

2009 Game Animal Population and Hunting Information

Biologist: Pat Fowler

District/Wildlife Area: District 3 Blue Mtns.

Upland Birds: Although conditions were fairly wet for the 2009 nesting period, temperatures were not cold. Observations of upland birds to date indicate production may be better than 2008.

Pheasant: Broods observed to date have shown good brood size. It appears pheasant hunting may improve over conditions in 2008. The best areas to hunt are along the major river drainages; Touchet, Walla Walla, and Tucannon rivers. Also, look to agricultural areas where good habitat conditions occur, brushy hillside and draws. Be sure to seek permission when hunting on private land.

Quail: Late broods are starting to appear, so far numbers look similar to 2008. The best areas to hunt quail are along the major river drainages; Walla Walla, Touchet, Tucannon rivers, and Asotin Creek.

Chukar & Gray Partridge: Broods observed to date appear to be good sized, so hunting for huns and chukar may improve for 2008. The best areas to hunt chukar is along the Snake River breaks from Lower Granite dam upriver to the Washington-Oregon border, and along the breaks of the Grande Ronde river. Huns can normally be found in these same areas, but concentrate efforts along the edge of agricultural fields and brushy draws.

Forest Grouse: The Blue Mtns. are home to both blue and ruffed grouse. Ruffed grouse populations are found along creeks and streams in the foothills and in the mountains. Blue grouse are found at higher elevations. Few broods have been observed to date, but ruffed grouse hunting should be similar to 2008. Hunters should look for ruffed grouse along the tributaries running through the foothills of the Blue Mountains; Coppei Creek, Mill Creek, upper Tucannon river, upper Toucher river and tributaries.

Wild Turkeys: Wild turkey populations continue to do well. Broods observed this year appear to be good sized, so hunting conditions should be similar to 2008. have done well, and weather doesn't appear to have impacted turkeys as much as other species, although production appears to lower in 2008. The best turkey hunting is located in the foothills of the Blue Mountains in Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin counties. Much of this area is private land, so be sure to seek permission before hunting on private land.

Waterfowl: Waterfowl hunting in the Blue Mtns. is dependent on migratory waterfowl in Dec-Jan. Local populations of Canada geese are good in the Burbank area, and around Clarkston.

Dove: Doves are well scattered throughout the district, but the best hunting is located near the Snake, Touchet, and Walla Walla Rivers. Densities of doves are moderate.

Deer: Mule deer and white-tailed deer populations have declined over the last 3 years due to lower fawn survival for mule deer, and EHD outbreaks in localized white-tailed deer populations. Mule deer populations appear to have stabilized along the breaks of the Snake River and in the lowlands. Mule deer populations in the mountains are still depressed, and hunters will find fairly low success rates in this area.

Although white-tailed deer populations have declined in localized areas, the population is still strong and will offer excellent hunting opportunity. The foothills of the Blue Mtns. and river bottoms hold the largest concentrations of white-tailed deer. Much of the foothill lands are in private ownership, so seek permission before hunting on private land.

Elk: Elk populations are doing well and have increased over the last few years, with most sub-herd populations at or near management objective. Calf survival has improved in recent years, but is still 15% below optimum levels, which does have a negative impact on the number of spike bulls available for harvest. The Wenaha sub-herd (GMU-169) still remains well below historic population levels, which hurts overall hunting opportunity in the Blue Mountains. Hunters can expect hunting conditions to be similar to previous years. Hunters lucky enough to draw the “any bull” permit will find excellent hunting opportunity in 2009.

Black Bear: Black bear populations remain strong in the Blue Mountains. However, hunting black bear in the mountains is difficult due to the lack of upper elevation berry fields. Hunters wishing to hunt bear in the mountains will need to focus attention on Mountain Ash thickets where bears feed on the berries. Also, using predator calls has proven to be a fairly effective technique in recent years, however, be vigilant and very observant when using predator calls to attract bears. At lower elevations, look for black berry patches or abandoned orchards, as bears will be focus foraging activities in these areas. Much of the land at lower elevations is privately owned, so be sure to seek permission from the landowner before hunting on private land.