

# Wildlife Program

Week of December 29, 2014-January 4, 2015

## **REGION 1**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Turkey Surveys:** District biologists Dana Base and Annemarie Prince continued this winter's survey of turkeys on established transects. Ten of twelve routes have been surveyed to date.



*Two white turkeys observed with flock of hens on the Clayton Transect*



*Winter closure signs hung at entrance to Cummings Creek*

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**WT Wooten WA – Winter Closure:** Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman hung signs closing Cummings Creek to all human access from January 1 to April 1 to protect wintering wildlife.



*Elk wintering in Cummings Creek drainage*

**GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCES**

**Wildlife Areas**

**Swanson Lakes Snowy Owl:** The beautiful white Schuster snowy owl was still out pleasing birders.

*Snowy owl, central Lincoln County, 01/02/2015* – Photo by Mike Finch



**GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**Wildlife Management**

**Wildlife Conflict:** Natural Resource Worker (NRW) Wade continued to monitor the deer in the town of Pomeroy. Wade kept in touch with the Mayor's office to keep scheduled hunts on track for the winter. Wade and Conflict Biologist Rasley assisted hunters with filling damage permits in Pomeroy.

*A few of the "problem" deer in Pomeroy*



**REGION 2**

NO REPORT SUBMITTED THIS WEEK

## **REGION 3**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Oak Creek Wildlife Area**

##### **Peak Elk Counts for Week:**

Headquarters-

Junction-

Nile-218

Sheep-170

Cowiche-

**Winter Weather:** Weather was very cold this past week with about two inches of snow falling early in the week. Weather is returning to above normal for this coming week with highs in the 40s and minimal chances of precipitation.

Elk are at the feed sites but in lower numbers. Access to vegetation remains good and warmer weather will keep hillsides open.

Elk are in seasonally good condition.

#### **Wenas Wildlife Area Winter Feeding**

Mellotte Feed Site elk numbers: 495+ animals

Mellotte gate was locked at 6am December 22<sup>nd</sup> and a sign was posted saying “No Public Entry.” On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Newland and upper Woodcamp gates were locked and winter closure signs were posted along the top of Cleman Ridge.



***Elk trailing along Woodcamp Ridge, ~2 miles SW of feed site, on December 23rd***

Assistant Manager Taylor set out salt and sulfur blocks on the feed site on the December 29<sup>th</sup> and began feeding December 30<sup>th</sup>.

Elk are in seasonally good condition. We had a cow die on the feed site on 12/28. Assistant Manager Taylor noticed that she was in poor health and had a small bloody wound behind her left, front leg. By the next morning she was dead.

**Winter Weather:** Weather temperatures were below normal for most of the last week, with highs in the mid to upper 20s and lows in the single digits to teens, with four to six inches of snow. Temperatures for the coming week are predicted to be well above normal, with highs in the mid-40s and lows in the upper 20s, with a chance of showers Monday and Friday.

### **Wildlife Management**

#### **Golden Eagle Offal Study:**

Biologist Moore retrieved a camera set up placed over hearts and kidneys collected from the Colockum Antlerless Elk Body Condition Sampling. This effort is evaluating the use of offal piles by golden eagles. Adult and immature goldens were observed at the site as well as bald eagles and other scavengers.

*An immature golden and adult bald competing for the last remaining scraps*



**Deer Surveys:** Biologist Moore spent a portion of a day on deer surveys in the Coleman Canyon area of PMU 32. A total of sixty-one deer were observed. These observations will be added to Biologist Bernatowicz's efforts in the PMU.

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCES***

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Oak Creek Wildlife Area:** Oak Creek Staff removed snow and deiced sidewalks following a small snowfall, spread gravel on the driveway and burned off weeds along the elk viewing area. Due to the holidays, the number of visitor's was very high, with hundreds of people per day stopping by to see elk. There are about 200 elk in the area that come and go from the feed site so the public wasn't completely disappointed. Manager Huffman answered dozens of phone calls and walk-ins to the office asking about feeding and when it would start.

**Sunnyside Wildlife Area:** Natural Resource Technician 2 Medina replaced “No Toxic Shot” signs at the two parking lots on South Emerald Road and monitored waters levels at Johnson’s Wetland, the Rice Paddies, and Hay Stack Ponds. He continued cleaning the barn and cleaning up scrap metal around Sunnyside headquarters.

***GOAL 4: BUILD AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATION BY SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY***

**Wildlife Areas**

**Oak Creek Wildlife Area:** Manager Huffman worked on the recruitment for the Oak Creek Forester Position. By the end of the week an offer was made to the top candidate and he accepted. Greg Mackey will start work on February 2<sup>nd</sup> at Oak Creek. Huffman worked on preparations for the new employee, including ordering uniform components, requesting a radio for the new vehicle and setting up a time with IT to install his computer.

**Colockum Wildlife Area:** Manager Lopushinsky checked in on the contract crew working on rebuilding the northern boundary fence. They have two miles completed and are still trying to work even in single digit temperatures this week. The lower elevations of the fence are still relatively snow free so some work can continue. The fence is being built without wood posts so it will withstand future fires better.

***Workers from “D-Fence” Fence Company build new boundary fence on the Colockum***

Assistant Hagan met with Herb Troxel from RMEF to map locations of old barbed wire fencing that will be removed this spring by RMEF volunteers.



**Sunnyside Wildlife Area:** Assistant Manager Sak, Program Manager McCorquodale, and Natural Resource Technician 2 Medina met with CAMP to go over details on the shop plans.

## **REGION 4**

### **GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE**

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project (PSNERP):** There is currently an open public comment period on PSNERP through January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015. More information on the process, the documents under review, and how to comment is available at: <http://pugetsoundnearshore.org/outreach.html>.

**Fir Island Farm Final Design Project:** Projects Coordinator Brokaw initiated the process of ordering new water quality monitoring level loggers through the IT Department. Given the high malfunction rate and expense in repairing the current devices, the Project Team has decided it will be more economical to use equipment from a different manufacturer that has a proven record of success and much better warranty. Grant funds are available for this switch in equipment.

#### **Private Lands/Access Management**

**Cross-agency Coordination:** Biologist Caldwell met with USGS Biologist Dusek to tour waterfowl hunting locations in Skagit and Snohomish Counties. Biologist Caldwell provided maps and information on where, when, and how to find people in order to survey harvested waterfowl. Mr. Dusek and his team will be in the area for eighteen days sampling harvested waterfowl for Avian Influenza.

#### **Wildlife Conflict Management**

**Wildlife Conflict Monitoring & Management:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman responded to three calls for elk damage complaints in Skagit County where follow-up meetings with landowners took place. Specialist Witman also received a deer complaint in reference to a neighbor feeding deer on Whidbey Island.

### **GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCES**

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Brant Survey:** Biologist DeBruyn surveyed bays in Skagit and Whatcom County to determine the number of wintering brant. The flyway council has determined that a minimum of six thousand brant must be present in Skagit County for a hunting season to proceed.

	30 Dec. 2014	3 Jan. 2015
Fidalgo Bay	0	0
Swinomish Reserve	0	0
Padilla Bay	1975	2710
Samish Bay	1755	875
Skagit Total	3730	3585
Portage Bay	303	520
Lummi Bay	2300	1800
Birch Bay	306	245
Blaine	336	475
Whatcom Total	3245	3040

*Brant Numbers from 2014-15 Aerial Surveys*

The flight on 29 December showed numbers below the threshold for a hunt, so the process was repeated on 3 January. Although the birds had moved around a bit, numbers remained below the level necessary for a hunt.

**Brant Aerial Imaging:** Biologist DeBruyn assisted Waterfowl Specialist Evenson with taking pictures of transects in Padilla and Samish Bay in order to develop an alternate method of assessing population levels. Traditional surveys were conducted before and after the imaging flights to determine the accuracy of the photo counts. The images are still being examined for numbers of birds.



*Brant images Taken from a camera mounted in the belly of the department Partnovia*

**Swan Mortality and Morbidity Project:** Science Tech Anderson, Biologist

DeBruyn and intern Laura Krogman, as well as cooperators from Puget Sound Energy and the Trumpeter Swan Society, continued to conduct field surveys this week to monitor for sick and injured trumpeter and tundra swans. This week, fourteen swans (thirteen trumpeter and one tundra) were collected in Skagit and Whatcom counties. Gizzard and liver samples were collected for contaminant analysis. Tracheal and Cloacal swabs were taken to monitor for other diseases. Power line strikes contributed to two mortalities recovered this week, with the “unknown” cause of death making up the remainder of mortalities this week. Swan mortalities recorded as unknown causes of death are swan carcasses recovered in and/or near roosting areas that appear to have succumbed to disease. Laboratory results will confirm or deny the suspected presence of avian diseases.

	Lead	Power line Strike	Trauma	Unknown	Feather Pile	Total (per county)
Sumas						
Whatcom		18	3	16	8	45
Snohomish	4	6	5	3		18
Skagit		18	3	16	6	43
San Juan				1		1
						107 (Grand Total)

**Avian Influenza Surveillance:** Biologist DeBruyn organized and facilitated the collection of samples from hunter harvested waterfowl by an epidemiologist from the National Wildlife Health Center and an intern from Tufts University. A total of six hundred samples have been

collected in Whatcom and Skagit Counties in the last two weeks. Two strains of High Path influenza have been identified in waterfowl and raptors in Whatcom County. Sick and dead waterfowl and raptors were also collected in Whatcom County.

*Intern Laura Krogman bags a sick duck off Wiser Lake in Whatcom County*



## Wildlife Areas

### **Samish Unit Enhancement**

**Project:** Projects Coordinator

Brokaw fielded a phone call from an adjacent farmer to discuss the project and set a time to meet in the field next week to review his concerns with future water control management. Brokaw also fielded a call from a reporter with the Skagit

Valley Herald with questions about the project. There is a public comment period open on the project through January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 as part of the Skagit County Special Use permit. For details on the project and how to submit comments, please see project PL14-0499 at:

<http://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/PlanningAndPermit/notices2014/122514.htm>.

Following the comment period, Skagit County will schedule a date for a public hearing examiner session whereby additional verbal comments will be sought and a decision on the permit will be made.

**Waterfowl Program:** Tech Cosgrove checked water levels and water control structures at the Samish unit. Cosgrove picked up hunter survey cards and filled the survey station with blank cards. Natural Resource Specialist Meis and Cosgrove checked water levels and remaining waterfowl forage on the Island unit. There is still a considerable amount of corn and fava beans, allowing for good duck hunting throughout the week.

## Private Lands/Access Management

**Waterfowl Quality Hunt Surveys and Management:** Techs Otto and Deyo completed a survey of use at access sites in Whatcom, Skagit, and Snohomish counties. After completing the surveys, the technicians assessed blind conditions at multiple sites. Biologist Caldwell submitted a Skagit Waterfowl Quality Hunt site for approval. Biologist Caldwell coordinated with waterfowl use survey volunteers to survey on weekends and holidays. Biologist Caldwell and Deyo also entered use and success data into a database for later analysis.

**Blind Construction:** Tech Deyo was able to construct a blind at the Beaver Marsh 1 Waterfowl Quality Hunt Site. This hunting site is now available to reserve online through the Hunt by Reservation system. NRT Deyo rebuilt a blind at the Swinomish Spit Reserve that was destroyed during a winter storm. The blind will be used for potential hunting next season, as well as for

performing an age/race determination survey on brant. Tech Deyo assisted Biologist DeBruyn with the brant survey. (See picture below)

***Blind at the Swinomish Spit Reserve***

***GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE***



**Wildlife Areas**

**Skagit Headquarters:** Cosgrove and Meis recovered a sick swan from the lower Skagit River near the Wildlife Area moorage facility on Freshwater Slough. Cosgrove fabricated dog-proof wood and metal bait boxes for rodent control at the Headquarters shop and office area. Manager Rotton and Meis worked on draft agricultural lease summaries for the 2015 agricultural year.

**Island Unit:** Meis measured field crossings for culvert replacement and took photos of an old barn located by the barn tidegate. Manager Rotton continued to follow up on action items related to the barge lease agreement, tide gate repair process, and ditch maintenance project for the Island unit. Cosgrove picked up litter and monitored hunter and waterfowl use at the Leque Island, Samish, Fir Island Farms, Jensen, Island, Headquarters, and Milltown units.

**Private Lands/Access Management**

**Blind Relocation:** After receiving feedback from several different members of the public, Biologist Caldwell determined that the blind at the 276 Waterfowl Quality Hunt site needed to be relocated. Tech Deyo and Biologist Caldwell decided to move the blind to a better location for hunters. The new area has a larger amount of water present and is in the vicinity of where members of the public asked to relocate the blind.



***Blind relocated at 276 Road***

**Waterfowl Quality Hunt Questions:** Biologist Caldwell received many questions from hunters about quality hunting opportunities on private lands in Region 4. Biologist Caldwell referred these hunters to internet resources and answered their questions.

**418 Special Permit Hunt:** Biologist Caldwell contacted the final three remaining archery hunters who have not harvested an animal in GMU 418. Biologist Caldwell made arrangement to meet with these individuals post-harvest/season to obtain information and access keys.

### **Wildlife Conflict Management**

#### **Wildlife Conflict Monitoring &**

**Management:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman received a report of an injured cow elk in Saxon-Acme area. The reporting party will continue to monitor the location of any elk and will update Specialist Witman on animal whereabouts. Specialist Witman also contacted a landowner in the Minkler Lake area who is experiencing ongoing elk damage and can't keep his



cattle fenced. Specialist Witman discussed future fencing options and discussed the use of Master Hunters and Tribal Hunters on his property. The landowner is considering the options and will follow up in the coming weeks. Conflict Specialist Witman received a damage complaint in the Acme area. The landowner is conducting daily hazing with elk returning each day. The landowner would like to use an audible deterrent system. Conflict Specialist Witman will follow-up with this landowner after the winter workshop. Conflict Specialist Witman contacted a landowner on Whidbey Island whose neighbors are complaining about the landowner feeding deer in the area. Wildlife Conflict Technician Cogdal monitored elk in the Skagit Valley and Acme areas and looked for pre-bait sites for elk trapping. He also re-finalized the Garcia fence contract.

**Landowner Meetings:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor Caldwell was contacted by a concerned party about elk related hunting permits and safety issues on and around their property. Supervisor Caldwell discussed trespassing and property boundary delineation/communication, HWY 20 crossing issues, neighbor relations, elk injury, and different methods to achieve mutual goals. Master Hunter use, qualifications, and safety issues were also discussed. After talking about these topics, a better understanding of the situation was gained by everyone involved. A follow up meeting was also conducted by Conflict Specialist Witman in the field to address other needs.

**Wildlife Conflict Staff Meetings:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor Caldwell met with staff to discuss elk damage issues, the upcoming winter workshop agenda, and other conflict related

topics. During these meetings timelines were established, goals/objectives for the 2015 season were outlined, and strategies were discussed to meet management needs.

### **Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordination**

**Hunter Education support:** Hunter education coordinator Steven Dazey continued to follow up on instructor applicants who had not turned in their authorization to conduct a background check. With the new contractor performing these checks, this new authorization form is required. The HE Department is in the process of rewriting the instructor application to include this authorization. Applications already received but still needing background checks need to complete this additional form. Coordinator Dazey assisted a student to get registered in an upcoming class.

**2015 Instructor Incentive Permits:** Coordinator Dazey answered questions from instructors who have received their end of year packets. Many questions on how to apply for and what permits they qualified for were answered. Also included in the packets was the signup for the 2015 In Service Training to be held in Wenatchee this coming March, Terry Hoffer Award nomination forms and the Chief Instructor Financial report forms. Dazey fielded questions from instructors on each of these.

**Master Hunter Advisory Group:** Coordinator Dazey forwarded the recruitment announcement for members of the Master Hunter Advisory Group to his list of master hunters in Regions 1, 2, and 3 where the Department was looking for an increase in applications. The master hunter contact lists are used as a resource for volunteers for agency projects as they are required to complete forty hours of service each five year period to maintain their Master Hunter permit status. This also gave Dazey an opportunity to update and correct the bad emails that he had on his contact list. Dazey fielded questions from several Master Hunters interested in applying to become a member of the Master Hunter Advisory Group (MHAG).

### ***GOAL 4: SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Flight Follow:** Biologist Milner followed the brant survey crew for their Padilla Bay and surroundings flight and photography session.

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Fire Extinguisher Training:** Projects Coordinator Brokaw completed the required online training module.

Manager Rotton completed the Endangered Species Act training and will complete the last module of the leadership training class this week.

## **Private Lands/Access Management**

**Private Lands Biologist Interview #1:** Biologist Caldwell, Biologist Milner, and Refuge Manager Rotton conducted the first round of interviews for the vacant Private Lands Biologist Position located out of La Conner, WA. Reference checks will soon be conducted. Afterwards, selected candidates will be contacted and asked to attend a second interview.

**WDFW/State Training:** Biologist Caldwell completed Ethics, two different IT Security Awareness, and Fire Extinguisher training courses. NRT Deyo completed WA-State IT Security Awareness training and WDFW Fire Extinguisher training.

**WDFW/State Training:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor Caldwell completed Ethics, two different IT Security Awareness, and Fire Extinguisher training courses.

**Wildlife Conflict Landowner and Issue List Summary:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor Caldwell and conflict staff created a summary list of landowners across Region 4, their conflict issues, and their contact information for management needs.

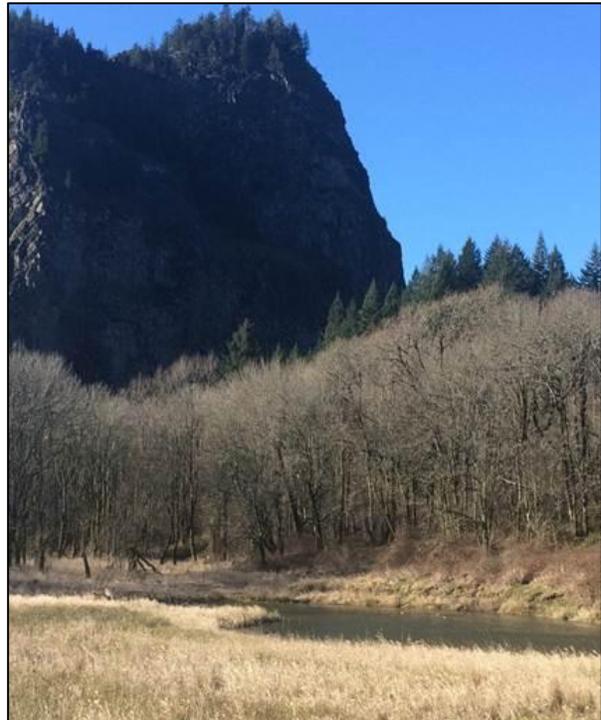
## **REGION 5**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory:** Biologists Bergh, George, Doorly, and Anderson conducted waterfowl surveys this week as part of the nationwide mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory. The District 9 section of the survey covers spots along the Columbia River from Washougal to John Day Dam. Weather was cold, clear, and windy during the week. Surveys will be finished in the next week and data analysis will follow.

***Ducks in a pond on Pierce NWR with Beacon Rock in the background***



***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES***

**Wildlife Management**

**Access to Hunt:** Conflict Specialist McDonald assisted a spring turkey hunter seeking more information on areas to hunt in Klickitat County. She was able to direct the hunter to a landowner with a high number of nuisance turkeys.

***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE***

**Wildlife Conflict**

**Wildlife Conflict – D-10:** Conflict Specialist Conklin issued several damage permits this week to land owners in Cowlitz and Lewis Counties, and also coordinated with land owners in Randle to issue damage permits so they can begin using Master Hunters to control elk damage.

**REGION 6**

NO REPORT SUBMITTED THIS WEEK