vary among GMUs. The best opportunities to harvest a black bear likely occur in GMUs 621, 627, and 636.

District 15 consists of GMUs that are part of the Coastal Black Bear Management Unit (BBMU) (GMUs 621, 636, and 651) and GMUs that are part of the Puget Sound BBMU (GMUs 624, 627, and 633). The current black bear hunting season guidelines for these BBMUs are designed to maintain black bear populations at their current level. The metrics used to direct black bear harvest include: proportion of harvested bears that were female, median age of harvested females, and median age of harvested males. The black bear hunting season for all District 15 units is August 1 to November 15, 2015. There are no spring bear hunts in this district. Hunters can purchase up to two bear tags during each license year.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2015 SEASON

The majority of bear harvest in District 15 comes from hunters killing a bear opportunistically while hunting other species like deer and elk, although some hunters do specifically hunt bears. Hunter success in District 15 has averaged 6% in the Coastal BBMU and 7% in the Puget Sound BBMU over the last five years. However, hunter success is likely higher for those hunters that specifically hunt bears versus those that buy a bear tag just in case they see one while they are deer or elk hunting.

Overall, annual bear harvest during the general bear season in District 15 has declined during the last two hunting seasons in both the Coastal and Puget Sound BBMUs (Figure 8). At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 621 and 627 (Figure 9). Overall, we expect similar harvest and success rates during the 2015 season.

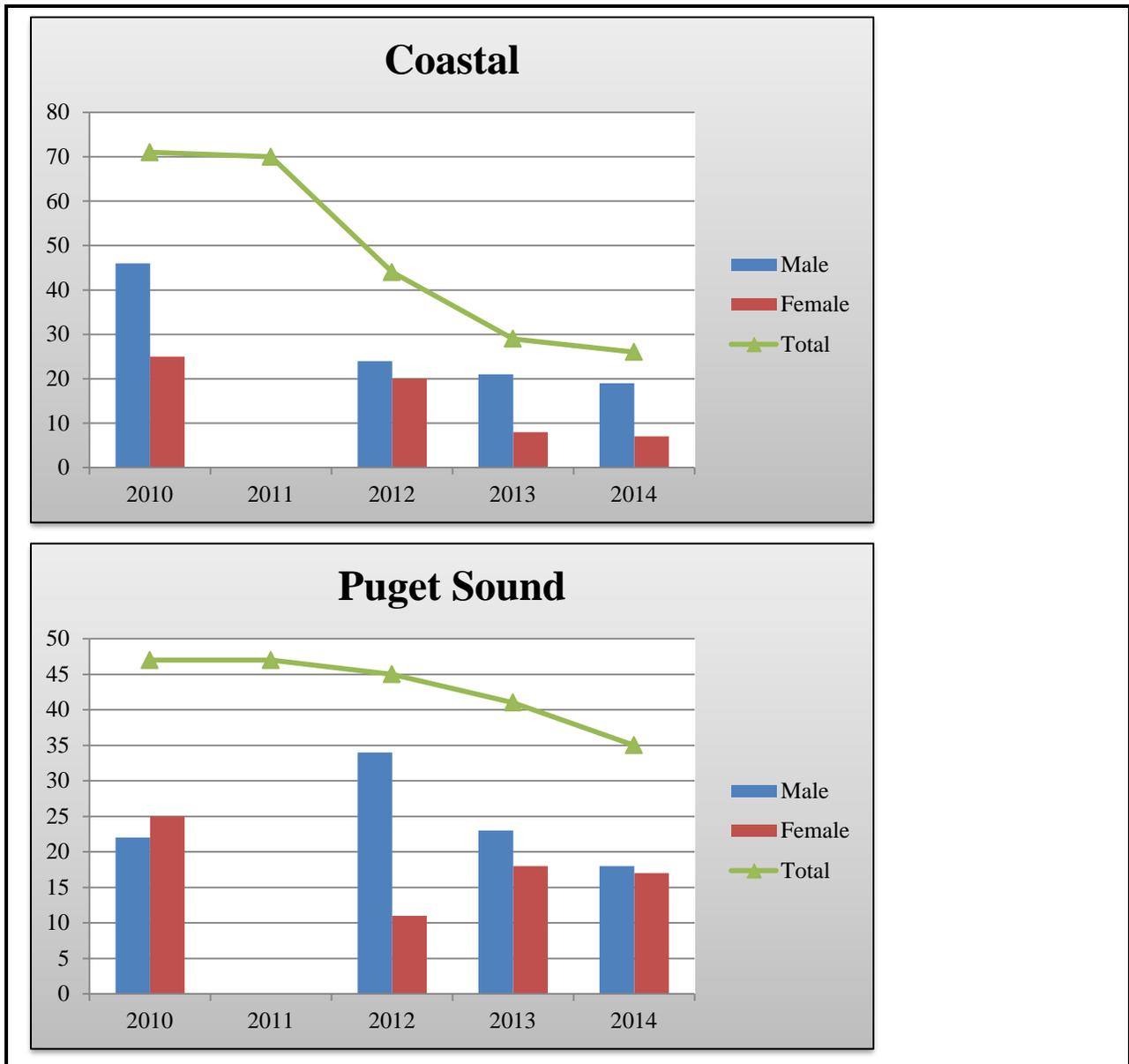


FIGURE 8. TRENDS IN THE NUMBER OF MALE AND FEMALE BLACK BEARS AND TOTAL NUMBER OF BEARS HARVESTED DURING THE GENERAL BEAR SEASON IN DISTRICT 15, 2009–2014. BEARS REMOVED FOR SAFETY REASONS ARE NOT INCLUDED. THE SEX OF HARVESTED BEARS IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR 2011.

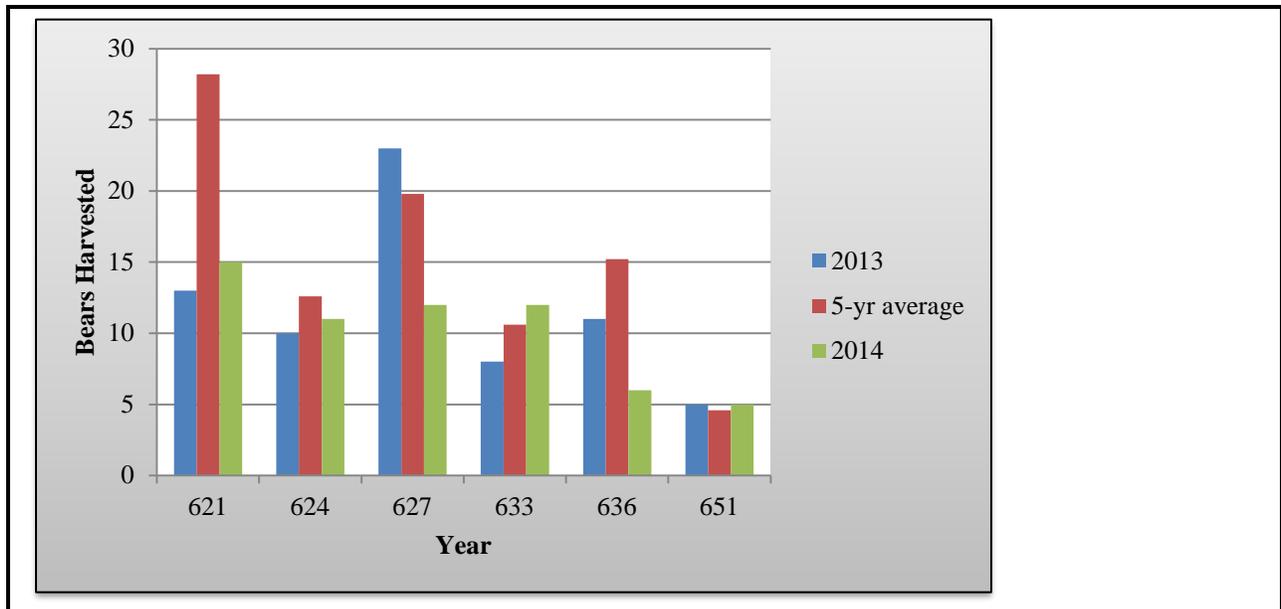


FIGURE 9. THE NUMBER OF BEARS HARVESTED IN EACH GMU DURING THE 2013 AND 2014 SEASONS IN DISTRICT 15. ALSO INCLUDED IS THE FIVE-YEAR AVERAGE FOR TOTAL NUMBER OF BEARS HARVESTED IN EACH GMU.

NOTABLE CHANGES

There are no notable changes for the 2015 season.



COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 15 and hunting seasons are established with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW changed to a standardized approach for establishing harvest guidelines based on habitat availability and a standard general season. The intent was to have a longer season, without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

WDFW established a series of hunt areas with standard early season dates of September 1

through December 31 and late season dates from January 1 to April 30 or when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever comes first. Harvest numbers are examined starting January 1 and any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed. If you plan on hunting cougar after January 1, please take a moment to confirm that the cougar season is open in the area you plan to hunt. Harvest guidelines for each Hunt Area located in District 15 are provided in Table 4.

For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit the WDFW’s website or [click here](#).

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline 2015	Harvest Guideline 2014	2014-2015 Harvest
618, 636, 638	4-5	4-5	1
642, 648, 651	6-8	6-8	6
621, 624, 627, 633	None	None	5

TABLE 4. HARVEST GUIDELINES AND THE REPORTED 2014-15 HARVEST FOR THE 3 COUGAR HUNT AREAS LOCATED IN DISTRICT 15.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2015 SEASON

Most cougar harvest comes from opportunistic encounters while hunters are pursuing deer, elk, or other activities, meaning total cougar harvest in District 15 can vary from year to year (Figure 11). Since 2005, the number of cougars harvested annually in District 15 has averaged seven.

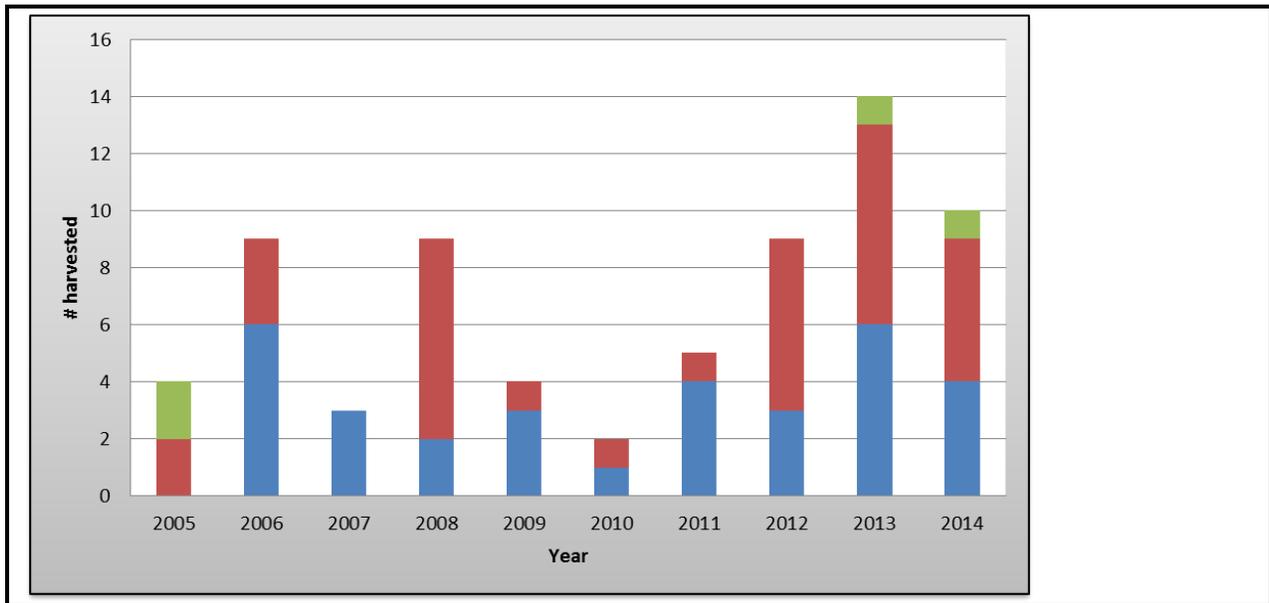


FIGURE 11. THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF MALE (BLUE), FEMALE (RED), AND COUGARS OF UNDETERMINED SEX (GREEN) HARVESTED IN DISTRICT 15, 2005–2014.

NOTABLE CHANGES

The late season dates were extended by one month to include April 2016; however, a 2016 cougar license will be required to hunt cougars in April.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 15. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall, mallard, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, and common goldeneye are also present on fresh and salt water. Nesting wood ducks can be located throughout the district early in the season and can provide a unique hunting opportunity. Sea ducks including scoters, Barrow’s goldeneye, long-tailed ducks (formerly oldsquaws), canvasbacks, and harlequin ducks occur in Hood Canal, as well as other saltwater areas.

Mallards are the most abundant species of duck in Washington and constitute the vast majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically $\geq 50\%$). However, the most abundant species of duck in District 15 is American wigeon.

POPULATION STATUS

Although some mallards and wood ducks nest in the district, the number of ducks that occur in District 15 during the hunting seasons is most strongly related to the status of breeding duck populations in Alaska. The 2015 breeding population survey estimated the breeding population for mallards in Alaska and Canada was similar to last year but above the long term average. The numbers of breeding birds in Washington was up 9% over last year and 11% over the long term average.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2015 PROSPECTS

With an increase in the breeding population in Alaska, hunters should expect great hunting opportunities in District 15 during the 2014 season. As in recent years, hunter success will be largely driven by rainfall and storm events during the waterfowl season. A lack of flooded farm fields can sharply reduce hunting opportunity in District 15.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Public hunting access exists at the mouths of the Duckabush, Quilcene and Union rivers. Many of the undeveloped lakes and marshes on the Tahuya Peninsula's DNR land offer an untapped and remote walk-in hunting opportunity for mallards, ringnecks, and scaup. Check the WDFW website for locations and restrictions as the season nears.

Due to extensive residential development on the shorelines, saltwater hunting opportunities are limited, especially in Kitsap County. Always check with the Sheriff's Department for county shooting closures before hunting.

Also, be sure to check the 2015 Migratory Waterfowl Regulation Pamphlet for additional requirements before hunting sea ducks (long-tailed ducks, scoter, harlequin and goldeneye) in Western Washington [by clicking here](#).

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

The sub-species of Canada geese that are most likely to be found in District 15 include western, lesser, Taverner's, and cackler. White-fronted and occasionally snow geese can also be encountered. The goose most likely to be harvested is the larger western, which breeds in the district and can be found year around.

POPULATION STATUS

Like ducks, goose numbers in the district are largely driven by weather. The more severe the weather, the more likely we are to see the northern subspecies in our area. The local westerns are stable or slightly increasing.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2015 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 15 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most geese are taken on private farm fields and securing permission is essential. When funding exists, WDFW biologists attempt to lease fields that regularly attract waterfowl.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Same as that listed under ducks.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Although grouse occur throughout the district, Mason County offers the most opportunity for the hunter. The Olympic National Forest and Skokomish valley are two of the more popular grouse hunting areas. Blue (sooty) grouse tend to occur in the coniferous forests at higher elevations while ruffed grouse can occur throughout the district in coniferous as well as mixed forests. In the fall, either species can be found in clearcuts feeding on berries from salal, Oregon grape, and huckleberry.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not conduct any standardized or formal surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 15. Instead, we use harvest data trends as surrogates to formal population estimates or indices of population size. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers so CPUE is the best indicator of population trend. Unfortunately, Jefferson County is split with another district, so getting actual harvest data and hunter numbers from the hunter reports is impossible. However, field observations by district biologists suggest that populations will be similar to last year.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2015 PROSPECTS

The total number of grouse harvested in District 15 has gradually been declining since 2005 (Figure 12).



However, hunter numbers have declined as well, especially over the past few years. There can be several reasons for this, but the high cost of gasoline and reduced access to private timberlands has certainly affected hunter participation. Still, hunters should be able to find some excellent grouse hunting in District 15, particularly as the mild spring weather this year should be favorable to grouse chick survival.

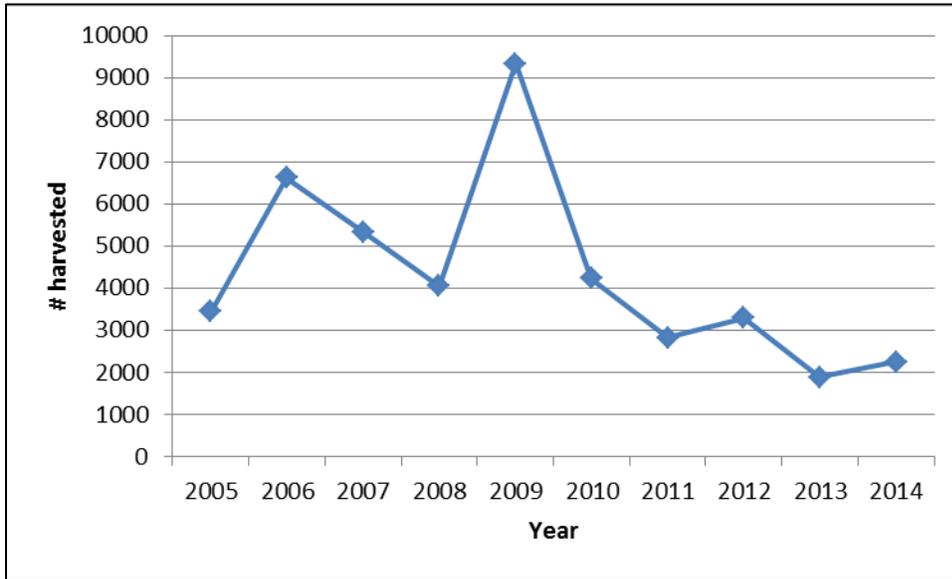


FIGURE 12. THE REPORTED NUMBER OF GROUSE HARVESTED IN JEFFERSON, KITSAP AND MASON COUNTIES DURING 2005 – 2014.

PHEASANTS

There are no viable populations of wild pheasants in District 15. All pheasant hunting opportunities in District 15 are associated with the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program. The primary intent of this program is to provide an upland bird hunting opportunity and to encourage participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released at 25 sites and three of those sites (Hunter Farms, Belfair, and the Sgt. Mak site) occur in District 15.

Release site locations can be found at GoHunt on the WDFW website or at the Peninsula Birdhunters Association website at <http://birdhunters.homestead.com/>. The new Sgt. Mak release site near Mason Lake replaced the Grapeview site in 2014. Maps and information will be available later this summer at the above websites.

QUAIL

District 15 contains the largest population of mountain quail in the state. Although frustratingly unpredictable, they are most likely to be found in two- to six-year-old clearcuts, under power

lines, and in tall stands of scotch broom throughout Mason and Kitsap counties. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird. Locations to try include the DNR parcels on the Tahuya Peninsula northwest of Belfair and the industrial timberlands between Shelton, Matlock, and McCleary. Walk-in opportunities are also numerous on timber company clearcuts around Mason Lake. The time to scout is in the spring and early summer when the males are quite vocal.

TURKEYS

The turkeys that can be found in District 15 are eastern wild turkeys. Approximately 400 eastern wild turkeys were introduced into southwest Washington from 1987-2000. Introduction programs have been discontinued because populations did not appear to expand and habitat suitability models indicated southwest Washington habitats were not likely to support viable turkey populations. There are no sizable turkey populations that exist in District 15. Occasionally single birds are spotted but this district cannot be recommended as a place to bag a turkey.

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Band-tailed pigeons (“band-tails”) are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western U.S., with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they feed mainly on berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

POPULATION STATUS AND TREND

WDFW monitors band-tail populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 15 mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years, but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities. July counts in 2015 showed a slight increase over last year.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2015 PROSPECTS

Band-tailed pigeon harvest in District 15, and statewide, showed an increasing trend until it declined sharply following the 2009 season. However, this decline in harvest was associated with a similarly sharp decline in hunter numbers, so harvest declines are not believed to be associated with a similarly sharp decline in population size. Harvest in District 15 occurs mostly in Mason County, which averages 48 birds taken per year.

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Often times, band-tailed pigeons congregate in areas with red elderberry, which are typically most abundant in five to ten year old clearcuts. Hunting can be exceptionally good in these areas. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting because it is hard to predict which clearcuts will be used by band-tails. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites and then sit patiently and wait for pass shooting opportunities as they occur.

As indicated by the mineral site survey WDFW uses to monitor trends in population size, band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. In addition, they show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. However, many of these sites are difficult to find because they are not abundant and occur in obscure areas. If hunters are lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails are congregating, they will likely have success hunting these locations for years to come.

Totals from two surveys at mineral spring sites along Hood Canal this July were similar to past years at one site and higher at the other.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Since band-tail seasons were re-opened in 2002, hunters have been required to purchase a migratory bird authorization and report their harvest using harvest cards and submit that information to WDFW after the season has closed. These regulations will apply in 2015 as well. Hunters will have a nine-day season from September 15 through 23.

Hunters should review the 2015 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons Pamphlet to confirm season dates, harvest reporting, and any other regulation changes.

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES



Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 15, but were not covered in detail include eastern cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, bobcat, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot. Crows are also abundant in District 15.

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

Unfortunately, District 15 is not well known for its large amount of public land opportunities. However, public land opportunities do exist on lands administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

New in 2014 was a web application showing the Washington State Public Lands Inventory provided by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office. To access this map go to <http://publiclands.smartime.com/#Map>.

PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

GENERAL INFORMATION

The vast majority of hunting opportunities, especially for big-game and upland birds, occur on private industrial forestlands. WDFW recognizes that some of the best hunting opportunities occur on private industrial forestlands and works cooperatively with private timber companies to maintain reasonable public access during established hunting seasons. There has been an increasing trend among timber companies to restrict public access or require an access permit to hunt or recreate on their lands. Access may also be restricted due the risk of fire danger. This predominately affects early season archery and muzzleloader hunters. All hunters are encouraged to check ahead of time to determine if any landowner restrictions apply to the area they plan to hunt.

BASIC ACCESS RULES

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forestlands vary by company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide these rules on their website or will provide them to hunters who call to inquire about access. Hunters are encouraged to follow these basic rules if they find themselves in an area they are not familiar with and are in doubt about specific landowners rules. The following are intended to be a general guideline of the basic access rules that are common-place on many private industrial forestlands. Timber companies may have more or less restrictive rules in place and ultimately, it is the hunter's responsibility to make sure they are familiar with those rules.

- ✓ Respect the land owner and other users.
- ✓ Obey all posted signs.
- ✓ Drive slow with headlights turned on when driving on roads opened to public access.
- ✓ Avoid areas of active logging.
- ✓ No camping, littering, ORV's, off road driving, target shooting or forest product removals. An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.

- ✓ Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors.
- ✓ Private forest lands are usually closed to public access during hours of darkness.

Failure to obey landowner rules can result in prosecution for trespass and/or other restrictions from the landowner.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

One of the most common questions we get from hunters is “What is hunter access like in GMU [enter GMU number]?” Generally, this question is referring to the amount of motorized access and not access in general. It is important to differentiate the two because in general, hunters enjoy a high level of access in all District 15 GMUs. However, type of access varies between motorized and non-motorized access.

The following rating system was developed for District 15 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they are thinking of hunting. Access ratings are specific to the level of motorized access that is allowed and does not refer to the level of access in general. Several GMUs have some type of fee access areas that grant the permit or lease holders a higher level of access. The following ratings are based on a hunter not having a lease or permit. Each GMU was given a rating of excellent, good, and poor with the level of access associated with each rating as follows:

- **Excellent**---most if not all of the main logging roads are open, as well as, most of the spur roads.
- **Good**---There is a mix of open and closed roads with most main logging roads open, but many of the spur roads are closed to motorized access.
- **Poor**---Most of the GMU is closed to motorized access, but is open to non-motorized access. Private timberlands may require an access permit.

Information provided is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Information is updated when available. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montezano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to hunter access that have not been answered.

GMU 621 – Olympic Access rating = Good

Access in GMU 621 is good for deer hunters and challenging for elk hunters, as most elk are found on lower elevation private lands along the major river valleys. This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, DNR, and USFS. Access to USFS land is generally allowed year-round. DNR land is accessible to motorized vehicles or walk-in only in most areas. Green Diamond Resources generally opens some of their gates to motorized access from September to the end of December. However, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. For areas behind closed gates on Green Diamond Resources land, access is

by non-motorized means throughout the year. All private agricultural lands require owner permission to hunt.

GMU 624 – Coyle Access rating = Poor

Other than the resident elk herd in the Sequim area, the Coyle Unit is usually considered a deer area. Although there are scattered timberlands that are publicly owned by DNR, most forest lands are privately owned. The largest property manager is Olympic Resource Management which is a division of Pope Resources Company. Maps of their properties can be found at www.orminc.com. Although some DNR and private mainlines may be open to motor vehicles, most hunting access is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicle.

GMU 627 – Kitsap Access rating = Poor

The Kitsap Unit is a highly human developed deer area, with private property throughout. However there is still ample hunting opportunity on forest lands. DNR owns a considerable amount of land in the western part of the unit. Olympic Resource Management (Pope) and Green Diamond Resource Company also have major holdings here. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of their land in this unit.

GMU 633 – Mason Access rating = Poor

The Mason Unit is best known as an area for deer. DNR has forestland throughout with extensive holdings on the Tahuya Peninsula. But in the Mason Unit, most of the deer hunting occurs on private property controlled by the Green Diamond Resource Company and the Manke Lumber Company. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of their land in this unit.

GMU 636 – Skokomish Access rating = Good

This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, and USFS. Elk in this unit are generally found on the lower elevation private agricultural or timberlands. Green Diamond Resources Company is the largest private timberland owner in this unit and they generally open most areas to motorized access from September to the end of December. However exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. For areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

Upper elevations and those portions of this GMU in the upper Wynoochee River and Skokomish River Valleys are primarily USFS with most areas open year-round for vehicle access. Some USFS land is gated and closed to motorized access to minimize disturbance to elk.

GMU 651 – Satsop Access Rating = Good trending to Poor

The primary area accessed by hunters is owned by Green Diamond Resources. They generally open some gates to motorized access from September to the end of December. However, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. Beginning in

2013, a large portion of their property in this GMU will be open only to those purchasing a recreation access permit. For more information, Green Diamond Resources can be reached at www.greendiamond.com/recreation/ or (360) 427-4737. For other areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

There are several private landowners in District 15 who are enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, Cooperative Agreements with these landowners had not been finalized. Even though there are no indications landowners will not renew their Cooperative Agreements for the 2015 hunting season, we were hesitant to provide that information in this document. Hunters are encouraged to call the Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) or periodically check for updated information on WDFW's Hunter Access website located at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/hunting_access.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 15 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be extremely difficult to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. However, there are several online tools and resources that many hunters do not know about, but provide valuable information that helps solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources that are available to the general public.

Department of Natural Resources Public Lands Quadrangle (PLQ) Maps

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands are DNR PLQ maps which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website ([click here](#)).

Online Parcel Databases

Technology has come a long way and has made it much easier for the general public to identify tax parcel boundaries and the associated landowner. However, because this technology has not been readily available in the past, there are several hunters who are not aware it exists.

Parcel ownership can be accessed in all three counties in District 15 by going to their county assessor's webpage and viewing the parcel maps.

WDFW's Go Hunt Tool

WDFW's GoHunt Tool has been revamped and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU. The GoHunt Tool can be accessed on WDFW's Hunting website or by [clicking here](#).