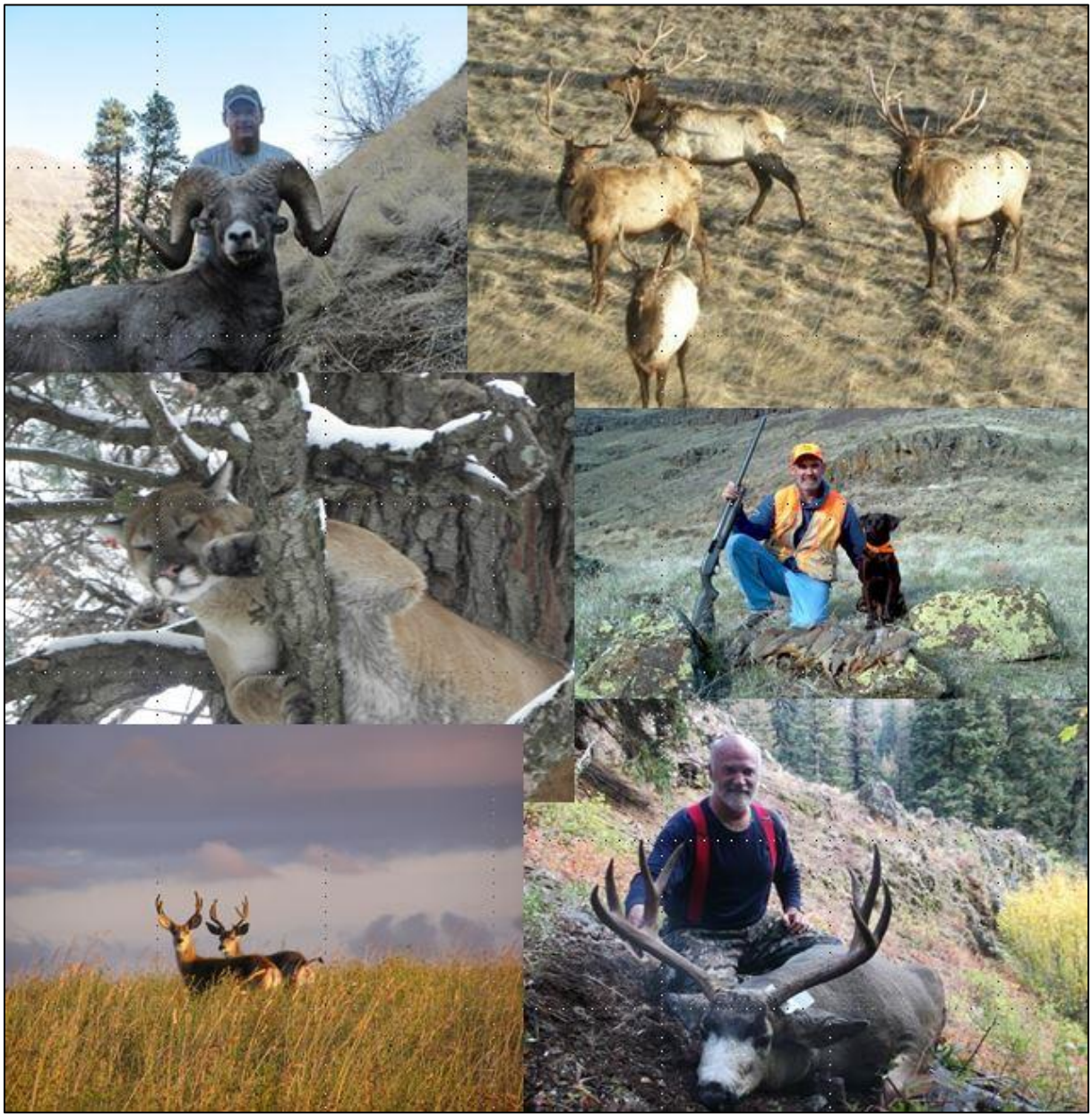
2017

PAUL WIK, District Wildlife Biologist
MARK VEKASY, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

Washington Department of FISH and WILDLIFE



DISTRICT 3 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla counties

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BE AWARE OF FIRE CONDITIONS 1

DISTRICT 3 GENERAL OVERVIEW 2

ELK 4

- General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status 4
- Which GMU Should Elk Hunters Hunt? 5
- A Brief Description of Each GMU 6
- What to Expect During the 2017 Season 9
- How to Find Elk 10
- Elk Areas 12
- Notable Hunting Changes 12

DEER 13

- General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status 13
- Which GMU Should Deer Hunters Hunt? 14
- What to Expect During the 2017 Season 17
- Deer Areas 20
- Notable Hunting Alerts 21

BEAR 21

- General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status 21
- What to Expect During the 2017 Season 21
- How To Locate and Harvest a Black Bear 22
- Notable Changes 23

COUGAR 23

- General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status 23
- What to Expect During the 2017 Season 24
- Notable Changes 24

DUCKS 25

Common Species 25
Migration Chronology 25
Concentration Areas.....26
Population Status 26
Harvest Trends and 2017 Prospects 26
Hunting Techniques 27
Public Land Opportunities 27
GEESE.....28
Common Species 28
Migration Chronology and Concentration Areas 28
Population Status 28
Harvest Trends and 2017 Prospects 28
Hunting Techniques 29
Special Regulations.....30
FOREST GROUSE 30
Species and General Habitat Characteristics.....30
Population Status 30
Harvest Trends and 2017 Prospects 31
Hunting Techniques and Where to Hunt.....32
PHEASANTS 32
Species and General Habitat Characteristics.....32
Population Status 32
Harvest Trends and 2017 Prospects 34
Hunting Techniques and Where to Hunt.....34
QUAIL.....34
Population Status 34
Harvest Trends and 2017 Prospects 34
Hunting Techniques and Where to Hunt.....34

TURKEYS....34
Population Status....35
Harvest Trends and 2017 Prospects....36
Hunting Techniques and Where to Hunt....36
OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES....37
MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS....37
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU....37
GMU 145 - Mayview....38
GMU 149 – Prescott....38
GMU 154 – Blue Creek....38
GMU 157 – Mill Creek Watershed....39
GMU 162 - Dayton....39
GMU 163 - Marengo....39
GMU 166 - Tucannon....40
GMU 169 - Wenaha....40
GMU 172 – Mountain View....40
GMU 175 – Lick Creek....40
GMU 178 - Peola....40
GMU 181 - Couse....40
GMU 186 – Grande Ronde....40
PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM....41
ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS....41
Department of Natural Resources Public Lands Quadrangle (PLQ) Maps....41
Online Parcel Databases....42
WDFW's GoHunt Tool....42

BE AWARE OF FIRE CONDITIONS

Wherever you choose to hunt, be sure to check on fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. For more information, see:

- Wildfire status updates
- Northwest Interagency Coordination Center
- Chelan County Emergency Management
- Okanogan County Emergency Management
- Stevens County updates
- Contact list for major landowners

Eric Gardner, Assistant Director, Wildlife Program
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

DISTRICT 3 GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) District 3 is located in southeast Washington and consists of 13 game management units (GMU). GMUs in District 3 include 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), 157 (Watershed- **Closed entry except by permit**), 162 (Dayton), 163 (Marengo), 166 (Tucannon), 169 (Wenaha), 172 (Mountain View), 175 (Lick Creek), 178 (Peola), 181 (Couse), and 186 (Grande Ronde). Administratively, District 3 includes Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin counties, and is one of three management districts (1, 2, and 3) comprising WDFW's Region 1. The northern part of District 3 (north of Highway 12) includes the southeastern portion of the Palouse Prairie ecoregion, while the southern part of the district is in the Blue Mountains ecoregion.

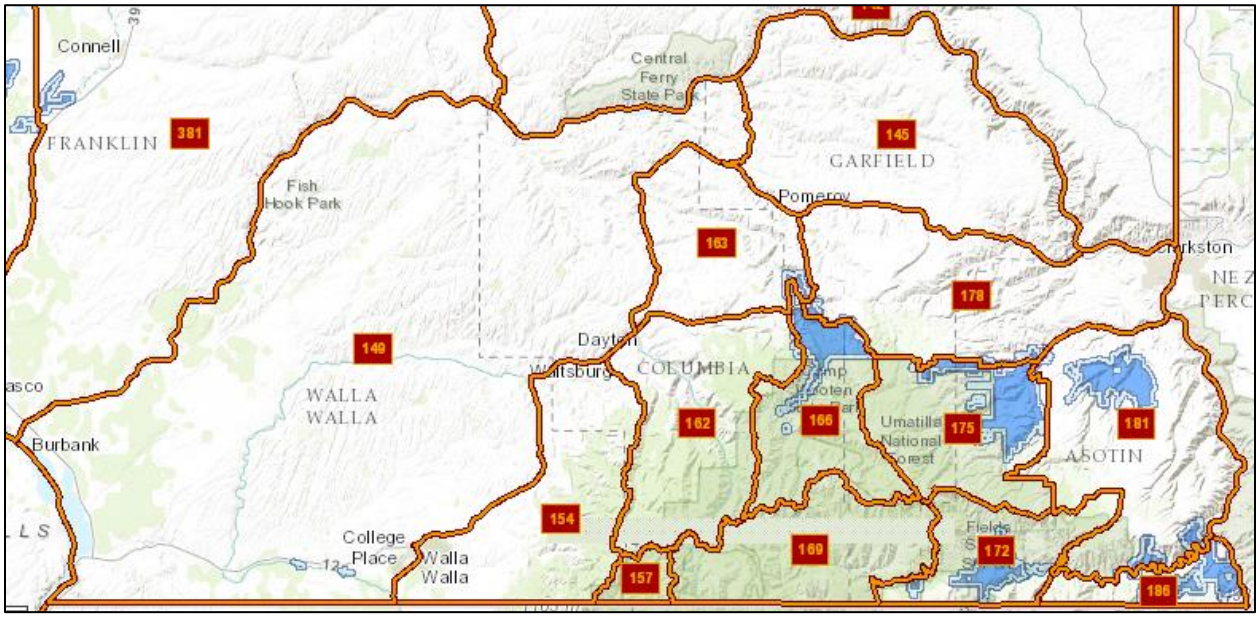


Figure 1. GMU map (from GoHunt) depicting District 3 GMU boundaries, west and south of the Snake River, east of the Columbia River, and north of the Oregon border. Green areas are U.S. Forest Service land and blue areas are WDFW Wildlife Areas.

The landscape in District 3 is dominated by agricultural land in the prairie and foothill regions, with interspersed grassland areas and brushy eyebrows and draws. In the mountains, the most common habitat is characterized by second growth forests consisting primarily of Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, grand fir, and subalpine fir. The Blue Mountains have been characterized as a high plateau dissected by deep draws and canyons carved by numerous creeks and rivers. The Tucannon and Touchet rivers flow north out of the mountains, while forks of the Wenaha River and its major tributaries generally flow south. Numerous creeks drain the western edge of the foothills, including Mill Creek, with its drainage located in the Walla Walla Watershed.

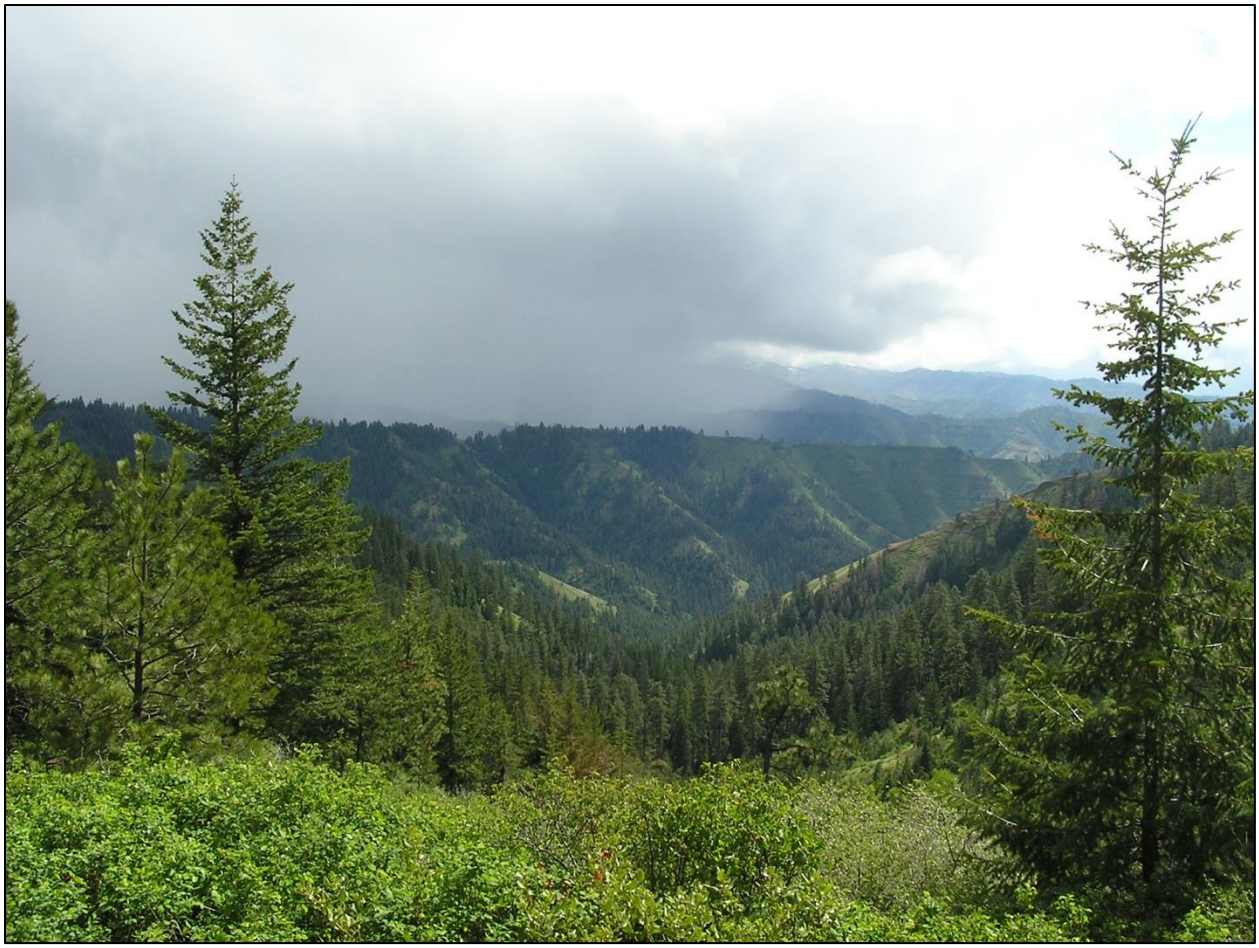


Image 1. Blue Creek in the western foothills of the Blue Mountains.

District 3 is best known for its elk hunting opportunities in the Blue Mountains and mule deer hunting opportunities in grassland/agricultural GMUs. However, quality hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including white-tailed deer, black bear, turkey, and pheasant. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest and harvest-per-unit effort (HPUE) for most game species in District 3 during the 2016 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2015 season and the five-year average. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Species	Harvest					HPUE				
	5-yr avg.	2015	2016	% change (5yr)	% change (2016)	5-yr avg.	2015	2016	% change (5yr)	% change (2016)
Elk (General)	136	75	105	-23%	40%	120	204	157	31%	-23%
Elk (Bull Permit)	113	101	115	1%	14%		66%	63%	(Permit success)	
Deer	2,683	2,757	2,699	6%	-2%	13	13	14	6%	8%
Bear	101	112	111	10%	-1%	104	86	99	-5%	13%
Cougar	16	17	22	39%	29%	Not estimated			**	**
Wild Turkey	735	770	773	10%	0.4%	0.10	0.10	0.11	11%	14%
Canada Goose	3,074	3,128	3,612	18%	15%	0.98	1.15	1.62	65%	41%
Chukar Partridge	1,840	1,825	1,796	-2%	-2%	1.04	1.09	1.78	72%	63%
Cottontail Rabbit	267	362	752	182%	108%	0.37	0.63	0.89	138%	42%
Duck	26,121	30,544	28,636	10%	-6%	2.62	3.06	3.10	18%	1%
Forest Grouse	1,751	1,390	1,330	-24%	-4%	0.38	0.46	0.30	-20%	-34%
Gray Partridge	1,139	939	661	-42%	-30%	0.60	0.52	0.55	-9%	7%
Mourning Dove	2,493	4,009	2,590	4%	-35%	3.18	4.26	2.53	-20%	-41%
Pheasant	8,637	7,841	8,791	2%	12%	0.65	0.72	0.79	21%	12%
Quail	6,393	7,297	6,870	7%	-6%	1.08	1.23	1.38	28%	8%
Snowshoe Hare	58	57	71	22%	25%	0.51	1.27	0.21	-58%	-83%

Table 1. Genereal season harvest and HPUE estimates for most game species found in District 3 during the 2015 and 2016 hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year averages and a comparison of 2016 to 2015 estimates and the five-year average. HPUE is expressed as #hunter days/harvest for elk, deer, and bear (lower is better), and as #harvested/hunter day for all other species (higher is better).

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

In Washington, elk are managed at the herd level, while harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. In general, each herd spans several GMUs that collectively define the range of a population that has little interchange with adjacent herds. Population objectives are set at the herd level, and survey data is summarized at that level as well. District 3 is comprised of the single Blue Mountains elk herd (GMUs 145, 149, 154, 157, 162, 163, 166, 169, 172, 175, 178, 181, and 186).

Only the GMUs within the forested portion of District 3 are managed for elk population stability or growth (GMUs 154, 157, 162, 166, 169, 172, 175, and 186). GMUs 145, 149, 163, 178, and 181 are managed to limit elk numbers, although some recreational opportunity is provided as determined through surveys and damage complaints. In all GMUs, minimizing elk depredation to agricultural crops on private agricultural lands is a priority. An additional management objective is to maintain a minimum of 22 bulls:100 cows in the post-season population, with a range of 22 – 28 bulls:100 cows identified as the management target.

Biologists in District 3 conduct a semi-annual helicopter survey within the core elk areas to estimate the post-winter population size. In the spring of 2017, biologists generated a population estimate of 4,396 (90 percent Confidence Interval of +/- 165) elk. Surveys are conducted along the state line of Oregon (and within Oregon), resulting in approximately 500-600 elk being classified that likely are not available for harvest in Washington during the fall. The average five-year population estimate prior to 2017 was 5,360 elk, which is 18% higher than the 2017 estimate.

Calf ratios declined substantially in 2017 and were estimated at 17.8 calves:100 cows (90 percent CI +/- 0.7) in 2017, considerably lower than the five-year average of 30.4. Bull ratios remained stable this past year, but total bulls declined by 25 percent from the 2016 estimate, which will result in decreased number of branched-bull permits in years to come. This decline in the number of elk in the Blue Mountains is a result of the hard winter observed this past year. The substantial decline in the number of calves making it through the 2016/2017 winter will also result in a large decline in the number of yearling bulls (spikes) available for harvest during the fall of 2017.

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.

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Most general season hunters in the Blue Mountains have been hunting here for many years, with the exception of the branched-bull tag holders and archery hunters in GMU 175. New hunters to this area will have to consider a number of options, such as weapon type, private land access versus public land, difficulty of hunt desired (wilderness versus landscapes with roads), and, as archery hunters, whether the availability of antlerless opportunity is important.

Throughout District 3, the harvest of branched-bulls is regulated through the permit system. All GMUs in District 3 are managed for quality, except GMUs 145, 186, and some hunts in 149. The drawing of these tags can be difficult and many hunters invest years before successfully obtaining a permit. Once a permit is obtained, district biologists are happy to provide information on where to hunt within the GMU.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH GMU

GMU 145

This is a private land unit managed for zero elk. Very few elk reside in this unit. Their movements are unpredictable and make them difficult to locate, and access to their locations is often not available.

GMU 149

This large GMU is predominantly private land managed to minimize elk numbers because of conflicts with agricultural activities. A relatively large number of bulls inhabit the southwest corner of the GMU and do cross back and forth between Oregon and Washington. Most harvest occurs in the area of the Boise Cascade poplar tree farm. Permission to access this property is required **prior to applying** for hunts (see footnote in the pamphlet for contact information). Applicants successful in drawing a permit without prior contact may not be allowed to hunt the tree farm, and availability of other areas to find and hunt elk in GMU 149 are extremely limited. An additional herd of elk exists in the northern portion of the unit on the breaks of the Snake River. This is a very difficult herd to hunt without access to numerous private lands, as the elk are highly mobile in this area and can be difficult to locate.

GMU 154

This GMU is 99 percent private land, but does include numerous landowners in the WDFW access program. The elk are heavily hunted in this GMU due to conflicts with agricultural activities. Access has historically been available to branched-bull tag holders and general season hunters.

GMU 157

This GMU is 99 percent public land, but closed to the public to any entry other than special permit holders. The Mill Creek Watershed is the source of drinking water for the City of Walla Walla, and access is highly regulated. Successful permit applicants will be contacted by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) with an information packet containing rules for hunting the watershed. This unit is very steep and rugged, contains few maintained trails, and is physically challenging to hunt. No scouting inside the watershed boundaries is permitted. Only the perimeter roads and trails can be accessed.

GMU 162

The Dayton GMU is a mix of private and public lands and supports approximately 1,000 elk. This unit has the highest density of general season hunters in District 3. Access to the northern portion of the GMU can be difficult, as it is predominantly private. The southern portion of the unit is predominantly USFS and lands owned by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Both of these lands are open to the public, with motorized vehicle restrictions throughout.

GMU 163

This GMU is not managed for elk and only occasionally supports enough elk to hunt. The GMU is predominantly private land.

GMU 166

This GMU has recently had the highest success rate for general season hunters, but also has one of the higher densities of hunters. The unit is predominantly USFS and WDFW-owned lands. A portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness extends into this GMU and offers backcountry hunting opportunities.

GMU 169

Most of this GMU is located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. Numerous road access points occur along the edge of this GMU, but a majority of the unit requires backpacking or horse packing to access. Elk densities have remained low in this unit for the past 20 years and do not show indications of improving. This can be a physically challenging unit to hunt. A large wildfire burned in this unit in 2015, which will affect elk distribution and habitat quality for years to come.

GMU 172

Elk numbers have risen in this GMU recently and can offer good general season opportunity, depending upon access. Approximately 60 percent of this GMU is private and access can be challenging. The USFS lands within this GMU are physically challenging to hunt. WDFW has been acquiring land within this GMU recently (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area), but deer and elk hunting there is managed by permit only access.

GMU 175

This GMU is predominantly public land owned by WDFW, USFS, and Washington DNR. Access is good throughout the unit. This is the only unit where archery hunters can harvest antlerless elk without a permit in the Blue Mountains, resulting in a very high density of hunters during archery season.

GMU 178

This private land unit is managed to minimize elk numbers due to conflict with agricultural activities. Access can be challenging to obtain. Elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and do not offer reliable recreational opportunity during the general season without knowledge of landowners and herd behavior.

GMU 181

This private land unit is managed to minimize elk numbers due to conflict with agricultural activities. Access can be challenging to obtain. Elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and do not offer reliable recreational opportunity during the general season without knowledge of landowners and herd behavior.

GMU 186

This unit is split equally between private and public lands, with very limited private land access available. This GMU is predominantly winter range for elk in Oregon, although approximately 100 elk reside in the unit throughout the year. The individual elk may reside on private land

throughout the season where access is not available, although some years have proven highly successful for the few hunters that know the unit.

The information provided in Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how District 3 GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The values presented are from the 2015 harvest reports. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of elk harvested and hunters per square mile.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 10 for elk harvested/mi^2 (bulls only for modern firearm and cows included with bulls for archery), hunters/mi^2, and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, with Public Access ranking excluded. The modern firearm comparisons are the most straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same in each GMU.

For archery seasons, hunters have to consider that antlerless elk may be harvested in one public land GMU (175) and on private lands throughout multiple GMUs. These differences are important when comparing total harvest or hunter numbers among GMUs. Hunters should keep these differences in mind when comparing and interpreting the information provided in Table 2.

MODERN FIREARM											
		Harvest			**Hunter Density**			**Hunter Success**		**Public Access**	
GMU	**Size (mi^2)**	**Total**	**Harvest per mi^2**	**Rank**	**Hunters**	**Hunters per mi^2**	**Rank**	**Success**	**Rank**	**Rank**	**Rank Sum**
149	1409	1	0.00	10	49	0.03	1	2.0%	10	**3**	**21**
154	216	7	0.03	8	231	1.07	5	3.0%	9	**3**	**22**
162	210	33	0.16	3	694	3.30	10	4.8%	6	**2**	**19**
166	131	29	0.22	1	366	2.79	8	7.9%	4	**1**	**13**
169	161	11	0.07	6	189	1.17	6	5.8%	5	**1**	**17**
172	108	22	0.20	2	215	1.99	7	10.2%	3	**2**	**12**
175	158	18	0.11	5	513	3.25	9	3.5%	8	**1**	**22**
178	275	4	0.01	9	103	0.37	3	3.9%	7	**3**	**19**
181	262	10	0.04	7	73	0.28	2	13.7%	2	**3**	**11**
186	53	8	0.15	4	29	0.55	4	27.6%	1	**2**	**9**

ARCHERY											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	0	0	6	12	0.01	2	0.0%	7	**3**	**15**
154	216	7	0.03	3	79	0.63	8	8.9%	1	**3**	**12**
162	210	6	0.02	4	145	0.78	9	4.1%	4	**2**	**17**
166	131	0	0	6	46	0.37	7	0.0%	7	**1**	**20**
169	161	0	0.01	6	10	0.25	3	0.0%	6	**1**	**15**
172	108	9	0.06	2	37	0.43	6	24.3%	7	**2**	**15**
175	158	23	0.15	1	251	1.68	10	9.2%	2	**1**	**13**
178	275	2	0.01	5	55	0.18	5	3.6%	3	**3**	**13**
181	262	0	0	6	22	0.08	4	0.0%	5	**3**	**15**
186	53	0	0	6	0	0	1	0.0%	7	**2**	**14**
MUZZLELOADER											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	0	0	4	0	0	1	0.0%	5	**3**	**10**
154	216	0	0	4	0	0	1	0.0%	5	**3**	**10**
162	210	5	0.02	1	60	0.29	4	8.3%	2	**2**	**7**
166	131	2	0.02	3	30	0.23	3	6.7%	3	**1**	**9**
172	108	3	0.03	2	34	0.31	5	8.8%	1	**2**	**8**
175	158	2	0.01	3	75	0.47	6	2.7%	4	**1**	**13**
178	275	0	0	4	7	0.03	2	0.0%	5	**3**	**11**

Table 2. Rank sum analysis that provides a quick and general comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. GMUs are generally limited to spike bull harvest, but some may have antlerless opportunity as well (see hunting regulations for specific restrictions). Data presented are based on 2015 harvest reports.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

It has been uncommon for elk populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where severe winter weather conditions seldom occur. Unfortunately, the winter of 2016/2017 did have the uncommon severe weather that rarely occurs, resulting in a significant decline in elk numbers. Consequently, populations available for harvest are expected to be lower than in recent years. In 2017, calf numbers declined from an estimated 5-year average of 998 to an estimated 466, which will result in a lower number of spikes on the landscape during 2017. Hunter numbers also typically do not change substantially from one year to the next. Weather does change from year to year, which will influence success rates.

HOW TO FIND ELK

When hunting elk in District 3, hunters need to do their homework and spend plenty of time scouting before the season opener because it is often difficult to predict where the elk are going to be, especially after hunting pressure increases. The majority of hunters spend most of their time focusing on open ridge tops where they can glass animals from a considerable distance. During the general season, past research on bulls has indicated that a majority of the elk will move to north aspect, mid-slope timbered hillsides within one day of the opener. With only nine days to hunt the general season, there is a lot of pressure the first few days. Pressure declines as the season progresses and may allow the elk to return to normal behaviors if they are not close to major roads.

Later in the season, it is a good idea to consult a topographic map and find "benches" that are located in steep terrain and thick cover because elk often use these areas to bed down during the day. Lastly, on public land, hunters should not let a locked gate keep them from walking into an area to search for elk. More often than not, these areas hold elk that have not received as much hunting pressure.

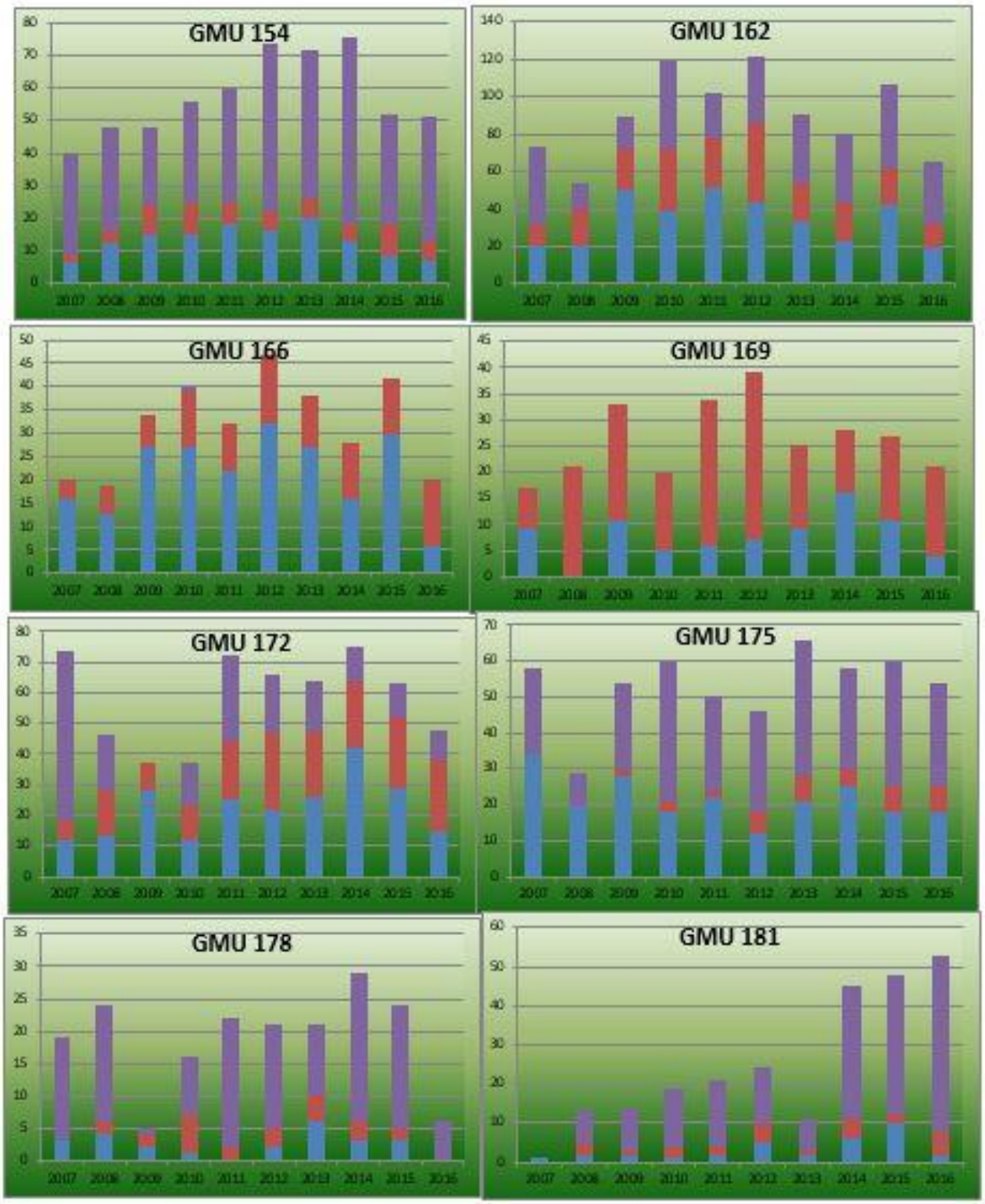


Figure 2. Ten-year harvest trends in yearling bulls (blue), branched bulls (red), and antlerless (purple) elk harvested during general and permit seasons.

ELK AREAS

There are six elk areas in District 3: Elk Area 1010 (Dayton private lands), Elk Area 1008 and 1009 (Wenaha Wilderness), Elk Area 1013 (Mountain View Private), Elk Area 1040 (4-0 Wildlife Area) and Elk Area 1016 (Dayton USFS).

Elk Area 1010 is used to focus antlerless and branched-bull elk hunting on private land in the Dayton Unit. In the past, branched bull tag holders focused on public lands where access was guaranteed, but also increased pressure on that segment of the population. This elk area is also used to focus antlerless harvest on the private lands where depredation complaints have historically been high, but limits antlerless harvest on public lands where higher elk densities are desired. Elk Area 1016 is used to provide controlled antlerless elk hunting opportunity on public lands, excluding the Rainwater Wildlife Area (CTUIR).

The intent of Elk Areas 1008 and 1009 was to distribute the hunting pressure within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. In the past, most permit hunters focused in the western corner of the unit where the road density was highest. By spreading out the hunting pressure, additional hunting opportunity was created.

Elk Areas 1040 and 1013 are used to manage hunters within GMU 172. Elk Area 1013 limits antlerless hunting to private lands where damage can occur on agricultural areas, while maximizing elk numbers and recruitment on public lands. Elk Area 1040 is the newly acquired 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area, which is managed for quality hunting opportunity as part of the sale agreement from the previous landowner. All deer and elk hunting on this wildlife area will be managed for quality opportunity, whereas all other species may be hunted by general seasons as listed in the pamphlet.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Elk Area 1040 (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area) is closed to general season deer and elk hunting. Elk hunting will only be allowed through the permit system on these lands.

Antlerless elk opportunity was increased in 2014 in GMU 181 due to increasing herd size and depredation complaints. Elk in this unit primarily inhabit private lands and acquiring access prior to applying for permits is highly recommended.

During the summer of 2015, a large wildfire burned through a large portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, extending slightly into GMU 172 on Grouse Flats. Portions of this fire burned very hot and likely will limit vegetation regrowth for a number of years. A large portion of the fire that occurred in Washington burned later into September, creating desirable habitat conditions for elk.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Both mule deer and white-tailed deer occur throughout District 3. Deer hunting opportunities in District 3 vary from marginal to quite good, depending on the GMU. The GMUs with highest success (GMUs 145, 149, 178, and 181) also have the highest amount of private land and access can be limited. GMUs where access to public land is highest (GMUs 166, 169, and 175) have the lowest success, probably due to a combination of high hunter numbers and lower quality deer habitat. While overall harvest is one indicator of GMU hunting quality, harvest/unit effort (HPUE) and harvest/unit area (HPUA) equalize GMUs based on hunter numbers, number of days hunting, and GMU size. However, both HPUE and HPUA can be misleading, as HPUE is complicated by private land access limitations and HPUA is complicated by the amount of habitat in the GMU that actually supports deer. In general, HPUE seems to be a better indicator of hunting success. Hunter success and HPUE of either white-tailed or mule deer in District 3 is highest in GMUs 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 178 (Peola), and 181 (Couse), while total general season harvest is highest in GMUs 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), 162 (Dayton), and 178 (Peola).

In Washington, both mule deer and white-tailed deer are managed at the Population Management Unit (PMU) level, while harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. In general, each PMU consists of several GMUs that collectively define the range of a population that minimizes interchange with adjacent deer populations. Population objectives are set at the PMU level and survey data is summarized at that level as well. District 3 contains all of PMU 16 (GMU 145, 149, 154, 178, and 181) and PMU 17 (GMUs 157, 162, 163, 166, 169, 172, 175, and 186). All PMUs in District 3 are managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing deer herds while also minimizing negative deer-human interactions. The WDFW Game Management Plan for 2009-2015 (WDFW 2008) has a desired status for post-hunt buck:doe ratios of 15-19 bucks:100 does for PMU 16 and 20-24 bucks:100 does for PMU 17. The lower desired ratios for PMU 16 mainly reflect a more liberal harvest of deer in agricultural units that likely have both higher quality forage due to availability of crops and higher levels of deer damage issues than PMU 17.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 3. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and HPUE (harvest/hunter day) are used to monitor population status. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and are conducting periodic aerial sightability surveys to monitor deer populations that are independent of harvest data and exploring the use of integrated population models.

All available harvest data indicates deer populations appear to be stable or slightly increasing in both PMUs associated with District 3. For more detailed information related to the status of mule deer and white-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.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

Probably the most frequent question from hunters is, "What GMU should I hunt?" This is not always easy to answer because it depends on the hunting method and the target hunting experience. Some hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature buck, while others just want to harvest any legal deer in an area with few hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high deer densities, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario does not exist in any GMU that is open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 3. Instead, because of general season opportunities, the GMUs with the highest deer densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of deer. Some hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if that means there are also very few hunters.

The information provided in Table 3 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of deer harvested and hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison since GMUs vary in size. For example, the average total number of deer harvested over the past five years during the general season in GMUs 149 (Prescott) and 154 (Blue Creek) has been 696 and 317 deer, respectively. Just looking at total harvest suggests deer densities are much higher in GMU 149 than 154. However, when harvest is expressed as deer harvested/mi^2, the result is an estimate of 0.49 in GMU 149 and 1.47 in GMU 154, which suggests deer densities are probably much higher in GMU 154 than they are in GMU 149. This is further complicated by the amount of actual deer habitat in each GMU. For example, GMU 149 is the largest GMU, but is comprised primarily of tilled croplands, and deer are concentrated in CRP fields and along the breaks of the Snake River, so densities are probably higher than the harvest/mi^2 indicates.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 12 (except for ties) for deer harvested/mi^2, hunters/mi^2, hunter success rates, and public land access. The ranking values were then summed (public land access excluded) to produce a final rank sum. GMUs are listed by GMU number, not by rank.

Comparisons are straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same for most GMUs. Differences that should be considered include:

1. Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in WDFW Access programs, such as Feel Free to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, Hunt by Registration, or Hunt by Reservation, and may offer similar access to some GMUs with public land. See the Access section of this document for private land acreage available for public hunting in each GMU.
2. Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in tilled croplands, and actual suitable hunting area may be much smaller, leading to higher than expected hunter densities.

MODERN FIREARM											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
145	355	277	0.78	4	624	1.76	4	44%	1	**3**	**9(1)**
149	1409	544	0.39	9	1524	1.08	1	36%	3	**3**	**13(4)**
154	216	278	1.29	2	964	4.47	11	29%	5	**3**	**18(6)**
162	210	375	1.78	1	1539	7.31	12	25%	8	**2**	**21(8)**
163	149	97	0.65	6	359	2.40	9	27%	6	**3**	**21(8)**
166	131	90	0.69	5	563	4.31	10	16%	10	**1**	**25(10)**
169	161	34	0.21	11	200	1.24	2	17%	9	**1**	**22(9)**
172	108	50	0.47	8	198	1.84	5	26%	7	**2**	**20(7)**
175	158	42	0.27	10	354	2.23	8	12%	11	**1**	**29(11)**
178	275	236	0.86	3	546	1.98	7	43%	2	**3**	**12(3)**
181	262	167	0.64	7	381	1.46	3	44%	1	**3**	**11(2)**
186	53	34	0.65	6	101	1.90	6	34%	4	**2**	**16(5)**

ARCHERY											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
145	355	13	0.04	7	51	0.14	4	25%	6	**3**	**17(6)**
149	1409	41	0.03	8	149	0.11	2	29%	3	**3**	**13(3)**
154	216	68	0.31	1	218	1.01	11	31%	2	**3**	**14(4)**
162	210	35	0.17	2	196	0.93	9	18%	7	**2**	**18(7)**
163	149	25	0.17	2	150	1.00	10	17%	8	**3**	**20(8)**
166	131	20	0.15	3	89	0.68	8	24%	7	**1**	**18(7)**
169	161	1	0.01	10	19	0.12	3	6%	9	**1**	**22(9)**
172	108	7	0.06	5	26	0.24	5	27%	4	**2**	**12(2)**
175	158	5	0.03	8	107	0.67	7	4%	10	**1**	**25(10)**
178	275	34	0.12	4	125	0.45	6	27%	4	**3**	**14(4)**
181	262	12	0.05	6	36	0.14	4	33%	1	**3**	**11(1)**
186	53	1	0.02	9	5	0.09	1	26%	5	**2**	**16(5)**

MUZZLELOADER											
		Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
GMU	Size (mi^2)	Total	Harvest per mi^2	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi^2	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
145	355	25	0.07	3	52	0.15	2	48%	1	**3**	**6(1)**
149	1409	81	0.06	4	238	0.17	3	34%	4	**3**	**11(4)**
154	216	N/A	.	.		.	.	.	.	.	.
162	210	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
163	149	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
166	131	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
169	161	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
172	108	18	0.17	2	52	0.49	5	35%	3	**2**	**10(3)**
175	158	5	0.03	5	41	0.26	4	11%	6	**1**	**15(6)**
178	275	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
181	262	61	0.23	1	152	0.58	6	40%	2	**3**	**9(2)**
186	53	1	0.01	6	6	0.11	1	23%	5	**2**	**12(5)**

Table 3. Rank sum analysis that provides a quick and general comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, hunter success rates, and access to public land compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. GMUs bolded are open during early and late seasons for the respective weapon type. Data presented are based on a five-year average.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

Wildfires are always a possibility that may affect hunter access to some hunting areas. Hunters should check the status of wildfires and access restrictions online.

It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where deer move out of the mountains in winter and weather conditions are generally mild and do not result in large winter die-offs. However, deer this winter experienced prolonged periods of heavy snow cover, particularly in the Grande Ronde River drainage. Although the deer went into winter in good condition, we observed significant winter-kill along the Grande Ronde, and anticipate below average deer numbers in GMUs 172, 175, 181, and 186.

Periodic die-offs have occurred due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and bluetongue, both viral conditions transmitted by a biting midge, which mainly affect white-tailed deer. Eastern Washington experienced a severe outbreak in 2015. However, the outbreak was

relatively mild in District 3, mainly affecting the eastern portion of the district, where summer drought conditions and warm temperatures likely concentrated deer near water sources with high midge densities. This outbreak did not appear to impact harvest during the 2016 season, and we do not expect any lasting effects in those GMUs that were affected (145, 163, and 178). While we annually monitor disease outbreaks, there is nothing feasible to be done to prevent outbreaks of hemorrhagic diseases.

Mule deer populations have experienced long-term declines across much of the west with no definitive cause identified. Habitat loss is suspected to be one possible cause, particularly loss of winter range. The Conservation Reserve Program has probably helped maintain winter range in District 3, and mule deer populations outside of the mountains appear to be stable to increasing. Consequently, populations available for harvest are expected to be similar in size compared to the 2016 season, although summer drought during 2015 may have influenced fawn over-winter survival, the effects of which would appear this 2017 hunting season, as the 2015 cohort of bucks reach legal antler size.

The only references WDFW currently has for future potential harvest during general seasons are recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Figures 3 through 5 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 3 and what they can expect to encounter with regard to hunter success and hunter numbers.

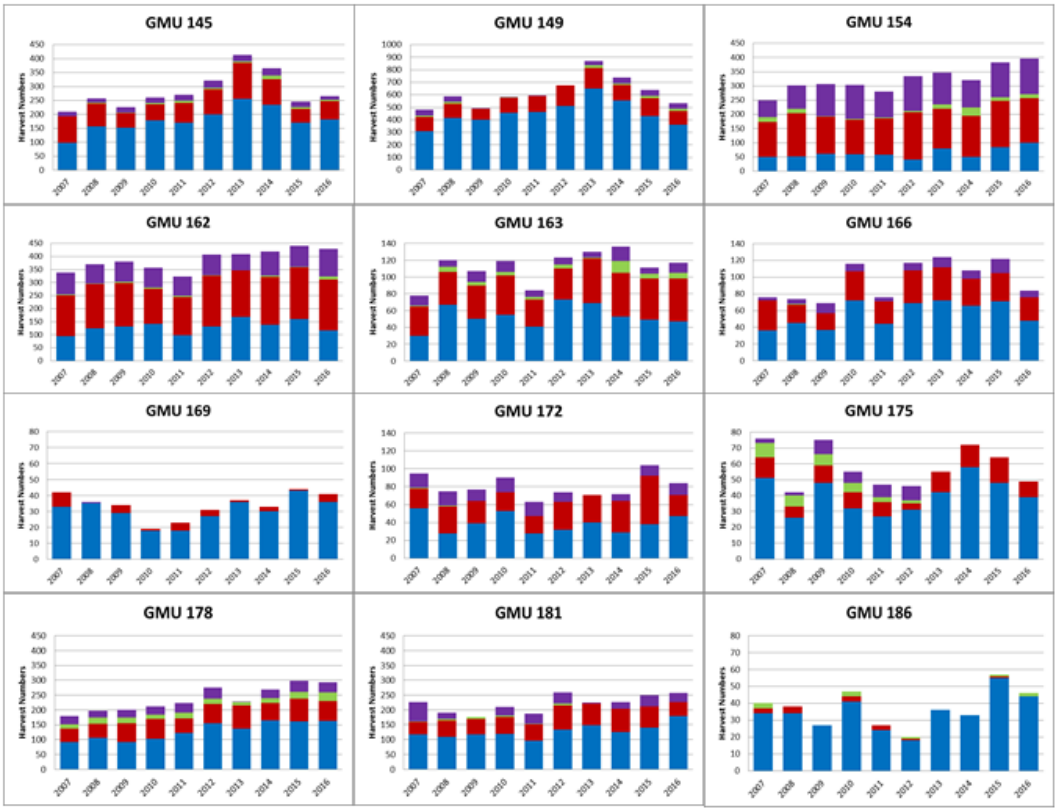


Figure 3. Ten year trends in total numbers of mule deer bucks (blue) and antlerless deer (green), and white-tailed bucks (red) and antlerless deer (purple) during all general seasons combined from 2007-

2016. Totals do not include permit harvest (note the different scales, from maximums of 80, 140, 450, and 1,000).

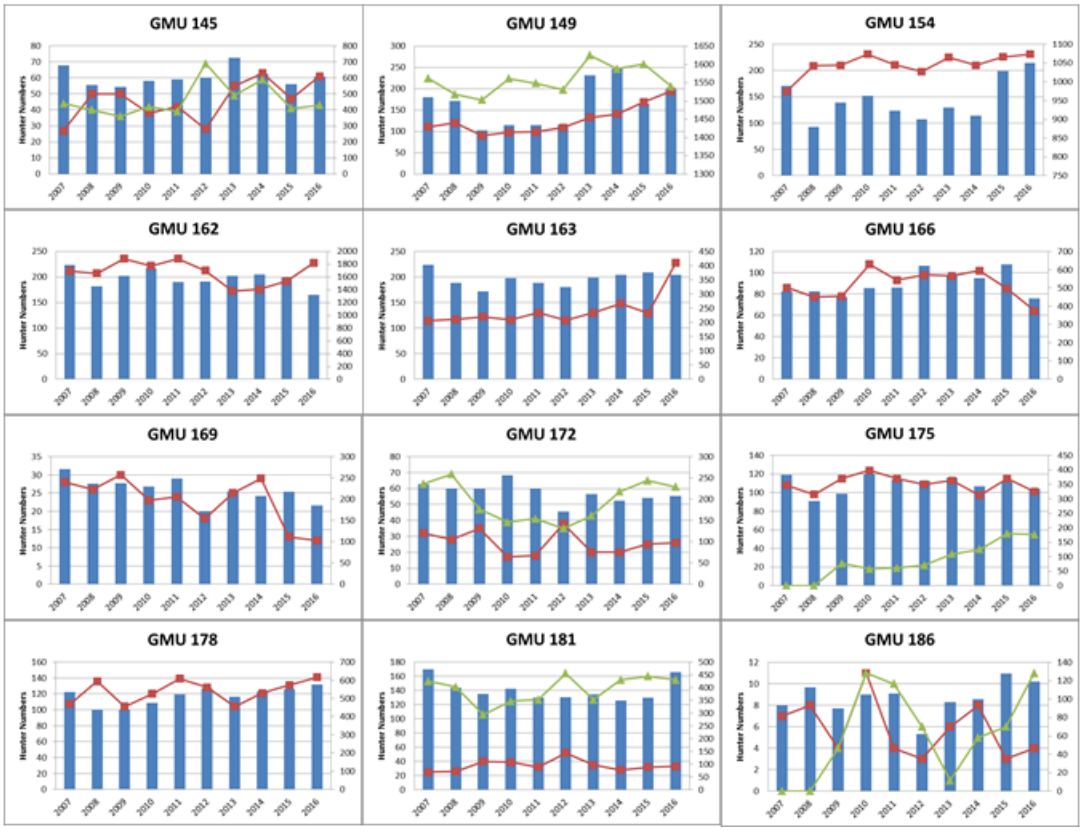


Figure 4. Ten year trends in hunter numbers for each GMU in District 3 for modern firearm (blue bars, scale right axis), archery (red squares, scale left axis), and muzzleloader (green triangles, scale left axis) general seasons for 2007-2016.

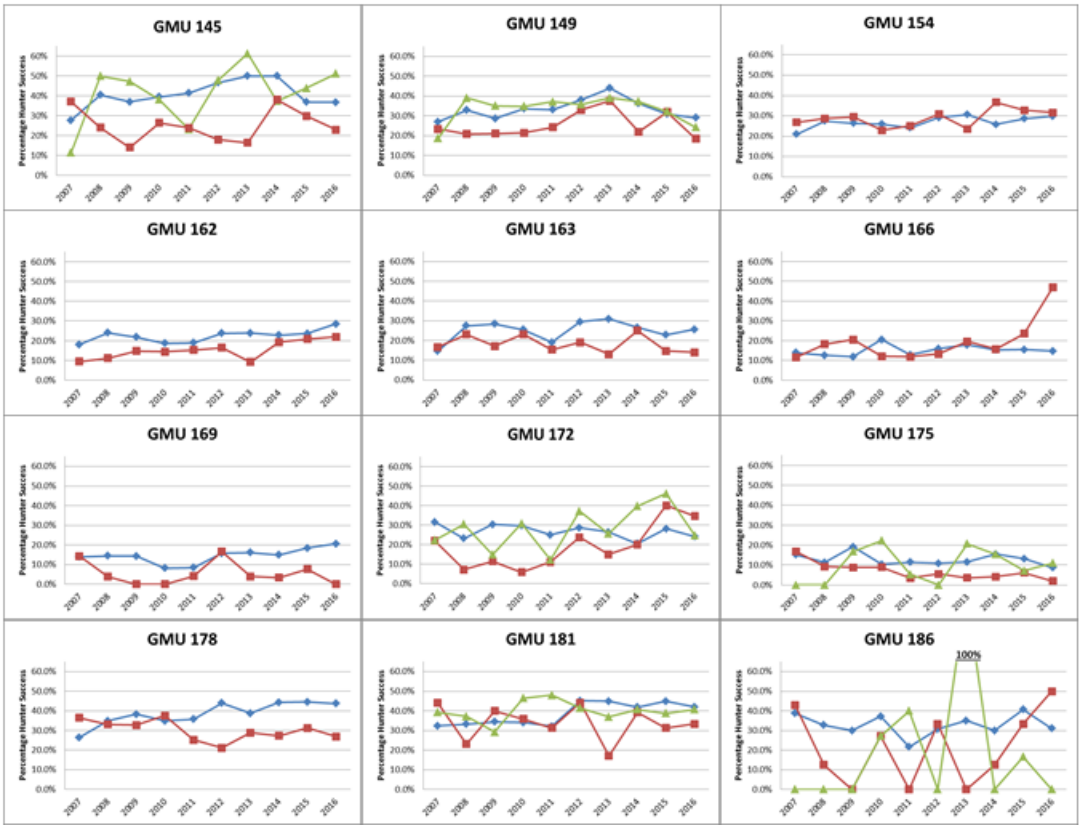


Figure 5. Ten year trends in percentage harvest success for each GMU in District 3 for modern firearm (blue diamonds), archery (red squares), and muzzleloader (green triangles) general season hunters for 2007-2016.

DEER AREAS

There are five deer areas in District 3 that were created for a number of different purposes. Deer Area 1010 is located within the private land area of GMU 162 and was created to help manage deer damage while limiting antlerless harvest on public land in the GMU. Deer Areas 1008 and 1009 divide GMU 169 and help to manage deer by distributing harvest opportunity across the wilderness area. Deer Area 1021 is located in and around the town of Clarkston in GMU 178 and is used to help manage deer in and around the urban area. Deer Area 1040 is located in GMU 172 and consists of the newly purchased 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area. The boundaries of this area are still in flux as different phases of the acquisition are approved, and the designation helps to manage harvest.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. New Deer Area 1040 (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area) is closed to general season deer and elk hunting. Deer and elk hunting is allowed only by 1040 Deer or Elk Area permit holders.
2. GMU 181: Added modern firearm permits for antlerless deer (25 total).
3. Youth permits: Added "any deer" youth permits in GMUs 145, 149, 178, and 181. These permits run during the general season, but allow youth hunters to harvest any mule deer or whitetail buck, and add antlerless mule deer to already legal antlerless whitetail.

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears occur mainly in the foothills and forested areas of District 3, but population densities vary among GMUs. The highest densities of bears occur in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton).

District 3 consists of GMUs that are part of the Blue Mountains Black Bear Management Unit 8 (BBMU 8), which is one of nine BBMUs defined by WDFW. Currently, allowing for a general bear season during the fall and controlled permit numbers during the spring has maintained harvest metrics within parameters identified by WDFW as reflective of a healthy bear population. The metrics used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of harvested female bears (no more than 35-39 percent of harvest), the median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years), and the median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years).

WDFW does not conduct surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size. Instead, we use trends in harvest data as surrogates to formal population estimates or indices. Currently, black bear populations are believed to be stable in District 3.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

Although there are hunters who specifically target black bears, most bears are harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest can vary quite a bit from one year to the next and overall hunter success is quite low. Since 2001, hunter success in District 3 has averaged just 6 percent and has never been higher than 9 percent. However, hunter success is likely higher for those hunters who specifically hunt bears versus those who buy a bear tag in case they see one while they are deer or elk hunting.

Overall, there has been no trend in annual bear harvest during the general bear season in District 3, with harvest generally fluctuating between 75 and 100 bears, excluding a few outliers. 2011 was a relatively poor year, with 66 bears harvested, but harvest rebounded during the 2012 and 2013 seasons before dropping off again in 2014 to 62 bears (Figure 8). With annual fluctuations in hunter numbers, some index of harvest per unit effort is generally a better indicator of harvest trends. Figure 8 shows the number of hunter days per bear harvested, which also does not show any consistent trend.

At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) (Figure 7). Harvest numbers during the 2014 season compared to long-term (10-year) and short-term (5-year) averages were lower in both GMUs 154 and 162, but the yearly harvest does not show any identifiable trends (Figure 6) other than there have been very few low harvest years back-to-back. This was again highlighted by the rebound in both the 2015 and 2016 harvests after the low 2014 harvest. Based on general long-term stability in District 3 bear harvest, hunters should expect similar harvest and success rates during the 2017 season.

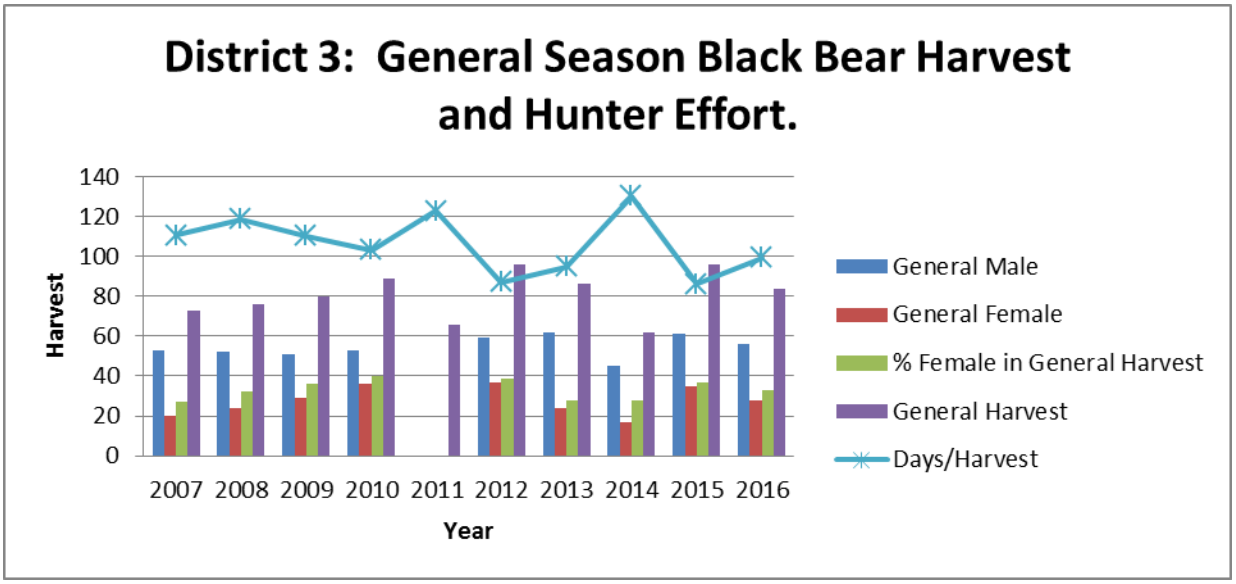


Figure 6. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season, and an index of hunter effort (hunter days/bear harvested) in District 3, 2007–2016 (the sex of harvested bears is not available for 2011).

HOW TO LOCATE AND HARVEST A BLACK BEAR

Scouting is an extremely important factor that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 3. Although black bears are extremely common and occur in some areas at very high densities, they are seen infrequently because they limit their time in the open to cooler times of day and move into thick vegetation in draws and creek bottoms.

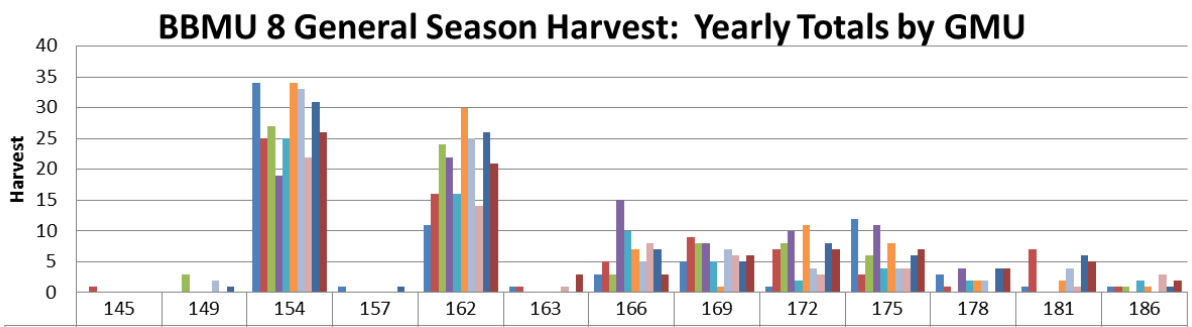
Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. Hunters should focus their efforts early in the day in more open terrain (e.g. south-facing slopes). Bears have an incredible sense of smell, and in habitats with dense vegetation, a bear is likely to smell a hunter well before the hunter knows the bear is there.

Bears can often be located along riparian corridors that contain a large number of berry-producing shrubs, including creeping blackberries and elderberries, or along north-facing slopes with salmonberries, huckleberries, and blackberries. Spring permit holders should look below snow-line on south-facing slopes that get early green-up of wild onions and other vegetation and near springs or wet areas with green aquatic vegetation. During the fall, hunters will generally find bears foraging across open slopes dissected by shrubby draws early in the day. Also, hunters should check riparian areas that may still have berries or rose hips, and hike through

them to see if there is any bear sign. If fresh sign is found, odds are there is a bear frequenting that area. If hunters are patient and sit for extended periods of time watching open areas in these riparian patches and corridors, they may get a chance to harvest a bear. Patience is the key.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

There are no notable changes for the 2017 season.



	145	149	154	157	162	163	166	169	172	175	178	181	186
2007	0	0	34	1	11	1	3	5	1	12	3	1	1
2008	1	0	25	0	16	1	5	9	7	3	1	7	1
2009	0	3	27	0	24	0	3	8	8	6	0	0	1
2010	0	0	19	0	22	0	15	8	10	11	4	0	0
2011	0	0	25	0	16	0	10	5	2	4	2	0	2
2012	0	0	34	0	30	0	7	1	11	8	2	2	1
2013	0	2	33	0	25	0	5	7	4	4	2	4	0
2014	0	0	22	0	14	1	8	6	3	4	0	1	3
2015	0	1	31	1	26	0	7	5	8	6	4	6	1
2016	0	0	26	0	21	3	3	6	7	7	4	5	2

Figure 7. The number of bears harvested in each GMU during 2007-2016 general black bear season in District 3.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 3, but densities likely vary among GMUs. Cougar populations in District 3 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining stable adult territories and population by limiting harvest of adult cougars to approximately 12 percent of the cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW has continually adjusted the way it manages cougar harvest in Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougar harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intent was to have a longer season, without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest was reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

To accomplish harvest goals, WDFW established a series of hunt areas, each with its own harvest guidelines and with standard season dates of September 1 through April 30. Harvest guidelines do not affect cougar hunting seasons until harvest numbers are examined starting January 1. At that point, any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed, depending on the age and sex composition of the harvest. If hunters plan on hunting cougar after January 1, they must confirm that the cougar season is open in the area they plan to hunt. Harvest guidelines for each hunt area located in District 3 are provided in Table 4.

For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit WDFW's website.

Table 4. Harvest guidelines and 2016 harvest levels for the three cougar hunt areas located in District 3.

Hunt Area	2017-2018 Harvest Guideline	2016-2017 Harvest
145, 166, 175, 178	3-4	4
149, 154, 162, 163	4-5	11
169, 172, 181, 186	3	7

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

Cougar harvest in District 3 has been variable over the years, with the average since 1990 of 16 cougars and a range between a low of seven and a high of 33. However, in 17 out of the last 25 years, the range has been between 12 and 20 cougars harvested. Since 2001, the number of cougars harvested in District 3 has averaged 14 cougars, and sub-adults typically dominate the harvest. With the yearly variation, it is hard to predict future harvest, but cougar sightings in the district continue to be fairly common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the harvest, although the lower harvest guidelines may result in lower harvest. Under the new harvest management guidelines, **all hunt areas are likely to close by the January 1** evaluation period, so hunters interested in cougar hunting in any of these GMUs need to plan accordingly.

NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. The late season extends from between January 1 to April 30. **Be aware that a 2017 cougar license is required to hunt cougar after March 31.**

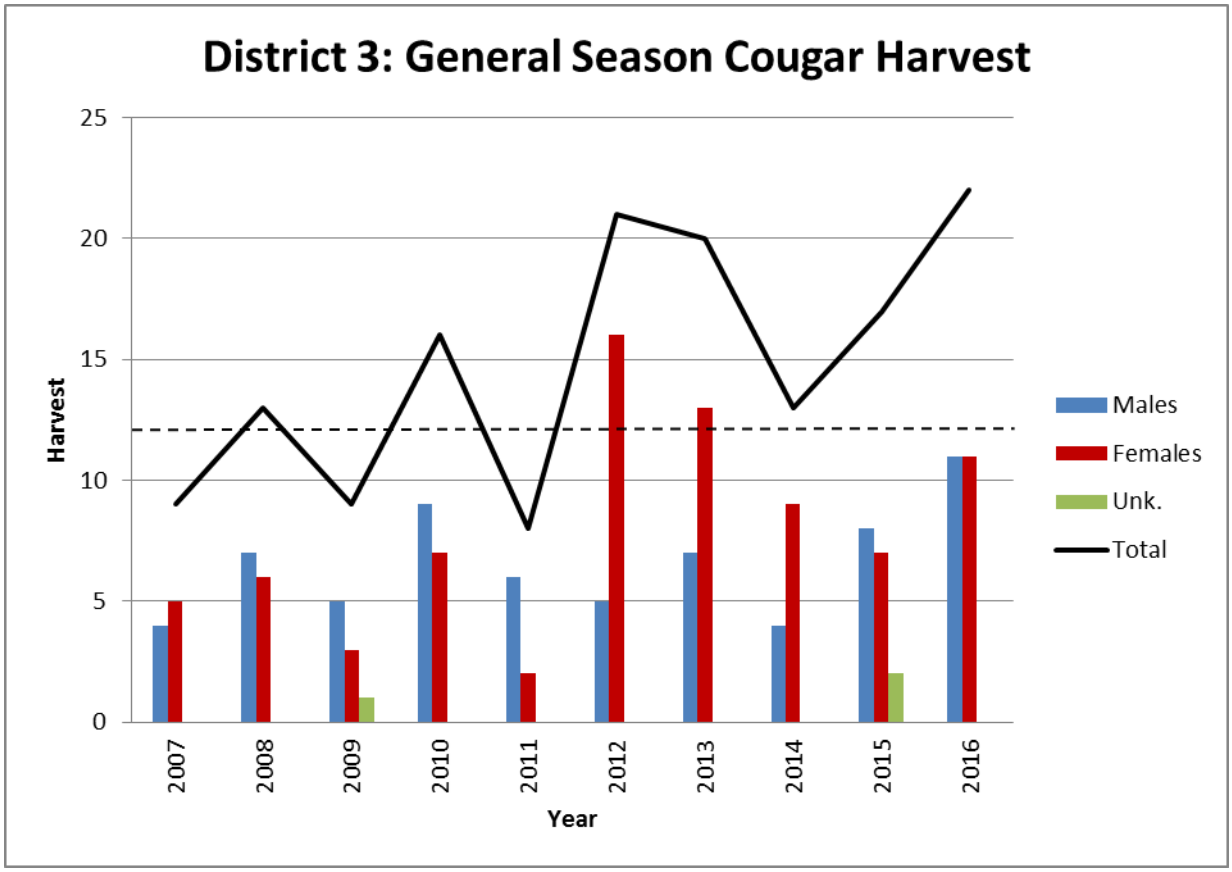


Figure 8. The estimated number of cougars harvested in District 3, 2006–2015. The dashed line reperesents the upper harvest guideline for all three cougar areas combined.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 3. Common dabbling ducks include mallard, northern pintail, American widgeon, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, canvasback, and common goldeneye are present along the reservoirs of the Snake and Columbia rivers and can occur in fairly large numbers.

Mallards are the most abundant duck species in Washington and constitute the vast majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically ≥ 50 percent). Mid-winter surveys in the South Columbia Basin segment of District 3 typically yield >50 percent of mallards in the dabbling duck count, with goldeneye and canvasback making up 80 percent of the diving ducks. Hunters should expect harvest opportunities to be mostly mallard and American widgeon, although hunting by boat in the river reservoirs can yield good harvests of diving ducks.

MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY

There are very few ducks in District 3 during late-spring and early summer. Beginning in mid to late September, birds will begin migrating south from British Columbia, the Yukon, and Alaska,

and numbers will continue to increase until they peak in late October and early November. Although migration patterns have not been intensively studied, it is believed ducks use concentration areas in District 3 as resting and foraging areas and do not stay in the district for long periods of time. Consequently, the number of ducks located in District 3 most likely changes on a daily basis, but begins to decline sharply when there are no more new migrants coming into the area from breeding grounds to the north.

CONCENTRATION AREAS

In general, concentration areas include the wetlands and rivers around McNary National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the Columbia and Snake river valleys. Concentrations within these broader areas are dependent on many factors (e.g. hunting pressure, weather, food, etc.), and have the potential to change on a daily basis. The agricultural areas around McNary NWR attract large numbers of foraging ducks and geese, but most of these lands are closed to hunting or leased by private hunting outfitters and access can be difficult or expensive.

POPULATION STATUS

The number of ducks in District 3 during established hunting seasons is most strongly related to the status of breeding duck populations in Alaska and Canada. The 2014 breeding survey estimated the breeding population in Alaska at 3.5 million ducks, a 6 percent increase over 2013 values, but still well below the 2012 estimate of 4.4 million. The mallard estimate recovered from 2013 lows of 338,000 to an estimate of 501,000 for 2014, a 48 percent increase and similar to the 2012 estimate (USFWS, Trends in Duck Breeding Populations, 1955-2015). In 2015, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats traditional survey area was 3.4 million, a 3 percent decrease from 2014 estimates and 8 percent below the long-term average. The mallard breeding population estimate was 471, 000, a decrease of 6 percent from 2014 levels, but still 24 percent above the long-term average. In 2016, the total estimate for the Alaska-Youkon Territory-Old Crow Flats area was 4.3 million, a 28 percent increase over 2015 estimates and 17 percent above the long-term trends. The mallard breeding population estimate was 584,000, 24 percent above the 2015 estimates and 54 percent above the long-term trend. The 2017 report was not available as of this writing.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

The 2016 duck harvest, down 6 percent overall from 2015, but still 10 percent above the five-year average, coincides with the increased population trends seen in the waterfowl breeding surveys. The district did see decreases in all counties except Columbia County, but harvest declines were mainly due to lower hunter effort, and the average harvest/day was actually higher than both 2015 and the five-year average. Generally, the waterfowl breeding surveys track well with hunter success. Although hunter numbers have remained relatively stable, this is the third year of declines in number of hunter days, and the fourth year of increases in harvest/day (Figure 9). Without information from the 2017 breeding surveys, it is hard to predict 2017 prospects. The district did experience a large winter die-off on the McNary National Wildlife Refuge due to avian cholera, but this appeared to be a localized event and is not likely to significantly affect the overall breeding population. However, ducks do show some fidelity to migratory flyways, so we may see some lasting effects across the district this coming season.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

How hunters go about hunting ducks is largely dependent on where they choose to hunt. When hunting inland waters associated with ponds and rivers, or feeding areas, traditional decoy setups work the best. Birds are most active during early morning and late afternoon as they move from resting areas to feeding areas. See Let's Go Waterfowling for more information on hunting ducks.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of U.S. Army Corp of Engineer (USACE) Habitat Management Units along the Snake River in District 3 that offer good waterfowl hunting opportunities, and McNary NWR along the Columbia River offers some of the premier hunting opportunities in the district. Wildlife areas in District 3 are primarily big game habitat and do not offer much waterfowl hunting opportunity, but hunters should see the WDFW waterfowl hunting page for more detailed information related to their location, current waterfowl management activities, and common species.

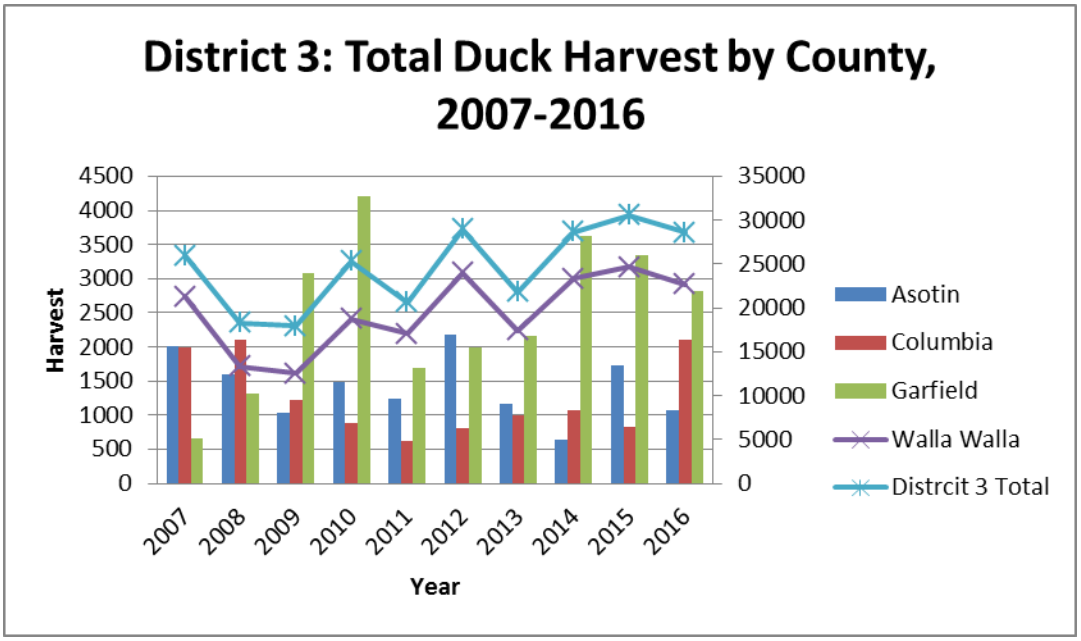


Figure 9. Trends in the total number of ducks harvested (blue line, right axis), and totals by county in Walla Walla (purple line, right axis), Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties (bars, left axis), 2006–2015.

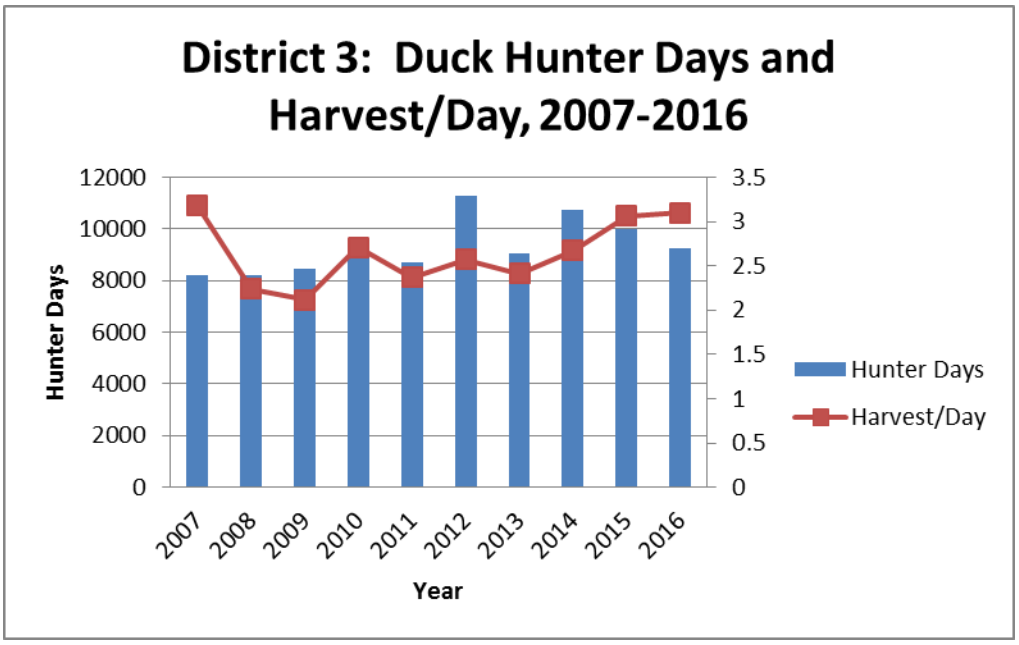


Figure 10. Trends in the total duck hunter days (left axis), and ducks harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2006–2015.

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

Canada geese are the only goose species available for harvest in District 3 during the early September season, while Canada, snow, Ross, and white-fronted geese may all be taken during the late season.

MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

The migration chronology of geese in District 3 is nearly identical to that described for ducks, with very few geese occurring in the district until migrants begin showing up from Alaska in September. However, one distinct difference between ducks and geese is goose numbers do not decline as sharply as duck numbers do around the latter half of November. Instead, many geese choose to over-winter in the agricultural areas of the district as long as snow cover does not become excessive.

POPULATION STATUS

There are few geese that breed in District 3, so WDFW does not conduct breeding goose surveys in this part of the state. Urban goose populations can be problematic at times, but offer limited hunting opportunities.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 3 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most goose harvest will occur in Walla Walla County during the late season,

where twice as many geese are harvested each year compared to Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties combined. Although harvest is low in the three eastern counties of the district, creative hunters can find opportunities along the Touchet, Tucannon, and Snake rivers by requesting access from farmers who have geese feeding daily in their crop fields, particularly alfalfa.

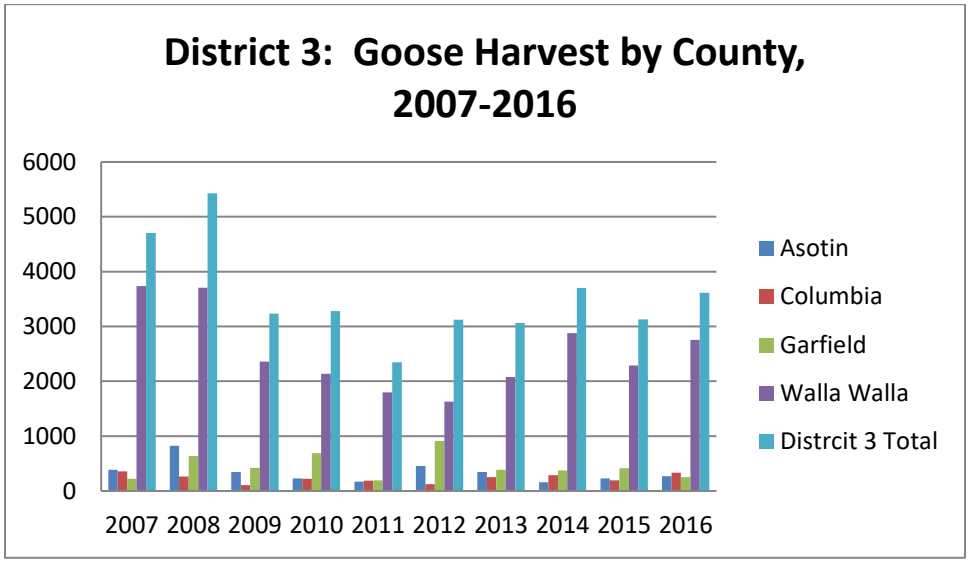


Figure 11. Trends in the total number of geese harvested (pale blue column), and totals by county in Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Walla Walla counties, 2007–2016.

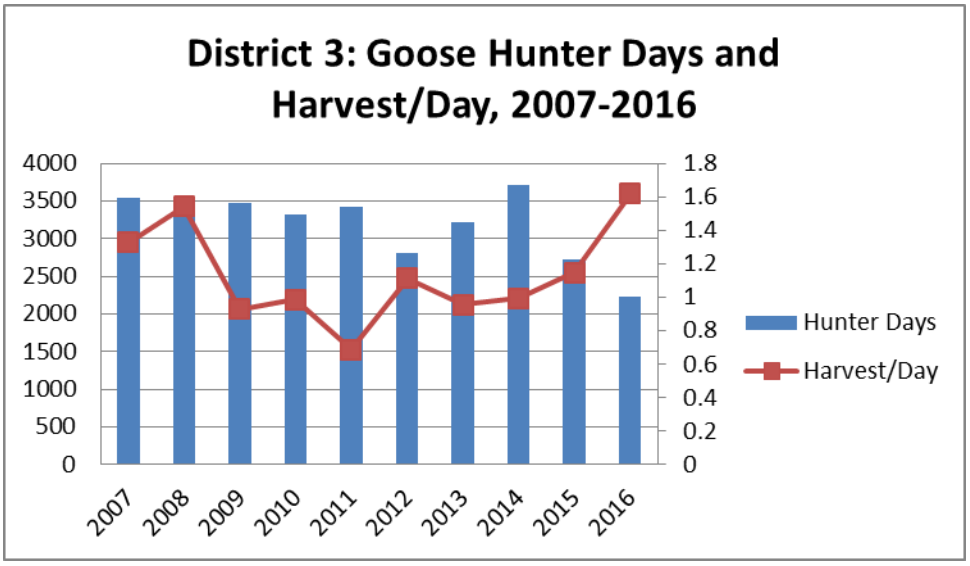


Figure 12. Trends in the total goose hunter days (left axis), and geese harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2007–2016.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

The standard techniques employed to harvest geese include finding agricultural areas where geese are feeding, and setting up a decoy spread well before daylight in parts of the fields where geese are expected to concentrate. In District 3, agricultural areas where feeding geese

congregate are dryland and irrigated agricultural fields relatively close to the Snake or Columbia rivers. Because of this, goose hunting opportunities most often occur on private property and require hunters to gain permission before hunting. There are multiple guide services available for hunters willing to pay for access and experience.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

It is strongly recommended that hunters review the most recent Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Season pamphlet to ensure they are in compliance, as there are specific daily regulations. Pamphlets are available at any retailer that sells hunting licenses or they can be downloaded from WDFW's website.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

There are two species of grouse that occur in District 3-- ruffed grouse and dusky grouse (formally called blue grouse). Ruffed grouse are the most abundant grouse in the Blue Mountains, and generally occur at lower elevations and along shrubby draws and riparian areas where hardwoods are present. Dusky grouse can be located in upper elevation timbered slopes and mountain meadows, often near springs or some other water source. Both species will be attracted to berry producing vegetation, such as chokecherry, current, elderberry, and snowberry, with aspen stands also being an attractive habitat for both cover and forage.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not conduct any standardized surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 3. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, grouse populations appeared to be at least stable over the past four years, as CPUE has slowly increased from a low in 2011. While both harvest numbers and hunter days have been decreasing, the increase in CPUE suggests grouse populations are stable (Figure 13). The correlation between harvest numbers and the number of hunter days is fairly robust, which also suggests the Blue Mountains grouse population is stable (Figure 14).

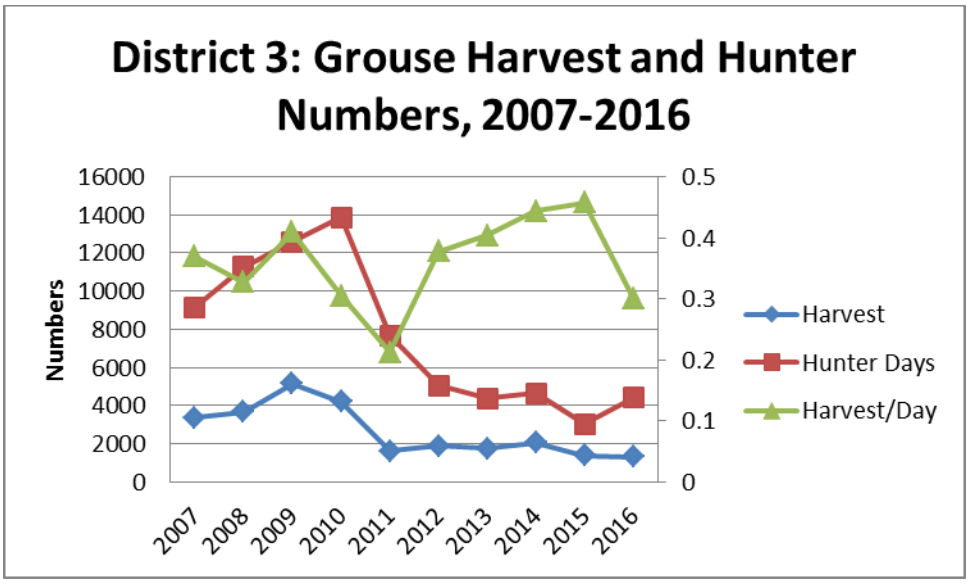


Figure 13. Number of grouse harvested, number of hunter days (right axis), and grouse harvested per hunter day (left axis), 2007-2016.

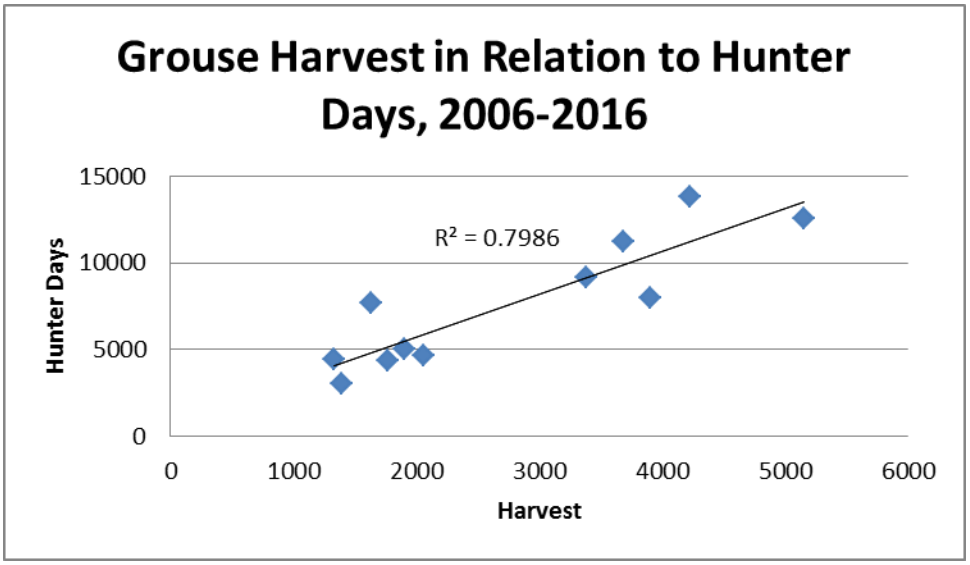


Figure 14. Number of grouse harvested in relation to hunter days, 2006-2016.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

The total number of grouse harvested in District 3 has declined significantly since 2009, when 5,147 grouse were estimated to be harvested. This is compared to 1,330 in 2016. However, hunter numbers have declined as well, with a dramatic decrease in 2010 followed by a slow decline since then. Despite the sharp declines in harvest, the strong correlation between hunter days and total grouse harvested suggests hunters should expect harvesting an average of between 0.3 and 0.5 grouse per day hunted.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt grouse in District 3 is by walking roads and shooting them as they flush or flushing after they roost in a nearby tree. Blue grouse tend to occur in higher densities in the higher elevations of the Blue Mountains, and can occasionally be found in good numbers along grassy open ridges mixed with conifer forests. Ruffed grouse are closely associated with riparian areas throughout all elevations of the forested portions of the Blue Mountains. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's grouse species, see WDFW's upland bird hunting webpage.

PHEASANTS

The best pheasant hunting opportunities in District 3 are associated with the Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program. Each year, approximately 3,500 pheasants are released in Region 1, and most of these are destined for release sites in District 3. Nine sites are located throughout the district. Four of those sites (Hollebeke HMU, Mill Creek HMU, Rice Bar HMU, and Willow Bar HMU) are owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, two sites (Asotin WMA and the Hartsock Unit of the Wooten WMA) are WDFW-owned, and the rest are on private lands open to the public under WDFW's Feel Free to Hunt access program. Releases take place for the youth season on most of the sites in mid-September, and the remaining releases happen sporadically throughout the pheasant hunting season.

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Pheasants are closely associated with agricultural and grassland habitats throughout the northern and western portions of the district. The best pheasant hunting is located in areas of permanent cover, usually associated with riparian or shrubby habitats.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not currently generate population estimates for pheasants. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which track birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, pheasant CPUE appears to have remained relatively stable over the past five years. CPUE in 2016 was 0.79 birds harvested per hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 0.65. Other WDFW information implies that populations have declined during the past few decades, but appear to have recently stabilized. For the period from 2006-2016, there is a strong correlation between the number of pheasants harvested and the number of hunter days, which also suggests a stable population over the same time period.

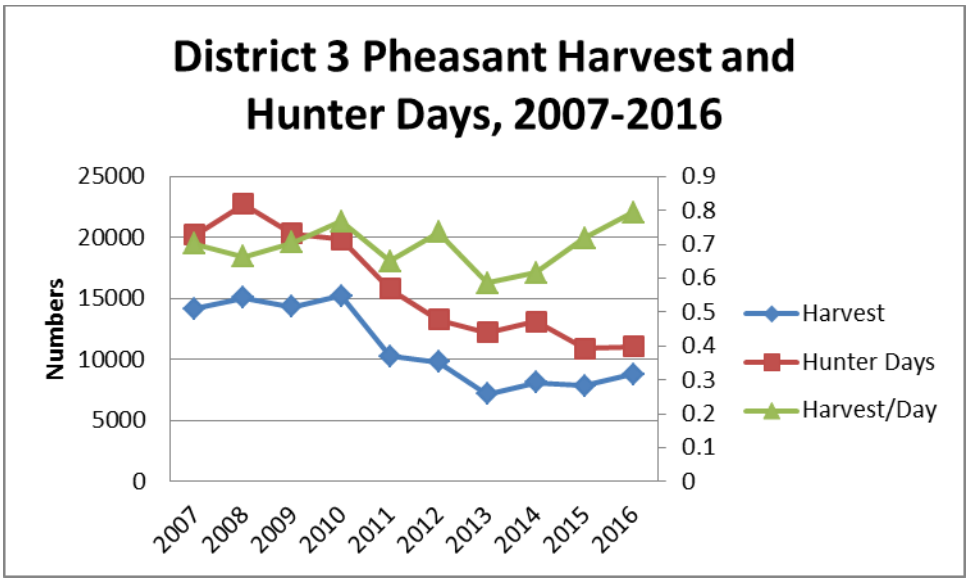


Figure 15. Total pheasant harvest, hunter days, and harvest per day in District 3, 2007-2016.

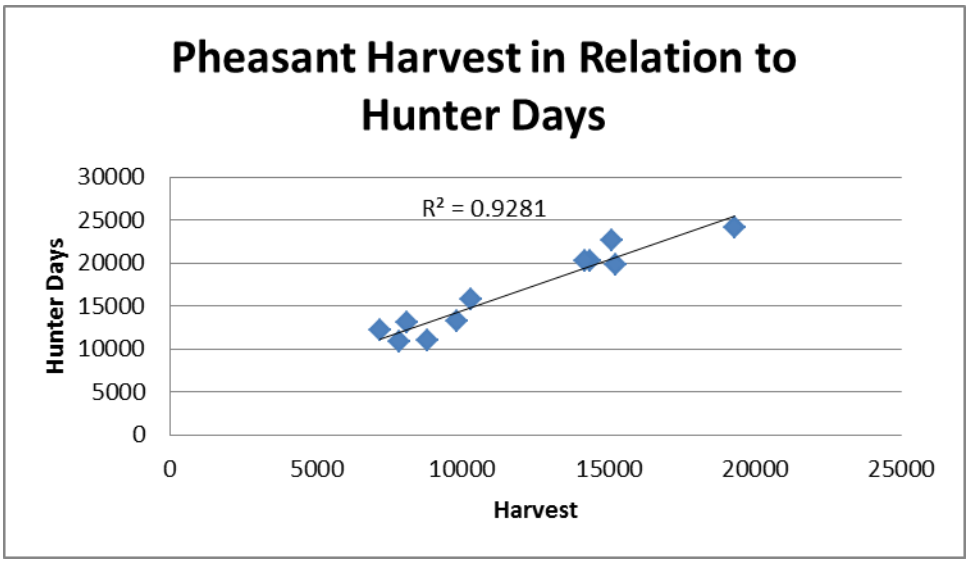


Figure 16. Number of pheasants harvested in relation to number of hunter days, 2006-2016.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

The total number of pheasants harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. The spring and early summer of 2017 have been good conditions for nesting and brood rearing for pheasants, although the hot and dry conditions persisting through early summer may limit food for young pheasants and late broods. Biologists predict that pheasant numbers should similar to the past few years.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt pheasants in District 3 is with the use of a bird dog. Pheasants are usually located in thicker cover and often require a dog to flush them if they do not

run in front of the hunters. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's pheasants, please visit WDFW's upland bird hunting webpage.

Hunters should be aware that special regulations apply when hunting on eastern Washington pheasant release sites. Most notably, hunters are required to use non-toxic shot, and hunting is only allowed between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. To locate maps for the Mill Creek, Hollebeke, Rice Bar, and Willow Bar HMUs, as well as the Asotin and Hartsock WMA release sites, and to learn more about the Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program, visit the WDFW website.

QUAIL

California quail are common in the lower elevation draws and drainages across the foothills of the Blue Mountains, and in suitable pockets of habitat across the prairie areas and breaks of the Grande Ronde and Snake rivers. Mountain quail occur in District 3, but there are no sizable populations and sightings are uncommon. When they do occur, it is usually along the Asotin Creek drainage and tributaries that have abundant shrub cover, and hunters looking for California quail in this area should be careful to identify their target, as mountain quail are protected in eastern Washington.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for quail. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, quail CPUE improved significantly from low levels in 2013, likely due to weather during the nesting period. CPUE in 2014 was 1.23 birds harvested per hunter day and has remained stable through the 2016 season at 1.38 birds harvested per hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 1.08 birds/day.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

The total number of quail harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. The spring and early summer of 2017 have been good conditions for nesting and brood rearing for quail. Biologists predict that quail numbers should be similar to the past few years.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt quail in District 3 is with the use of a bird dog. Quail are usually located in thicker cover and often require a dog to flush. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's quail, please visit WDFW's upland bird hunting webpage.

TURKEYS

Wild turkeys of the Rio Grande subspecies have been introduced into southeast Washington and have become very common. Turkeys are found in the lower elevation draws and drainages across the foothills of the Blue Mountains, and in suitable pockets of habitat across the prairie

areas and breaks of the Grande Ronde and Snake rivers. Turkeys can be found in all GMUs, but tend to be concentrated along riparian areas in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountains and often near farmsteads and towns.

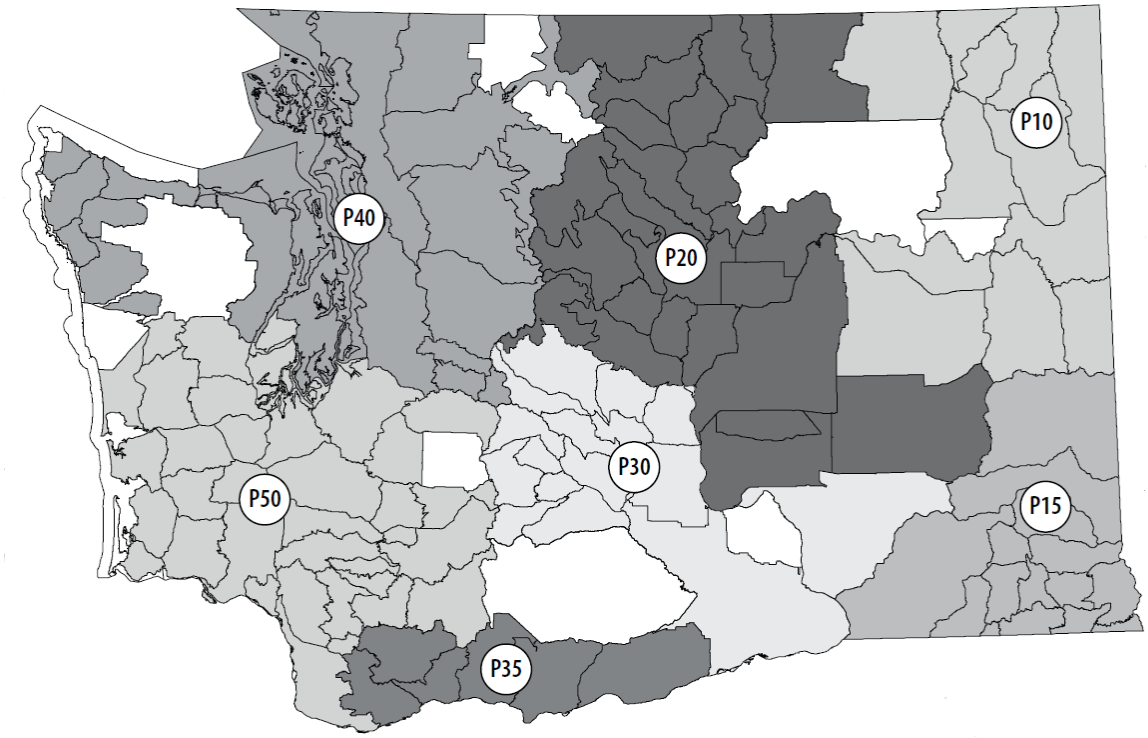


Figure 17. Map depicting WDFW's seven wild turkey population management units.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for turkeys. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, turkey CPUE rebounded from a below average year in 2013 to a CPUE of 0.11 in 2014, 0.10 in 2015, and 0.11 in 2016, similar to the previous five-year average of 0.10 turkeys per hunter day.

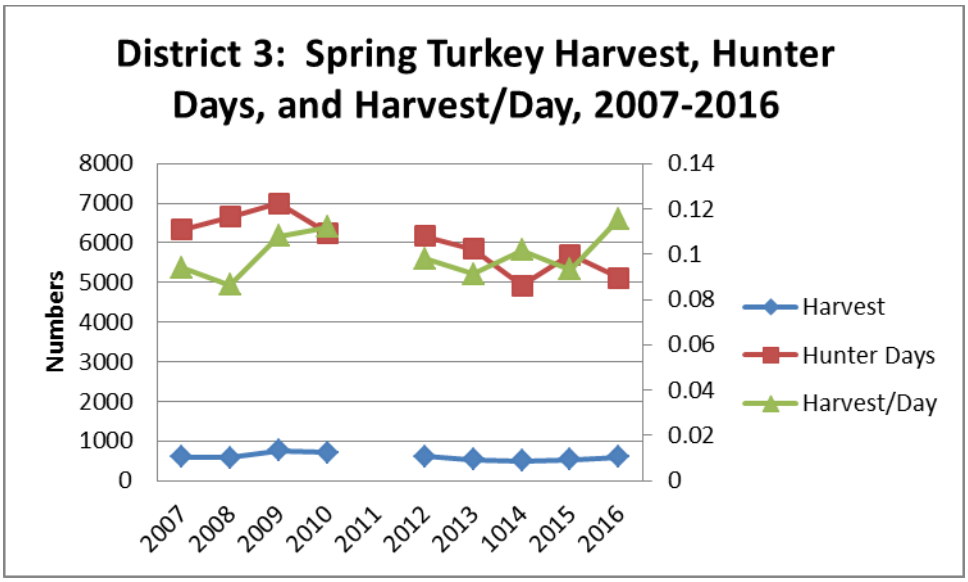


Figure 18. Spring turkey harvest numbers, number of hunter days, and harvest/day, 2007-2016 (no data available for 2011).

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

The total number of turkeys harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. Total harvest dropped from 824 turkeys in 2012 to 638 in 2013, and rebounded slightly to 742 harvested in 2014, 770 harvest in 2015, and 773 harvest in 2016, which is slightly higher than the five-year average of 734 birds. Based on long-term harvest trends, turkey populations in southeast Washington appear to have stabilized after years of increasing harvest, and future harvest is likely to be most impacted by spring weather conditions on brood survival. The spring and early summer of 2017 have been good conditions for nesting and brood rearing for turkeys. Biologists predict that turkey numbers should continue to be robust through the fall of 2017.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

Most turkey hunters target gobblers in the spring when males are displaying and readily come to box, slate, and mouth calls that mimic hen groups. Setting a blind or using camouflage clothing near meadows or small forest openings used as strutting grounds can be very effective. Often only minimal calling is needed to bring turkeys within range. Identifying roost areas and setting up nearby can also be effective, but efficient calling will be needed to attract birds. Gobble calls should only be used infrequently, and hunters generally should not stalk or approach gobble calls, as it may be another hunter. For other tips and tactics on safe and ethical turkey hunting, visit the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/turkey/index.html.

GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) have the highest turkey harvests. The highest densities are often found on private land in the lower foothill areas that have a mix of forest, grassland, and agricultural fields, and flocks can frequently be seen from roadways along the creek drainages in these areas. Some of these flocks have become nuisance birds, and landowners are often willing to grant permission to thin turkey numbers. Be respectful of private land and always ask for permission to hunt. Although densities are lower, good numbers of birds

can be found on National Forest lands and local wildlife areas, including the Wooten Wildlife Area in GMU 166 (Tucannon), Asotin Creek Wildlife Area in GMU 175 (Lick Creek), and the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area in GMU 186 (Grande Ronde).

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 3 but were not covered in detail include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional game birds with significant harvests in District 3 include chukar and gray partridge, and migratory birds including mourning doves, snipe, and coot. Asotin County accounts for the majority of the chukar and gray partridge harvest, with Columbia and Garfield counties having localized pockets of good hunting for these species. Walla Walla County accounts for the majority of the mourning dove harvest, and the introduced Eurasian collared dove, which can be hunted anytime with a small game license, has become common in the developed areas of all four counties.

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

District 3 does offer considerable public land hunting opportunities. Public land opportunities within the district are comprised of U.S. Forest Service (Umatilla National Forest), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Natural Resources, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Bureau of Land Management, and WDFW.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include GMU 157 (Mill Creek Watershed, closed to entry except by permit), GMU 162 (Dayton), GMU 166 (Tucannon), GMU 169 (Wenaha), GMU 172 (Mountain View), GMU 175 (Lick Creek), GMU 181 (Couse), and GMU 186 (Grande Ronde).

For more information related to the location of WDFW wildlife areas and other public land, visit WDFW's hunting access website.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

One of the most common questions from hunters is, "What is hunter access like in particular GMUs?" Generally, this question is referring to the amount of public land in each GMU, and the following ratings reflect that assumption. Please refer to the Private Land Access Program section of this document to determine which GMUs have significant amounts of additional lands available for public hunting.

The following rating system was developed for District 3 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they want to hunt. For the purposes of this exercise, access ratings are specific to the level of public land available. Each GMU was given a rating of excellent, good, or poor, with the level of access associated with each rating as follows:

- **Excellent** – A majority of the GMU is in public ownership.
- **Good** – There is a mix of public land within the GMU.

- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is privately owned.

Information provided is a brief description of major ownership. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Eastern Region (Region 1) office in Spokane Valley (509-892-1001) with other questions related to hunter access.

GMU 145 - MAYVIEW

Access rating – Poor

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) owns the shorelines of the Snake River. In many places, the USACE lands only extend a couple of hundred yards above the waterlines, but there are a few large habitat management units that provide considerable recreational opportunity. There is significant acreage from this unit enrolled in WDFW's Access Program.

GMU 149 – PRESCOTT

Access rating – Poor

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although USACE owns the shorelines of the Snake River. In many places, the USACE lands only extend a couple of hundred yards above the waterlines, but there are a few large habitat management units that provide considerable recreational opportunity. There is significant acreage from this unit enrolled WDFW's Access Program, and the Tucannon Wind Resource area managed by Portland General Electric has limited hunting (see GMU 163 for information and links).

GMU 154 – BLUE CREEK

Access Rating – Poor

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although a number of large landowners participate in the Department's private land access program. Hunters wishing to hunt in this GMU are highly encouraged to contact landowners long before their season opens to secure access. Hunters applying for special permits in this GMU are encouraged to secure access prior to applying.

GMU 157 – MILL CREEK WATERSHED

Access rating – No entry without permit

Although this GMU is 99 percent public lands, access is restricted to special permit holders. The Mill Creek Watershed has regulated public access because it is the source of drinking water for the City of Walla Walla. Currently, there are elk and deer permit opportunities within this GMU.

GMU 162 - DAYTON

Access rating – Good

Approximately half of this GMU is in public ownership, primarily USFS and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Private land access can be difficult to obtain within this GMU, although a few landowners participate in the department's private land access program.

GMU 163 - MARENGO

Access rating – Poor

A majority of this GMU is in private ownership. This GMU has a large percentage of the lands developed for wind power. Special rules are in place to ensure the safety of hunters, local residents, wind project workers, and equipment. More information is available through the wind project hunting video and brochure (PDF). Remember, hunting on private lands is a privilege and, as with all hunting activities, rules and prohibitions are enforced by state game agents and local law enforcement. Access to PacifiCorp's Marengo wind facility, Puget Sound Energy's adjacent Hopkins Ridge wind facility, and Portland General Electric's Tucannon River wind farm is jointly administered by the utilities. With this shared access program, hunters only need to register with one utility to hunt at any of these wind facilities.

Written permission for access to these lands may be obtained by completing the online registration form. Forms are also available at:

The General Store
426 Main Street
Dayton, Washington,
99328
509-382-1042
tgsdayton@gmail.com

The Last Resort
Kampstore
2005 Tucannon Rd.
Pomeroy, WA 99347

www.thelastresortrv.com

Four Star Supply
2255 Villard St
Pomeroy, WA 99347
509-843-3693
pomeroyfourstarsupply
@hotmail.com

GMU 166 - TUCANNON

Access rating – Excellent

A majority of this GMU is owned by WDFW and USFS. Access is good throughout most of the unit, with a portion of the unit being located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness.

GMU 169 - WENAHA

Access rating = Excellent

This GMU is 100 percent public lands, with 95 percent of it being located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. This is a very rugged wilderness topographically and access can be physically challenging.

GMU 172 – MOUNTAIN VIEW

Access rating – Good

Approximately 50 percent of this GMU is in public ownership. Access to the private lands can be difficult to obtain. This GMU also has the 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area located within it, where deer and elk hunting is permitted by special draw only.

GMU 175 – LICK CREEK

Access rating – Excellent

A majority of this GMU is in public ownership, administered by the USFS, WDFW, and DNR. Access is excellent and this GMU has the highest road density of any of the District 3 GMUs.

GMU 178 - PEOLA

Access rating – Poor

This GMU is predominantly private land, with the public land (DNR sections) often being land locked from public access. Landowners tend to allow significant access throughout the GMU and there are numerous landowners who participate in WDFW private lands access program.

GMU 181 - COUSE

Access rating – Good

This GMU is mostly private land, but WDFW does own a considerable amount of land. See the WDFW wildlife area webpage.

GMU 186 – GRANDE RONDE

Access rating – Good

Approximately half of this GMU is in public ownership. Access to the private land in this GMU has not been available to the public in recent years.

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

There are a multitude of private landowners in District 3 who are enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, cooperative agreements with some of these landowners have not been finalized. Even though there are no indications landowners will not renew their cooperative agreements for the 2017 hunting season, we were hesitant to provide that information in this document. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Eastern Region (Region 1) office in Spokane Valley (509-892-1001) or periodically check for updated information in this document or on WDFW's Hunter Access website.

The following is a summary of anticipated private land acres available through the Department's Private Lands Access program in 2015.

District 3 Access Acres

GMU	Hunting Only BY Written Permission (HOBWP)		Feel Free To Hunt (FFTH)		Register To Hunt (RTH)		Hunt By Reservation (HBR)		Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP)	
	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres
145 Mayview	8	7,750	10	6,911	1	1,837	1	1,060		
149 Prescott	9	33,013	19	43,671			5	11,563	1	7,280
154 Blue Creek	3	3636	17	13,218			1	1,605		
162 Dayton	1	620	1	11,087			4	7,885		
163 Marengo	7	7,833	5	12,741						
172 Mountain View			1	554			4	764		
175 Lick Creek	2	887								
178 Peola	8	11,417	4	1,591	1	2,602	3	1,646		
181 Couse	10	13,813	3	4,059	1	1,617				
186 Grande Ronde										
Total	48	78,969	60	93,832	3	6,056	18	24,523	1	7,280
Total Private Lands Access Acres	210,660									

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 3 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 many hunters do not know about that provide valuable information that helps solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources 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 is DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than $10 on DNR's website.

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.

Walla Walla County tax parcels can be searched using the county GIS site, which is a user-friendly mapping program that allows users to zoom in to their area of interest, click on a parcel, and identify who the owner of that parcel is. The Walla Walla County GIS tool can be accessed online.

WDFW'S GOHUNT 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.