

# Wildlife Program

Week of Dec. 24 – Dec. 30, 2018

## **WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION**

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

**Fishers Released in the North Cascades for the First Time:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the National Park Service, Conservation Northwest, and their project partners released fishers in North Cascades National Park on Wednesday, Dec. 5. The six fishers (five females and one male) are from central Alberta and they made the trip by plane from Calgary, Alberta to Abbotsford, BC (just north of Sumas, Washington) before being driven to the park on Wednesday morning. A gathering of over 100 fisher enthusiasts was there to cheer them on as they made quick departures from their transport boxes and began their exploration of the North Cascades ecosystem. A number of media outlets reported on this event and links to those media stories and videos are provided below. We expect to release an additional 46 fishers in the North Cascades this fall and winter, and for most of these fishers to be released on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

<https://www.kuow.org/stories/porcupines-and-hares-beware-weasel-like-fishers-return-to-north-cascades>

<https://www.king5.com/video/news/local/fishers-released-into-the-wild/281-8362275>

[https://www.goskagit.com/news/local\\_news/fishers-released-into-north-cascades/article\\_e45694a6-06f5-5c99-a099-f3c6a92758eb.html](https://www.goskagit.com/news/local_news/fishers-released-into-north-cascades/article_e45694a6-06f5-5c99-a099-f3c6a92758eb.html)

<https://q13fox.com/2018/12/06/fishers-released-in-north-cascades-elusive-carnivores-once-considered-extinct-in-washington-state/>

<https://www.opb.org/news/article/fishers-reintroduction-north-cascades-washington/>

**Coastal Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Analysis:** Jeff Azerrad developed an initial list of focal species to support an analysis to illustrate areas important to habitat connectivity across Washington’s Coastal Region. We select focal species to represent the connectivity needs of a broader assemblage of wildlife. We also want to make sure the needs of focal species are representative of the habitat connectivity needs of wildlife across a broad range of coastal Washington ecological systems. The initial list includes a “proposed” and a “rejected” list of species alongside a rationale explaining the reasons why each species is on either list. The initial list includes roughly 25 proposed species. Early next year, regional species and ecosystem experts will narrow down this list to a final list of about five focal species. After selecting focal species, the [modeling team](#) will collect data for each focal species to inform the connectivity model. This model will be similar in scope and scale to an earlier model of important areas to habitat connectivity in the [Columbia Plateau](#).

**WDFW’s Engagement in Landscape Conservation Collaborative:** Jeff Azerrad organized a meeting to discuss agency engagement in partnerships across the state that promote collaborative landscape conservation. At the meeting was Acting Diversity Division Manager Taylor Cotten, along with partners in Habitat Program’s Ecosystem Services Division (Terra Rentz and Lynn Helbrecht) and Regional Habitat Program Manager Dave Howe. Participants originally met to evaluate our agency’s commitment and engagement with a group that organized to address conservation in [Pacific Northwest Coastal Landscapes](#) through collaboration. Although WDFW is engaged in this and other landscape conservation collaborative (e.g., [Arid Lands Initiative](#)), the participants concluded that these groups are important enough that WDFW needs a strategic, cross-program approach to engaging in these efforts. Going forward participants plan to elevate the discussion within and across their respective programs.

**Conservation Assessment:** Ann Potter, with colleagues from Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), submitted a manuscript, “Monarch butterfly distribution and breeding ecology in Idaho and Washington,” to the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*. The journal is planning a special edition for the monarch butterfly, and the vast majority of research and publications to date have focused on the monarch population inhabiting the midwestern and eastern portions of North America. This recently submitted paper reports on a two-year study (2016 and 2017) of milkweeds and monarchs conducted by our two state agencies, the first statewide studies of breeding monarchs, their habitat, and threats in the west.



*Adult monarch nectaring on nonnative Canada thistle, Okanogan County, Washington* – Photo by Jordan Erlenbach, WDFW



*Milkweed patch targeted by herbicide application, Lemhi County, Idaho* - Photo by Toni Ruth, IDFG.

## **REGION 1**

No report submitted this week.

## **REGION 2**

No report submitted this week.

## **REGION 3**

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

#### **Oak Creek Wildlife Area - Manager Greg Mackey**

Manager Mackey was contacted by many visitors and answered questions about winter feeding. There has been a significant increase in visitors to the headquarters area inquiring about timing of feeding operations to allow for public viewing. The help of the Washington Education Corps volunteers is greatly appreciated as they continue to staff the Oak Creek Visitor's Center on weekends to inform visitors about the status of the winter feeding program.

Natural Resource Worker Blore repaired wire gates on stock fence in the Cowiche Unit.



***One of three reconstructed stock fence gates on the Cowiche Unit***

Assistant Manager Berry performed maintenance on Cowiche elk fence and posted signs to deter hiker/elk interactions near the feed yard in preparation for the commencement of feeding at the site. Minimal signs of any elk east of fence were observed, but a lot of boot tracks/dog tracks coming into wildlife area through the re-entry gates in the fence line.

Oak Creek staff members continued feeding operations at the Nile feed site, seeing a steady upward trend in elk numbers despite an increase in recreational traffic during the holidays. Peak elk on site was 172 animals with the only bulls on site being a handful of yearlings. One spotted calf has been observed on site as well.



*Elk feeding at the Nile feed site*

Assistant Manager Berry continues to monitor the Cowiche area for elk numbers and activity. Several hundred elk have been observed in the area, but weather has still been too mild to begin feeding activities.

A few hundred elk have also been observed above Oak Creek Headquarters feed site, but there is still plenty of satisfactory open winter range in the area. The weather has been too mild to begin feeding.

#### **L.T. Murray Wildlife Area - Manager Melissa Babik**

Manager Babik worked with partners at Conservation Northwest and Pheasants Forever on a joint application to National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's program "Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors." Applications are due Jan. 10 and there is still confusion on how WDFW will submit applications, account for match, and apply indirect costs.

Natural Resource Technicians Nass and Daling fed elk at both Robinson and Watt. The numbers are fluctuating with the weather and warmer temperatures. Watt started out with about 20 cows and calves on Dec. 12 after getting about an inch of snow and temperatures at 32 degrees. Numbers increased to about 200 by Dec. 20, but as the temperatures rose into the low 40s and the snow began to melt, they stayed on the hillside and preferred to eat grass.

Natural Resource Technicians Nass and Daling fed about 100 elk on Dec. 12 at Robinson, but the following day they were gone. We speculate they went over to Watt, where the numbers increased there by about that number the following day. Three days later, there were about 40 elk, which jumped to 150 a day later. By Dec. 19, following warmer temperatures, they all disappeared again. We are expecting rain and snow this weekend and into next week and expect to be feeding again at that time.



*First herd of elk at Robinson Canyon feeding area. At one point numbers increased to about 175 then all left as temperatures rose and snow melted*



*A generous neighbor brought his loader to re-stock our truck and trailer while our tractor is being repaired. This is a handy machine!*

**Winter Feeding at Mellotte Feed Site:** Elk numbers: Approximately 400 animals.

Assistant Manager Taylor began feeding Dec. 17. The elk are cleaning up the hay, but have been skittish with animals unwilling to come onto the feed site while the feed truck was there. The last few days they have finally begun to settle down.

The first weekend of feeding, Assistant Manager Taylor had a vehicle with two men in it come through the closed gate at Mellotte as he was returning from the feed site. They wanted to go through into the closed area and first indicated they had not seen the closed area signs, and then said the sign said elk closure and they were hunting for deer, so it did not affect them. Taylor informed them that the area was closed to all access and they would need to go back out the way they came in. There have also been vehicles parked at the Hardy walkthrough gate with no one around them. This may be the reason for the elk being standoffish.

Elk appear to be in good condition, with no limping observed.

#### **District 4 Wildlife Biologist - Jason Fidorra**

District Biologist Fidorra discussed project proposals for federal grant funding related to habitat restoration of mule deer wintering grounds with district staff members. Several sites in the district could be suitable and various options discussed. The District 4 proposals may be included with a statewide project proposal due early in the year.

District Biologist Fidorra responded to a request from Public Affairs regarding a report of a white “wolf” seen in a neighbor’s yard on Christmas Eve in Kahlotus. A local news reporter was interested in this story after the reporting party contacted Washington State Patrol. Fidorra responded to the reporter regarding the possible sighting and general information on wolves in the Columbia Basin.

District Biologist Fidorra reviewed data collected from user registration cards at pheasant release sites this year. From October to mid-December, 1,120 users registered at the four pheasant release sites. At least 70 percent of users were hunters, but 25 percent of users did not indicate the type of use onsite or neglected to return the bottom of the form after hunting. Another 5 percent were registered non-hunting users. This is the first year of collecting this data in District 4. Despite incomplete reporting, pheasant hunter harvest accounted for 42 percent of the 930 birds planted in 2018.

District Biologist Fidorra proofed and reviewed deer data from road surveys in the Columbia Basin, and discussed some outlying survey results with district biologists.

**Yakima Canyon Bighorn Sheep Project:** District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz placed 25 pounds of salt and increased volumes of apples at two sites early in the week. A check of the sites on Friday found the salt again missing along with the cameras. A few emails and calls solved the mystery of missing bait and previously “malfunctioning” cameras. A Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) employee was not aware of the project, believed someone was trying to poach deer, and took matter into his own hands. The cameras were retrieved from BOR. The pictures obtained while the cameras were out did not documented any ungulate use. Deer were walking by the bait and not stopping.

**Clemans Bighorn Trapping:** Biologists Bernatowicz baited the Clemans site with apples and salt. The plan for this winter is to trap some of the Clemans surplus bighorn sheep and send them to Utah. There has been very little winter weather to date at Clemans elevation. Alternate baits are being explored to see if bighorns can be attracted into the trap without harsh winter weather. If bighorns cannot be attracted to the Clemans feed site, it is doubtful trapping will be successful in the Yakima River Canyon where deep snow is infrequent.

**Mountain Goat Mortality:** Biologists Bernatowicz helped arrange a volunteer to investigate a goat mortality near Quartz Mountain for the Muckleshoot Tribe. The goat was killed by a cougar. Three radio-collared goats were killed by cats in District 8 over the last week. Two were 2018 transplants from the Olympics.

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

**Sunnyside Wildlife Area - Manager Phillip Buser**

Manager Buser collected registration cards from the Christmas holiday weekend at the Sunnyside Headquarters Unit, and restocked boxes for the New Year's Holiday weekend.

A group of Boy Scouts replaced the perimeter signs for the safety zone around the shooting range at the Rattlesnake Slope Unit. Boy Scout Reid Oldfield coordinated the effort of volunteers and shooting range personnel as part of his Eagle Scout project. The previous signs were faded, burned up, or shot.



*Boy Scouts volunteering to replace signs around the shooting range at Rattlesnake Slope*

**L.T. Murray Wildlife Area - Manager Melissa Babik**

Manager Babik met with Biologist Torrey to brainstorm for the Expanding Your Horizon's outreach event. The duo is preparing a scavenger hunt for the young women who select their educational session.

Manager Babik continued to work with Conservation Northwest staff members on an interpretive panel for the Green Gate area. Conservation Northwest is graciously funding the interpretive panel! Babik is also working on the designs for a panel at the Joe Watt feeding site paid for by Kittitas Field and Stream Club. Tis the season for collaborate giving! Thank you partners for helping in our outreach efforts!

### **Region 3 Private Lands Biologist - Seth Hulett**

Private Lands Biologist Hulett assisted three hunters interested in gaining hunting access on areas enrolled in the Hunt by Reservation or Hunt by Written Permission program.

Private Lands Biologist Hulett communicated with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) about the government shutdown and how it would be affecting the office. At this time, FSA is shut down until a new spending bill is passed. NRCS is open for at least a few more weeks. If the office is shut down fully, Hulett will work out of the Pasco office as needed.

### **Region 3 Private Lands Technician - Ashley Rodgers**

Private Lands Technician Rodgers continued to visit and maintain Hunting Access sites in Franklin and Benton counties.

Private Lands Technician Rodgers completed a waterfowl survey on Sunnyside Wildlife Area lands in Franklin County. Bird numbers are down across the Basin as the mild weather this season has kept water open further north.

Private Lands Technician Rodgers continued organizing and entering hunter data from Army Corp pheasant release sites, as well as sites enrolled into Hunt by Reservation.

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

### **District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist - Don Hand**

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to monitor elk activity and movements near Hanford's southern border on Rattlesnake Mountain. Strong numbers of elk continue in mid elevation locations with minimal nocturnal movements outside the national monument.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand worked on finalizing cost share fencing design and material costs for a project to protect a tree fruit operation on Rattlesnake Mountain from deer and elk damage.

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

**L.T. Murray Wildlife Area - Manager Melissa Babik**

Assistant Manager Winegeart worked with the IT Service Desk to come up with a solution for the Ellensburg field office wi-fi that has not worked correctly since the opening of the new office building. After a couple tries, the issue appears to have been resolved.

**Wenas Wildlife Area - Manager Cindi Confer Morris**

Manager Confer Morris worked with Access Manager Garcia and Enforcement personnel to address removal of an abandoned motorhome at the Ringer access site. Enforcement sent official notification to the registered owner of our intent to dispose of the vehicle. If the owner does not reply within 15 days (Jan. 7), we will have it removed.

Manager Confer Morris reviewed the non-forest fire protection contract with DNR, which included documentation of all Wenas Wildlife Area acres having been shifted under the Forest Fire Protection Assessment (FFPA) as of April 2018. She sent an email to Forest Management Lead Tveten and Wildlife Area/Access Manager Dahmer with some questions regarding how the shift will affect some aspects of fire management and restoration funding. She also forwarded the contract onto other eastside managers that are impacted by the shift of some non-forest lands into FFPA.

Assistant Manager Taylor checked on the Conrad elk fence contractor several times. They have wire up on Segment B of the new fence (NE corner of Section 27 north to Austin spur) and a portion of it hog-ringed. They are currently hanging wire on Segment A (Section 27 NE corner to NW corner), working from east to west. Segment C (NW corner south to the orchards) has posts installed, but no new wire up yet.

**REGION 4**

No report submitted this week.

**REGION 5**

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

**Puget Island Columbian White-tailed Deer Survey:** Biologists Stephens and Burlingame assisted Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge with annual Columbian white-tailed deer surveys. Surveys are conducted on and off the refuge throughout the deer's range.

Surveys are done by driving routes and counting and classifying deer observed. One-hundred and seventeen deer were observed on two routes covering most of Puget Island.



*Puget Island Columbian white-tailed deer survey*

**Dusky Canada Geese:** Biologist Burlingame surveyed areas in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties for dusky geese. Small flocks of duskies were observed, along with large flocks of cackling, taverners, western, and snow geese (including a couple blue phase).

**Increase of Water Levels at Shillapoo:** Conditions for this waterfowl season have been dry to say the least, but over the past two weeks, water levels on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area have increased significantly. With the recent winter rainstorms, most wetlands currently have sufficient amounts of water, making them huntable. Pumping activities are still very intermittent with the lower than average river levels, but due to the recent rain events, many of the wetlands in the South Unit have open water even though no water has been pumped to them. Water levels in the North Unit and the Shillapoo lakebed are still lower than normal, but more than 100 acres are ponded. All of the managed ponds in the Vancouver Lake Unit have about average water levels. Goose numbers in the area are about average, with many snow geese using the Port of Vancouver and Columbia Land Trust properties south of the wildlife area. Duck numbers, however, are well below average for this time of year. We hope that more birds will start showing up in the last month of the season.

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

**Southwest Washington Goose Management Area 2-Inland:** Biologist Burlingame checked goose hunters in Clark County to collect goose harvest information and monitor for any dusky harvest violations. One harvest was reported by phone but was unable to be inspected. No violations were observed during monitoring. The total number of dusky harvest violations is two, both of which were found at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge check station. The goose season in Goose Management Area 2-Inland is open Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday, now through January 13, 2019.

**Master Hunter Assistance:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen provided advice to a Master Hunter who will be hunting the Trout Lake Elk Area 5062 hunt for the first time.

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

**Dead Calf:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen and Officer Bolton worked with a livestock producer who reported a dead 600-pound calf out on the range.

**Cougar Sighting:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen followed up with a landowner who reported seeing a cougar on his property. The landowner wanted the cougar to be “trapped and relocated to Montana.” Jacobsen advised the landowner that he lived in an area where cougar sightings are not uncommon, and that relocation was not an option at this point, especially since the cougar had only been observed passing through at night. Advice on living with cougars was given.

**REGION 6**

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

**Dusky Goose Survey #6:** Biologist Sundstrom and Biologist Michaelis conducted the first half of January dusky goose survey in Grays Harbor and the northern portion of Pacific counties. Dusky goose numbers in Grays Harbor County have steadily increased over the past four surveys (2, 3, 45, and 137) with 333 found this survey, three of which were banded. Dusky numbers in northern Pacific County remained stable while, those in southern Pacific County declined compared to the prior survey window. *Note: Towards the latter part of the survey, weather and visibility deteriorated, which may have affected the number of geese observed.*

12/28/18	Cackler	#banded	Aleutian	#banded	Tav/Lesser	#banded	Dusky	#banded	Western	#banded	Wusky	#banded	GWF	Snow	Unknown	Totals
Grays Harbor County	215	0	0	0	191	0	333	3	405	0	0	0	0	13	53	1,210
North Pacific County	878	0	0	0	859	0	1,071	8	43	0	0	0	3	0	190	3,044
South Pacific County	716	0	4	0	99	0	683	21	79	0	11	0	29	28	567	2,216
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,809</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,149</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,087</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>6,470</b>

**Goose Hunter Checks:** Biologist Sundstrom worked all six goose hunting days over the past two weeks. GMA 2-Coastal area opened on Dec. 22 and hunter participation was good but harvest numbers were low. The majority of the snow and white-fronted geese have moved out of the area and a large increase in the number of dusky geese has moved in making hunters very cautious.

Biologist Michaelis conducted field checking and goose hunter contacts in Pacific County. During the last part of the reporting week, hunters reported geese appeared to be very cautious and hard to attract into decoys.

Other waterfowl hunters reported different success for duck hunting. One Pacific County resident waterfowl hunter reported and complimented WDFW's access site along Highway 101 near the middle fork of the Nemah River. This site was created a few years ago and is managed as part of the Olympic Wildlife Area. Besides waterfowl hunting, elk often frequent the property as well and many different bird species. It is also just a very nice place to walk out and see this portion of Willapa Bay.

***Dec. 16 through 29 Grays Harbor and northern Pacific counties – Hunter harvest reports and field checks***

Date	County	# of Hunters	✓'d or PI	December 16th - 29th Goose Hunter Checks									
				Goose Species Reported or Recorded									
				Cackler	Aleutian	Tavemer	Lesser	Dusky	Western	GWF	Snow	UK/Other	None Harvested
12/16	GH	2	✓'d										X
	GH	1	PI										X
12/19	GH	4	✓'d	5		6			1				
12/22	PA	3	✓'d	2							1		
	PA	2	✓'d										X
	GH	1	✓'d			3							
	GH	3	PI										X
12/23	PA	2	✓'d	3							1		
	PA	3	✓'d										X
	GH	1	PI	2									
12/26	PA	4	PI	4									
12/29	PA	2	PI	4						2			
	GH	1	PI										X
	GH	2	✓'d										X
Totals		31		20	0	9	0	0	1	2	2	0	7

(PA=Pacific County, GH=Grays Harbor County; ✓'d=physically checked & recorded, PI=phoned in report)

*Dec. 23 through 29 southern Pacific County – Hunter harvest reports and field checks*

Date	Location /County	# of Hunters	ü' or phoned in	December 23 <sup>rd</sup> – December 29 <sup>th</sup> Goose Hunter Checks Goose Species Reported or Recorded								
				Cackler	Aleutian	Taverner	Lesser	Dusky	Western	GWF	Snow	UK/Other
12/23	SWPA	1	PI	4								
12/23	CPA	3	ü'	1								
12/29	SWPA	2	PI			1						
12/29	CPA	2	ü'	2 hunters reporting no geese								
Totals		8		5		1						

*SWPA = Riekkola Willapa NWR, Sandridge Rd., and near the town of Chinook. CPA = Areas south of South Bend to HWY 4ü' = field checked, PI = Birds phoned in and classed as to what the hunter(s) believed them to be.*

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

**Habituated elk:** Natural Resource Technician Tupen assisted Biologist Harris, Biologist Tirhi, Biologist Butler, and WDFW Enforcement officers with a habituated elk that was food conditioned to humans. It was reported as being aggressive in the Graham area. The elk was tranquilized and moved to the Tahoma State Forest.

**Bird Rescue:** Natural Resource Technician Tupen transported an injured bird to a local rehabilitator. The bird appeared to be a common murre.

**Private Lands Access:** Natural Resource Technician Tupen checked Register to Hunt sites near Elma and Oakville. The sites seem to be getting used a lot by waterfowl hunters. This is good news, as it seems many hunters have already discovered the new site off Wenzel Slough Road.

**Damage Harvest Violation:** Biologist Harris received a call from a hunter who had just harvested an elk using a Damage Prevention Permit. The way the hunter reported caused him to ask if he had a Damage Tag. The answer was no. He informed the hunter that this would be reported to WDFW Police. WDFW Police responded and found several issues. The elk was seized and donated to the Union Gospel Mission. This hunter had used a damage prevention permit before and should have known the rules.