

# 2009 Game Animal Population and Hunting Information

**Biologist: Mike Davison**

**District/Wildlife Area:** District 14 (North Region 4)

**Pheasant:** Two Pheasant Release sites will be operational in north Region 4 during the 2009 hunting season: **1)** Leque Island, Nov. 8 – 30 and **2)** Samish Unit, Sept. 26 – Nov. 7. Both areas will operate under the traditional ODD/EVEN permit system and require non-toxic shot only. Maps and directions for these sites can be found on the Go Hunt website --<http://wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/gohunt/index.html>.

**Forest Grouse:** Drier and warmer spring weather conditions throughout most of north Region 4 should afford local hunters with an excellent opportunity to harvest both ruffed and blue grouse. Hunting access to private timber lands has been significantly reduced over the past five years and continues to represent a major obstacle to grouse harvest. Department of Natural Resources and U. S. Forest Service lands remain available to hunters but can be restricted by seasonally imposed fire restrictions. It should be noted that access restrictions on some private timber lands are vehicle restrictions only, however, hunters are encouraged to make landowner contacts for permission to hunt well in advance of established seasons. Many grouse hunters with permission to hunt these lands find exceptional harvest opportunities behind locked gates via walk in hunts or by the use of mountain bikes.

**Waterfowl:** North Puget Sound bays and estuaries are expected to over-winter above average numbers of dabbling ducks again this season. The highest concentration of waterfowl (ducks) occur in Skagit, Padilla, and Samish Bays which typically provide hunters with excellent harvest opportunities along the inter-tidal shoreline areas, as well as, most interior farmland and agricultural lands. Harvest success in recent seasons has been more dependent upon weather conditions than the actual number of waterfowl wintering in the region. Warmer than average winter temperatures has reduced harvest success in the early portion of the season with the majority of quality hunting opportunity occurring after the 1st of December. Snow Goose numbers are anticipated to reach a historical high this winter with populations expected to reach between 110,000 – 125,000 birds in the Skagit/Frasier wintering areas. Juvenile ratios are expected to exceed 40+ percent which typically improves harvest success in most years. The Snow Goose Quality Hunt program will be once again provide enhanced hunter access to private farmlands in the Stanwood and Fir Island areas (See 2009-2010 Waterfowl Pamphlet and the Snow Goose Quality Hunt Web site for program details). The Black brant population has remained at levels well above the 6,000 bird minimum required for hunting to occur over the past 4 years. The January 1-10, 2010 mid-winter aerial survey count will determine if this seasons hunt will occur as scheduled in the pamphlet.

**Black-tailed Deer:** Black-tailed Deer populations in District 14 remain at low densities throughout Whatcom and Skagit Counties. Black-tailed deer populations in the San Juan Islands continue at high levels but general public access to private lands is limited and public lands are not plentiful. Hunters are encouraged to make landowner contacts for permission to hunt well in advance of established seasons.

**Mule Deer:** Severe winter conditions throughout the Cascade Mountain ranges of Whatcom, Skagit, and north Snohomish counties are anticipated to have significantly reduced mule deer population levels in both GMU's 426(Diablo) and 450(Cascade).

**Elk:** The North Cascades Elk Herd (Nooksack) will be hunted for the second time in over 16 years. Harvest will be by permit only (18 total, 10 spike only, 8 any bull). Population levels continue to increase with significant expansion back into historically occupied ranges. Numerous large branched antlered bulls are available to permitted hunters. Damage oriented permits (Skagit River A – Elk Area 4941) has been allocated 15 permits this season but land access remains a problem.

**Miscellaneous Comments:**