

2009 Game Animal Population and Hunting Information

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District/Wildlife Area: District 5 (Ephrata)

Pheasant: Expect similar numbers of wild pheasants as observed during the 2008 season. Winter conditions were harsh but did not likely cause large scale mortality. Spring conditions were fair with cool weather and localized rains in June that may have reduced productivity to some degree. 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. Hunters should be reminded that non-toxic shot is now required at all pheasant release sites in the Columbia Basin.

Quail: Quail hunting is expected to be fair to good this year. Large coveys are difficult to find on public lands and successful hunters will attempt to identify multiple coveys to pursue throughout the season. Winter conditions were harsh but did not likely cause large scale mortality. Spring conditions were fair with cool weather and localized rains in June that may have reduced productivity to some degree. 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.

Gray Partridge: Gray partridge occur in low densities in the basin but are rarely targeted by hunters, instead taken incidentally while hunting chukar, quail, or pheasant. Most partridge will occur on private farm fields, particularly in the dryland wheat portions of Adams and, to a lesser degree, Grant Counties. Gray partridge are a resilient bird and thus likely fared well through the winter. Spring breeding conditions were fair with cool weather and localized rains in June that may have influenced brood survival.

Chukar: Most chukar hunting in the Ephrata District occurs in Moses Coulee and Coulee Corridor areas. Chukar are a challenging game bird to pursue. Hunters can expect to chase their mocking calls across fractured basalt only to watch them flush out of range and glide out of sight. Most chukar probably survived the winter in fair condition. However, chukar numbers appeared to be low last fall and thus the adult breeding population may have been small despite the moderate winter conditions. Expect another tough season for an already difficult quarry.

Forest Grouse: There are no sizeable populations of forest grouse in this district.

Wild Turkeys: There are no sizeable populations of wild turkey in this district.

Waterfowl: Duck production in the Columbia Basin was down about 25% this year based on annual surveys which will primarily affect the early season hunting. Regardless, opening weekend should offer good numbers of mallards, teal, wigeon, and gadwall. Also, wood ducks can be found in fair numbers concentrating in stands of flooded Russian olive trees (typically associated with the wasteways) in the early season as well. Hunters frequenting the Winchester Regulated Access Area should use caution on pintails, which can be abundant here early in the season. Regulations for the Regulated Access Areas can be found in the hunting pamphlet.

Migration will bring the best waterfowl hunting in the basin. November will bring large numbers of mallards, gadwalls, wigeon, teal, scaup, redheads, and canvasbacks. December typically provides the peak of mallards, ringnecks, and canvasbacks, while other dabbling and diving species continue their journey south. Goose hunting will ramp up in November when early season migrant Canada geese (Lesser and Taverners) 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.

Waterfowl hunters should be aware of lands enrolled in the Corn Stubble Retention Program which is intended to provide public field hunting opportunity. Fields are typically identified and enrolled during November and locations will vary by year. Call or visit the Ephrata regional office for details.

Dove: Dove hunting is expected to be similar to past years. Hunters may improve their success by securing access to wheat fields for the morning hunt. Evening hunts can be lucrative 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.

Deer: District 5 is predominately characterized by mule deer, but white-tailed deer do occur in small isolated groups and are most prominent in GMU 284 (Ritzville). Overall, deer hunters should fair quite well during the 2009 season. Post-hunt fawn:doe ratios indicate herd productivity was moderate in all surveyed Game Management Units (GMU) and buck:doe ratios have steadily increased during the past few years. Despite the fact that the 2008 winter proved to be a formidable one, above normal winter mortality was not observed and populations are believed to have remained stable or increased slightly.

Most deer harvest occurs in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284. Although hunter success declined from 28% in 2007 to 24% in 2008 in GMU 272, this was largely caused by a 12% increase (1,210 hunters in 2007 vs. 1,350 hunters in 2008) in the number of hunters rather than declines in local deer herds. The number of hunters

that hunted deer in GMU 284 (613 hunters in 2007 vs. 681 hunters in 2008) similarly increased by 11%, but hunter success remained relatively constant at 34%. Even though hunter numbers increased, total harvest in GMU 272 (339 deer in 2007 vs. 319 deer in 2008) decreased slightly and only increased marginally in GMU 284 (216 deer in 2007 vs. 231 deer in 2008). Additionally, post-hunt surveys yielded buck:doe ratios of 21:100 in GMU 272 and 24:100 in GMU 284, which suggests moderate buck escapement rates during the 2008 season despite increased hunting pressure. 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. GMU 272 includes 53,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex, most of which is open to hunting. **New for the 2009 season is an early muzzleloader general season opportunity that was added in GMU 272 and will run from September 26th–October 4th.**

All hunting opportunities in GMU 290 (Desert Unit) are issued thru the public draw. With post-hunt ratios of 50 bucks:100 does, high success rates are expected to continue in 2009. 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, associated primarily with the Winchester and Frenchmen Wasteways, surrounded by rolling, sandy dunes and varying densities of shrub cover. The majority of the private agricultural land in this unit occurs throughout the western half.

Harvest in GMU 278 (Wahluke) is again expected to be low in 2009. Since 2001, total harvest in GMU 278 has averaged 35 deer and only 43 deer were harvested during the 2008 season. The above average harvest in GMU 278 was likely related to a 16% increase in the number of hunters (234 hunters in 2007 vs. 271 hunters in 2008) which also resulted in decreased hunter success during the 2008 season (18% in 2007 vs. 16% in 2008). GMU 278 provides approximately 36,000 acres of lands as part of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex, most of which is open to hunting.

Elk: Elk are extremely rare in most GMUs located in District 5. Since 2000, harvest estimates suggest there have only been 2 and 10 elk harvested in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 278 (Wahluke), respectively. However, 3 of those 12 elk harvested in GMU 278 were from the 2008 season. Elk do not occur in GMU 290 (Desert). These trends are not expected to change during the 2009 season.

If hunters wish to hunt elk in District 5 during the 2009 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. Over the past 4 years, the number of elk harvested in GMU 284 has gradually increased from 4 elk in 2005 to 25 elk during the 2008 season. Overall success rates were 22% during the 2008 season and slightly below the 4 year average of 29%. Compared

to other GMUs, success rates for hunters that are able to gain access are relatively moderate.

It is difficult to predict whether or not elk harvest levels in GMU 284 will continue their upward trend during the 2009 season. Because harvest levels have, until recently, been extremely low, biologists do not conduct annual surveys for elk in GMU 284. Moreover, the elk harvested in GMU 284 are most likely part of a small herd that is known to occur near the border of GMU 284 and GMU 136 (District 2 located in Whitman County). Consequently, harvest in GMU 284 is probably dependent on whether or not that herd migrates to GMU 284 during the hunting season. Additionally, budget restrictions have limited survey opportunities in District 2 and little is known about the productivity rates (calves:100 cows), age structure, or sex ratios (bulls:100 cows) of this herd.

Miscellaneous Comments: