

2024 District 1 Hunting Prospects

Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Orielle counties



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WILDLIFE**

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District 1 Hunting Prospects

Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Orielle counties

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District 1 general overview

District 1 is in the northeastern corner of Washington and includes Pend Oreille, Stevens, and Ferry counties (Figure 1). District 1 is comprised of seven game management units (GMUs): 101 (Sherman), 105 (Kelly Hill), 108 (Douglas), 111 (Aladdin), 113 (Selkirk), 117 (49 Degrees North), and 121 (Huckleberry) (Figure 2). The topography is dominated by four prominent mountain ranges that run north and south: the Selkirk, Calispell, Huckleberry, and Kettle Mountain ranges. There are broad valleys between these ranges drained by the Pend Oreille, Colville, Columbia, and Kettle rivers, all within the upper Columbia River watershed.

Figure 1. District 1 in northeastern Washington includes Pend Oreille, Stevens, and Ferry counties.

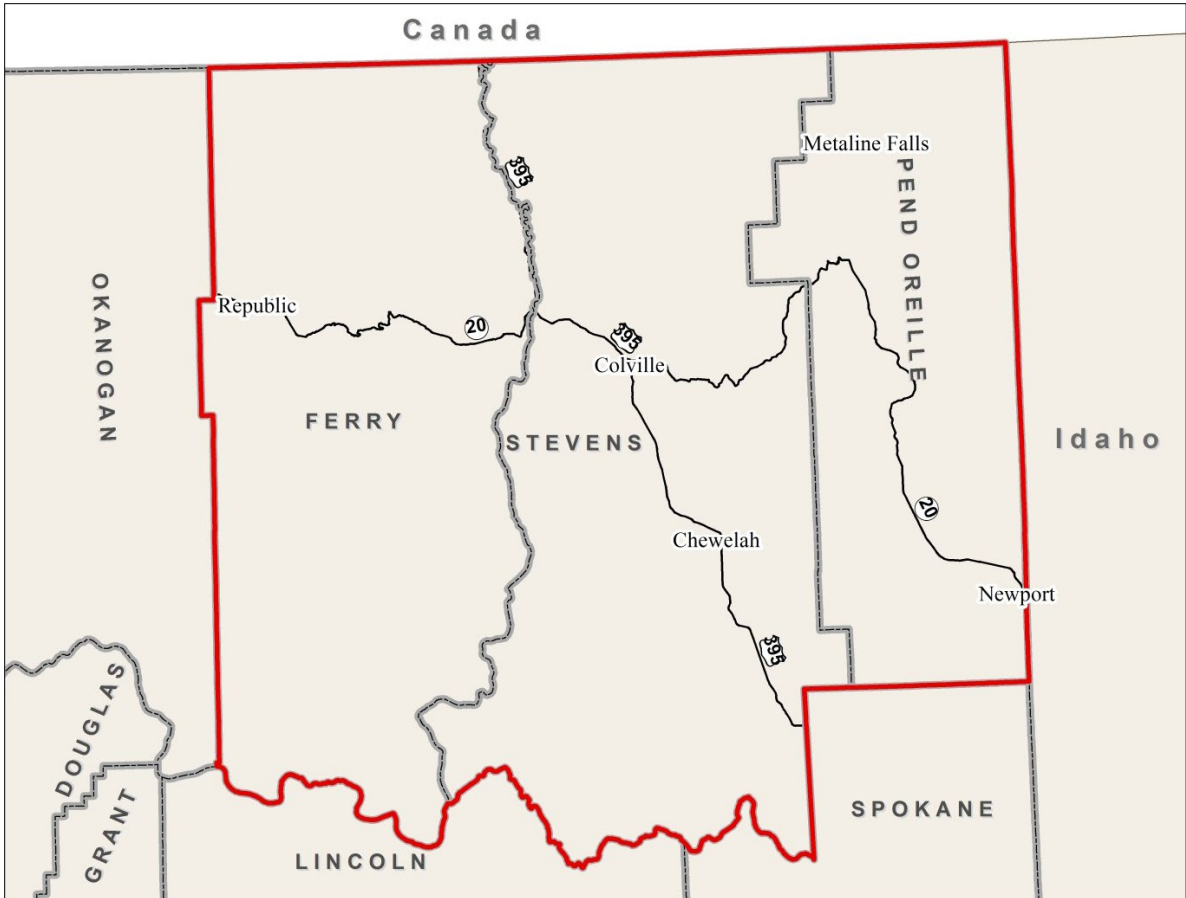
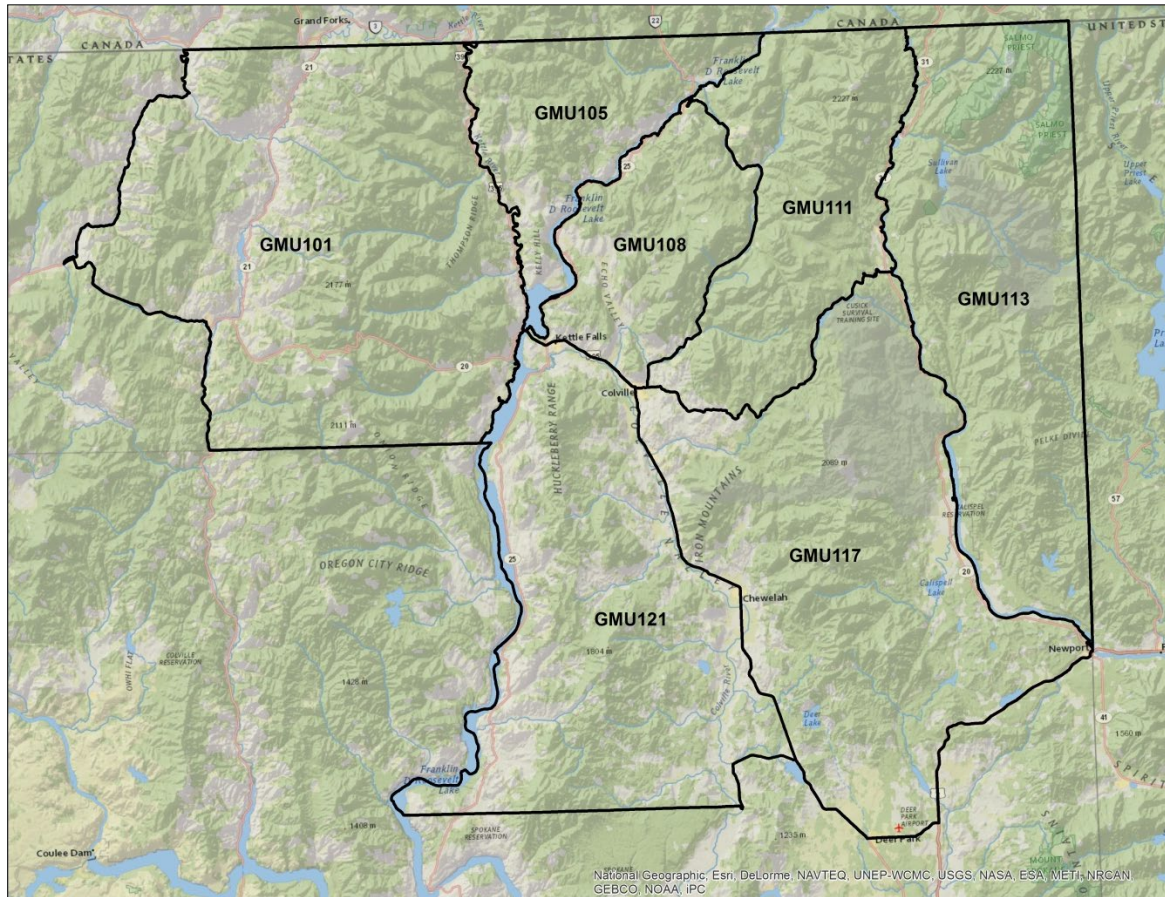


Figure 2. Game Management Units (GMUs) within District 1.



Elevations vary from about 1,290 feet at the normal pool level of Lake Roosevelt (Reservoir) to 7,309 feet on Gypsy Peak in the north Selkirk Range. Coniferous forest is extensive within District 1, covering about two thirds, or 68%, of the district’s landscape. Agricultural land, range land, and water features cover most of the balance.

Over one third (37%) of the land mass in District 1 is public land. It is mostly national forest, but Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) lands are also present. Additional public lands include Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and a few other government agencies. Most of the public lands outside of Indian reservations are open to public hunting. There are large timber company lands open to public hunting, although not necessarily open to private motorized vehicles. Private lands are typically only open to hunting by first gaining written permission from the landowner or manager.

District 1 is well-known for its white-tailed deer, moose, forest grouse, and turkey hunting opportunities. Quality hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including mule deer, black bear, and cougar.

Table 1 presents estimates of harvest and days per kill for most game species in District 1 during the 2023 general hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2022 season and the five-year

average. For more specific information on harvest trends or permit statistics, please refer to the appropriate section in this document or go to the [harvest statistics](#) section of the WDFW webpage.

Table 1. Harvest for the most popular game species found in District 1 during the 2022 and 2023 general hunting seasons.

Species	Harvest: 5-yr average	Harvest: 2022	Harvest: 2023	% change (5yr)	% change (2022)
Elk	261	269	288	+10%	+7%
Deer (both species)	3683	3161	3292	-11%	+4%
Black bear	276	281	257	-7%	-9%
Cougar	44	47	39	-11%	-17%
Turkey	3523	3352	3542	+5%	+6%
Forest grouse	7917	6384	6894	-13%	+8%

Also included are the five-year average and a comparison of 2022 and 2023 estimates and the five-year average.

Elk

WDFW recently confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in north Spokane County in GMU 124. While that detection was not in District 1, it was geographically close. CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the Cervidae ‘deer’ family and is fatal in infected elk, deer, moose, and caribou. TSEs are caused by malformed proteins called prions. There is currently no cure for CWD and it can severely impact cervid populations if it becomes widespread. CWD can only be confirmed through testing of lymph nodes or brain tissue. Testing will be more important than ever to prevent the spread of the disease to other areas of eastern Washington and across the region and state. Information on how to have your harvested animal tested, and other steps WDFW is taking to prevent the spread of CWD, is at wdfw.wa.gov/cwd.

General information, management goals, and population status

All elk that occur in District 1 are Rocky Mountain elk. There are ten identified elk herds in Washington, and elk in District 1 are part of the Selkirk Elk Herd. The quality of elk hunting opportunities in District 1



Antlerless Elk. Photo by WDFW.

varies from poor to fair depending on the GMU, but in general, opportunities are marginal and harvest success is low. Elk are widely scattered in small groups throughout the densely forested region of northeastern Washington. Consequently, elk in northeastern Washington are difficult to both survey and harvest. Population data are limited, but recent research and harvest data indicate elk numbers are increasing. The best elk hunting opportunities occur in GMUs associated with the Pend Oreille sub-herd area, which includes GMUs 121 (Huckleberry), 117 (49 Degrees North), and 111 (Aladdin). Elk hunter numbers in the Colville District have increased over the last several years with hunter participation and harvest well dispersed across the Colville District through all three hunting methods. However, hunting elk successfully within District 1 is no small challenge.

The management objective for elk in the Colville District is being met with a sustained annual harvest of a viable and productive elk population with desirable population characteristics. The prime bull (six points or more) percentage in the 2023 bull harvest (all weapon types) was 19%.

Currently, WDFW does not make formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor elk populations in District 1. Due to the thick forest cover and harvest levels that are relatively low compared with other regions of Washington, devoting substantial resources to surveying bull to cow ratios has not been a high priority. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill, are used as surrogates to a formal index or estimate. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and hopes to gain the resources necessary to begin monitoring populations using formal sampling designs in the future.

Increasing hunter harvest, documented expansion of elk distribution, increased damage complaints from members of the agricultural industry and anecdotal information indicate that elk populations are at least stable and likely increasing in northeastern Washington. 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](#) and/or the [Selkirk Elk Herd Plan](#).

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

Probably the most frequent question from hunters is, "What GMU should I hunt?" This is not easy to answer because it often depends on access to private land, the hunting method, and the type of hunting experience desired. For example, not all GMUs are open to late archery hunters.

Many, if not most, hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature bull. Although large mature bulls do exist in District 1, they are not very abundant, and hunters are usually advised to apply for special permit opportunities within District 3 (Blue Mountains) if they are searching for the best opportunity to harvest a large mature bull elk on public land in Region 1.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high densities of elk, low hunter densities, high hunter success rates, and be mostly, if not entirely, comprised of public land that's open to hunting. Unfortunately, this scenario does not exist in any GMU that is open during the general elk modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 1. Instead, because of general season opportunities, the GMUs with the highest elk 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 elk. Other hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of elk if that means there are also fewer hunters.

Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how District 1 GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The values presented are the three-year averages for each statistic. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of elk harvested and hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison, as GMUs vary in size.

Each GMU was ranked for elk harvested/mile² (bulls and cows), hunters/mile², and hunter success rates for the general season only. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum

(lower rank sums are better). The modern firearm comparisons are the most straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same in each GMU.

For archery seasons, consider that antlerless elk may be harvested in all GMUs in the early season, but only five GMUs are open for any bull during late archery seasons. These differences are important when comparing total harvest or hunter numbers among GMUs.

Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c provide rank sum analysis for comparison of total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. Data presented are based on a three-year running average. As a generalization, the lower the rank sum, the better the overall elk hunting opportunity is within a GMU.

Table 2a. Modern Firearm

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
101	1,103	5	0.0	6	138	0.13	1	3.9%	6	13
105	296	7	0.02	5	131	0.44	2	5.7%	3	10
108	289	14	0.05	2	180	0.62	3	7.7%	2	7
111	455	8	0.02	5	247	0.54	4	3.4%	7	16
113	736	20	0.03	4	516	0.70	5	4.1%	5	14
117	954	38	0.04	3	719	0.75	7	5.3%	4	14
121	796	54	0.07	1	572	0.72	6	9.7%	1	8

Table 2b. Archery

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
101	1,103	5	0.00	4	100	0.09	1	5.1%	7	12
105	296	6	0.02	2	56	0.19	2	11.7%	1	5
108	289	6	0.02	2	55	0.19	2	10.0%	3	7
111	455	6	0.01	3	92	0.20	3	5.9%	5	11
113	736	11	0.01	3	207	0.28	5	5.2%	6	14
117	954	20	0.02	2	303	0.32	6	6.5%	4	12
121	796	23	0.03	1	210	0.26	4	10.8%	2	7

GMUs bolded in the archery section are open during early and late archery seasons. All GMUs allow for antlerless harvest in the early archery season.

Table 2c. Muzzleloader

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
101	1,103	4	0.00	3	40	0.04	1	9.1%	4	8
105	296	3	0.01	2	23	0.08	2	12.0%	2	6
108	289	3	0.01	2	26	0.09	3	10.0%	3	8
111	455	3	0.01	2	43	0.10	4	6.0%	6	12
113	736	8	0.01	2	126	0.17	6	6.7%	5	12
117	954	7	0.01	2	171	0.18	7	4.3%	7	16
121	796	20	0.02	1	120	0.15	5	16.3%	1	7

What to expect during the 2024 season

Elk populations typically do not fluctuate dramatically from year to year, but periodic severe winters can trigger substantial die-offs. The 2023-24 winter was generally mild, and no die-offs were detected. The 2023 harvest was the highest since at least 2008 (comparable data only available since 2008). We expect harvest in 2024 to be about the same or a little higher than it was in 2023. Populations available for harvest are expected to be at least similar in size compared to the 2022 and 2023 seasons. However, the total hunter harvest of elk in District 1 is still low compared to other WDFW districts, hovering around 200-300 animals per year since 2008.

How to find elk

When hunting elk in District 1, hunters should research areas and spend plenty of time scouting before the season opener as it is often difficult to predict elk location, especially after hunting pressure increases. If hunters are seeking permission to hunt on private property, talk to the landowner well before the start of the season. Elk within District 1 are scattered in small groups throughout the district, but some drainages hold more elk than others. Many, if not most, hunters spend great amounts of their time focusing on forest clear-cuts, which makes a lot of sense because elk often forage in clear-cuts and are highly visible when they do. However, there are many elk (especially bulls) that do not frequent clear-cuts during daylight hours. Instead, they spend most of their time during the day in closed canopy forests, swamps, or young forest. Moreover, those highly visible elk often attract many hunters to open clear-cuts, and these areas can get crowded in a hurry.

From a landscape perspective, some generalities can be made that will help increase the odds of locating elk. When going to a new area, hunters will benefit by covering as much ground as possible and making note of areas where they see sign along roads and log “landings.” Log landings from past timber harvest operations are an especially good place to look for sign because they are often not graveled, which makes it easier to see fresh tracks. This scouting approach will give hunters a good idea of what areas hold elk and where to focus their more intensive scouting efforts.

After those areas with abundant elk sign have been identified, hunters should focus in on higher elevation stands that provide cover and are adjacent to open hillsides and/or clear-cuts. During early seasons when it is warm, these areas often include creek bottoms, river bottoms, or any place that is near water. Once the season progresses and temperatures cool, typically by late October, elk are not as attracted to water and the challenge of finding them becomes more difficult. Hunting pressure also has an effect and will force elk to use areas that provide thicker cover or are less accessible to hunters because of topographical features.

Later in the season, it is a good idea to consult a topographic map and find “benches” located in steep terrain and thick cover. Elk often use these areas to bed down during the day. Any snow cover generally enhances the ability to find elk tracks. Hunting right after a fresh snow usually presents a particularly good advantage in tracking down an individual or group of elk. Lastly, provided that non-motorized access is allowed, hunters should not let a locked gate in an otherwise open area keep them from going in on foot, horseback, or bicycle to search for elk. More often than not, these areas hold elk that have not received as much hunting pressure, which can make them less skittish and easier to hunt. A popular approach to hunting these areas is to use mountain bikes or fat-tire bikes, which is not extremely difficult given the network of maintained gravel roads that frequently occur on timber company lands.

Elk Areas

There is one elk area in District 1, Fruitland (Elk Area 1021). The Fruitland elk area is new in 2024 and is to address localized damage caused by elk. The area is on private land and hunters are encouraged to secure access before applying and, if drawn, contact landowners within the elk area well before the hunt begins. If hunters need help finding access, they can contact the Region 1 office at 509-892-1001 and WDFW staff may be able to assist.

Deer

General information, management goals, and population status

WDFW recently confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in north Spokane County in GMU 124. While that detection was not in District 1, it was geographically close. CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the Cervidae ‘deer’ family and is fatal in infected deer. TSEs are caused by malformed proteins called prions. There is currently no cure for CWD and it can severely impact cervid populations if it becomes widespread. CWD can only be confirmed through testing of lymph nodes or brain tissue. Testing will be more important than ever to prevent the spread of the disease to other areas of eastern Washington and across the region and state. Information on how to have your harvested animal tested, and other steps WDFW is taking to prevent the spread of CWD, is at wdfw.wa.gov/cwd.

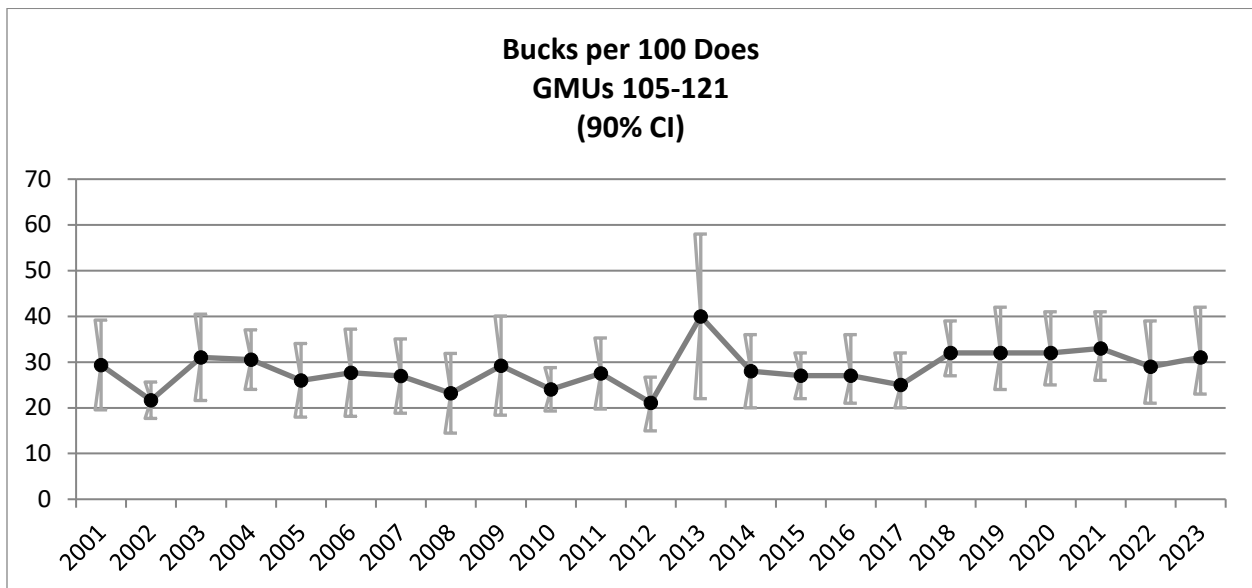
In northeastern Washington, white-tailed deer are the most abundant deer species. Mule deer are locally common, especially in the higher elevations and throughout Ferry County, but their overall

numbers are low compared to white-tailed deer on a district scale. Deer hunting opportunities in District 1 vary from fair to excellent, depending on the GMU. The best opportunities to harvest a mule deer in District 1 generally occur in GMUs 101 (Sherman) and 121 (Huckleberry). All GMUs within the district offer good opportunities to harvest a white-tailed deer. The white-tailed deer harvest management objective is to provide antlered and antlerless hunting opportunity for all hunting methods whenever feasible. Management goals for mule deer are to provide conservative hunting opportunity and allow population levels to increase by managing antlerless hunting opportunity.

Surveys for deer in District 1 are conducted before the modern firearm hunting season. Pre-season ratios come from roadside surveys conducted during August (for buck to doe ratio) and September (for fawn to doe ratio). These ground-based surveys provide an estimate of buck ratios prior to the modern firearm hunting season (Figure 3). Pre-season surveys for the past three years yielded stable buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios. However, these surveys tend to occur in more privately owned and agriculturally dominated areas where visibility of deer from a road is good.

There are quality bucks in the more heavily forested areas within District 1, but they are not as visible and therefore not represented in the survey sample.

Figure 3. Pre-season white-tailed deer ratios and 90% confidence intervals from ground surveys within District 1 from 2001 - 2023.



Recent disease outbreaks in 2015 and 2021 were hard on the white-tailed deer population in District 1 and decreased harvest was a reflection of the lower deer population. According to harvest data, mule deer populations appear to be stable or slightly decreasing. For more detailed information related to the status of 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. For more information, hunters could also look at the [White-tailed Deer Management Plan](#) and the [Mule Deer Management Plan](#).

Which GMU should deer hunters hunt?

One of the most frequently asked questions from hunters is, “What GMU should I hunt?” This is not easy to answer because it depends on the hunting method and 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 be entirely or mostly comprised of public land, 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 1. 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. Other hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if that means there are also relatively few hunters.

The information in Table 3 provides a 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 three-year averages for each statistic. Mule deer and white-tailed deer are combined for this table, but it is a reasonable assumption that in GMUs other than GMU 101, the vast majority of the deer harvested are white-tailed deer. 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, as GMUs vary in size.

Each GMU was ranked for deer harvested/mile², hunters/mile², and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum. Comparisons are straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same for most GMUs.

When choosing a species to hunt or a GMU to hunt in, differences that should be considered are:

1. Mule deer have a 3-point minimum harvest restriction during all general seasons.
2. The late archery season in GMU 101 runs longer than other GMUs.
3. There is no late modern firearm season in GMU 101.
4. There is no late archery season in GMUs 111 or 113.
5. There is a late muzzleloader season in GMU 113.

Tables 3a, 3b, and 3c provide rank sum analysis for comparison of total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. Data presented are based on a three-year average. As a generalization, the lower the rank sum, the better the overall deer hunting opportunity is within a GMU.

Table 3a. Modern Firearm

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
101	1,103	386	0.35	6	2332	2.11	2	16.5%	6	14
105	296	191	0.65	3	675	2.28	3	28.4%	1	7
108	289	234	0.81	2	972	3.36	6	24.1%	3	11
111	455	223	0.49	5	1103	2.42	4	20.1%	4	13
113	736	195	0.27	7	1247	1.69	1	15.6%	7	15
117	954	498	0.52	4	2833	2.97	5	17.6%	5	14
121	796	962	1.21	1	3618	4.55	7	26.6%	2	10

Table 3b. Archery

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
101	1,103	132	0.12	1	605	0.55	7	21.75%	1	9
105	296	10	0.03	5	61	0.21	3	17.0%	4	12
108	289	13	0.04	4	72	0.25	4	18.1%	2	10
111	455	5	0.01	6	52	0.12	2	9.0%	7	15
113	736	7	0.01	6	70	0.10	1	10.4%	6	13
117	954	56	0.06	3	332	0.35	5	16.7%	5	13
121	796	56	0.07	2	314	0.39	6	17.9%	3	11

Table 3c. Muzzleloader

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
101	1,103	43	0.04	1	186	0.17	6	23.0%	2	9
105	296	4	0.01	3	13	0.04	1	34.7%	1	5
108	289	1	0.00	4	25	0.09	4	4.9%	7	15
111	455	5	0.01	3	26	0.06	2	20.5%	4	9
113	736	30	0.04	1	242	0.33	7	12.7%	5	13
117	954	8	0.01	3	74	0.08	3	11.2%	6	12
121	796	19	0.02	2	85	0.11	5	22.7%	3	10

What to expect during the 2024 season

Harvest declined in District 1 in 2022 and remained low in 2023, an expected trend given the large-scale epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD)/Bluetongue outbreak throughout eastern Washington in 2021. Some GMUs seemed to be hit harder than others, including GMUs 121 and 117 being the hardest hit by the outbreak. However, the 2023/24 winter was mild and over-winter survival was likely high. Therefore, if no large-scale disease outbreaks occur prior to the hunting seasons in 2024, we expect to see a moderate increase to harvest this season.

In 2024, hunters of any user group or weapon type will *not* be able to harvest a doe. This regulation change was enacted in 2019 to protect the reproductive component of the population.

District 1 runs check stations on weekends during the modern firearm season. Check stations allow biologists to collect important biological information that informs management decisions. This may include removing teeth to determine the age structure of a population, detailed information about the size of bucks being harvested, and tissue samples to test for diseases like chronic wasting disease (CWD). Aside from collecting biological information, check stations allow biologists an opportunity to interact with the hunting community, answer questions, and receive immediate feedback on how the season is going.

During the 2024 hunting season, additional check stations will be run throughout District 1 for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance. We are interested in sampling deer harvested throughout District 1. If you pass a check station, we encourage you to stop. If you're late getting out of the field, your deer can still be sampled for CWD. Go to wdfw.wa.gov/cwd for all the ways to have deer tested for CWD. Only the head, with 2-3 inches of neck, needs to be retained for testing.

WDFW recently confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in north Spokane County in GMU 124. While that detection was not in District 1, it was geographically close. CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the Cervidae 'deer' family and is fatal in infected deer. TSEs are caused by malformed proteins called prions. There is currently no cure for CWD and it can severely impact cervid populations if it becomes widespread. CWD can only be confirmed through testing of lymph nodes or brain tissue. Testing will be more important than ever to prevent the spread of the disease to other areas of eastern Washington and across the region and state. Information on how to have your harvested animal tested, and other steps WDFW is taking to prevent the spread of CWD, is at wdfw.wa.gov/cwd.

If you harvest or salvage a deer, elk, or moose in GMUs 124, 127, or 130, you are required to submit to WDFW the whole head with at least three inches of neck attached, or extracted lymph nodes, within three days of harvesting or receiving a salvage permit.

Current check station locations for the 2024 season are:

- Colville - [check website for exact location](#)
- Hwy 2 Weigh Station, Chattaroy

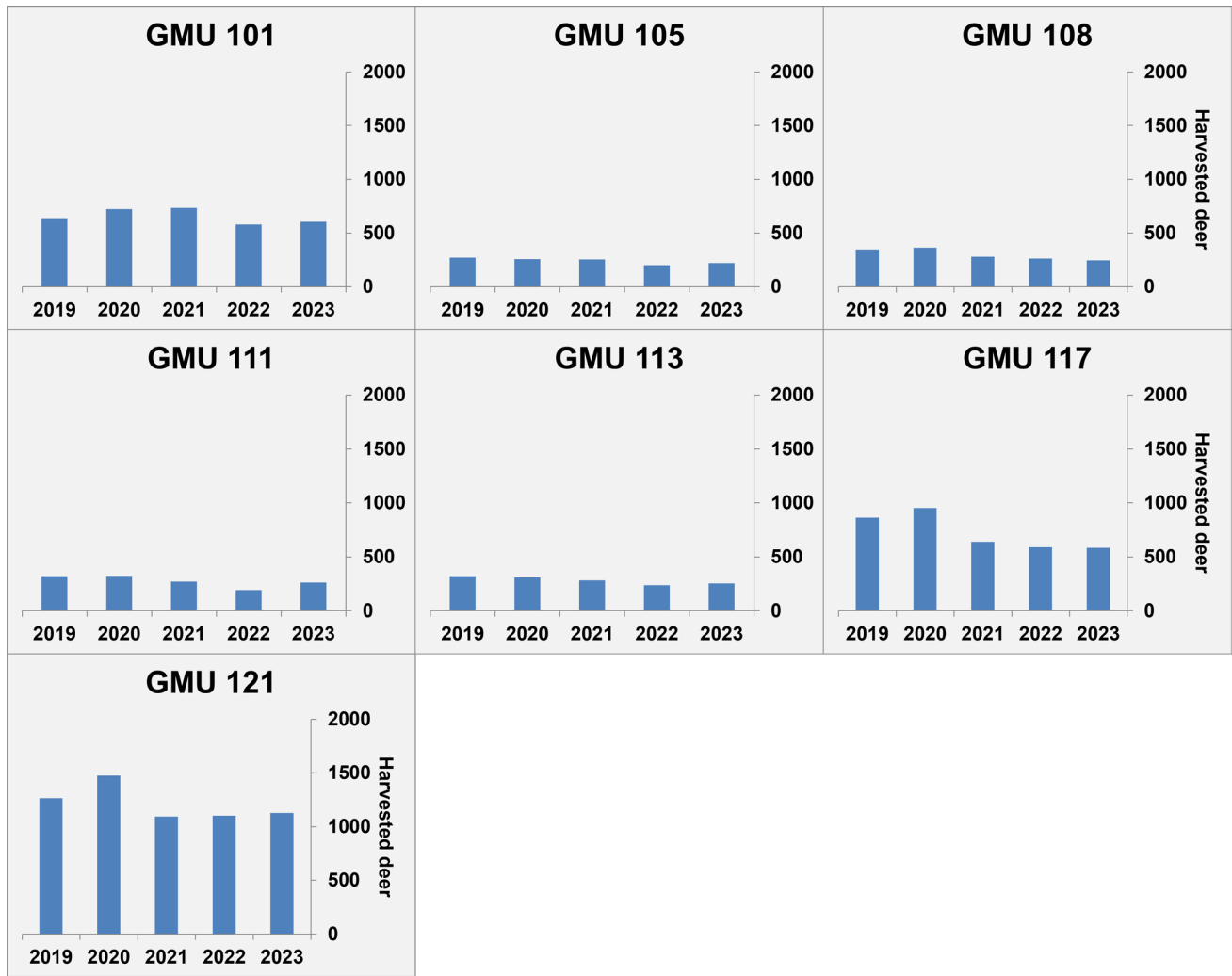
- Hwy 395 Weigh Station, Deer Park

Check for the most up to date [check station locations](#). In addition, there is a self-service kiosk at the Colville District Office at 755 S. Main Street in Colville.

To encourage hunters to have their harvested animals tested for CWD, WDFW is teaming up with the [Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers](#) (BHA), for a special drawing for multi-season deer tags. BHA helped pay for 100 multi-season deer tags. Hunters who provide CWD samples from WDFW's Eastern Region 1 will be entered in a random drawing for those tags.

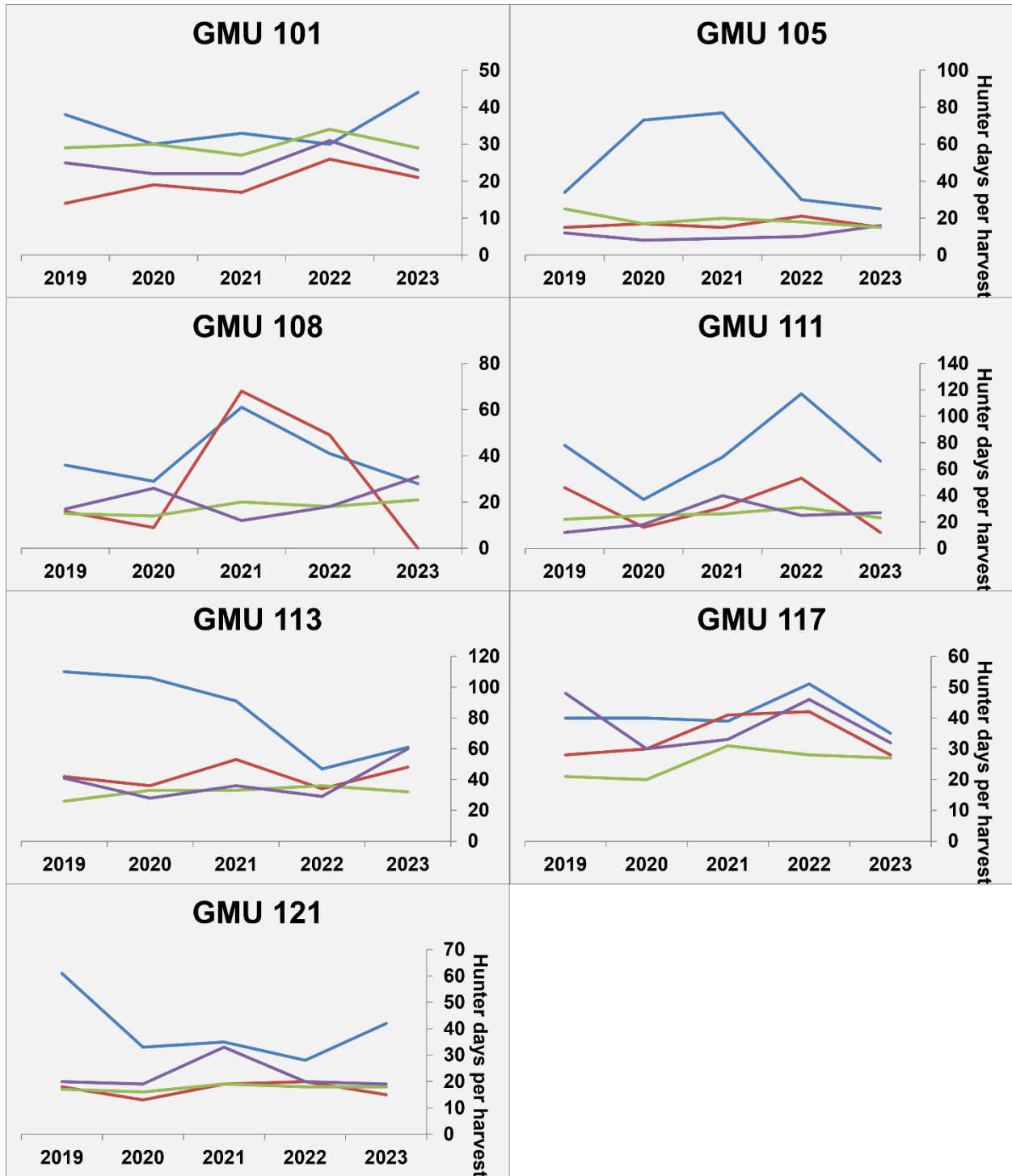
A good predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill. Figures 4 and 5 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where to hunt in District 1. Harvest was predictably low in 2021 and 2022 following a large-scale disease (bluetongue and EHD) outbreak in 2021.

Figure 4. Trends in the estimated number of bucks harvested during the general season (all weapons combined) in each GMU from 2019-2023.



Harvest totals do not include tribal harvest or special permit harvest.

Figure 5. Trend in days per kill for archery (blue), muzzleloader (purple), multiple weapon (green), and modern firearm (red) during the general season for deer in each GMU from 2019 -2023 within District 1.



How to find and hunt white-tailed deer

As is the case with most game species, the key to harvesting a white-tailed deer in District 1 is scouting. White-tailed deer occur throughout the district and in nearly every present habitat type. White-tailed deer densities are highest on private lands in the valleys and foothill benches bordering the valleys, especially in the farm-forest mosaic within GMUs 105, 108, 117, and 121. GMUs 101, 111, and 113 also have white-tailed deer, but with more localized distributions, again with the highest densities typically on private lands.

The majority of hunting is done in or adjacent to agricultural fields or recent forest timber harvest areas. When deer are present, they are much more visible than in adjacent habitats. However, deer typically use these more open areas at night, dawn, and dusk, especially once they have been disturbed by human presence. Therefore, it is advantageous for hunters to seek out areas a short to moderate distance away from these openings, which provide cover where deer are spending more time. If a hunter is seeing large amounts of deer signs in an area, odds are those deer are not far away.

The traditional approaches to hunting white-tailed deer generally include several methods. The first is still hunting, where the hunter is moving, but very slowly through a patch of habitat, stopping frequently to scan or glass the vegetative cover ahead with binoculars. The hunter looks for parts of a deer, like legs, an antler, or a portion of the body or head, as opposed to the whole deer, which is usually not visible through the vegetation. Stand hunting is another technique. This method involves the hunter patiently waiting in a tree stand, on a stump, against a tree trunk, on a ridge rock, etc. in high deer use areas (highly traveled trails, habitat edges, bottlenecks, funnels, etc.) until deer show up. A third deer hunting approach is conducting drives. This technique involves at least two hunters, but larger groups maximize its effectiveness. The hunters divide into “drivers” and “blockers.” The blockers position themselves in an organized spacing, often downwind of a patch of deer bedding habitat (thick woods, forested swamp, or heavy brush field). The drivers then slowly hike through the habitat patch, alerting the deer and hopefully pushing them to the blockers. Sometimes it’s a good idea to post one blocker at the front of the habitat patch behind the drivers in the event that any deer double back to evade them. Although each of these approaches is highly effective, there is another technique that is not as well-known or used as much. This includes rattling and grunting to simulate two bucks fighting over a doe. This technique is more common with mid-western and eastern white-tailed deer hunters, but can be effective here as well, especially in the days leading up to the rut (deer breeding season) in mid-November. A quick internet search on this topic will yield plenty of evidence to illustrate its effectiveness when conditions are right. More information on deer hunting can be found in the Department’s [Basics of Deer Hunting resource](#).

How to find and hunt mule deer

Mule deer occur in District 1, but in much lower abundance than white-tailed deer, especially east of the Columbia River. Although mule deer occur within every District 1 GMU, the highest density is in GMU 101. As is the case with most game species, the key to harvesting a mule deer in District 1 is scouting. The classical western method of hunting mule deer is sometimes called spot and stalk. The hunter uses

good optics, binoculars, and spotting scopes to scan from ridge tops and other vantage points to find the mule deer, pick out suitable bucks, and stalk them to within shooting distance. Ordinarily, the stalk entails a strategic hike and cautious sneak action. Much of District 1 does not offer the open country required for this method of hunting, but where it does, it can be effective. More information on deer hunting can be found in the Department's [Basics of Deer Hunting resource](#).



Several female mule deer stand in an open grassy field. Photo by WDFW.

Deer areas

There is one deer area in District 1, Parker Lake (Deer Area 1031). This deer area is described in the Area Descriptions section of the [Big Game Pamphlet](#). Hunting is by special permit only within the Parker Lake area.

Notable changes

All legal harvest is buck only for all user groups. This change was enacted in 2019 to conserve the reproductive portion of the population.

Information about EHD/bluetongue and deer

During the late summer of 2015 and 2021, agency staff members documented a large-scale bluetongue and EHD outbreak in District 1. In certain areas, WDFW received many reports of large numbers of dead deer. The bluetongue outbreak in both years was brought about by the severe drought in northeast Washington. It's still too early to predict if bluetongue or EHD will make an appearance, the potential for

an outbreak is always possible. Hunters may consider reviewing the Department's [bluetongue and EHD resources](#) for further information.

Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

The goals for black bear management in Washington are to: 1) preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage black bear and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations; 2) minimize threats to public safety from black bears, while at the same time maintaining a sustainable and viable bear population; 3) manage black bear for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, wildlife viewing, and photography; and 4) manage populations statewide for a sustained yield. For management purposes, the state is divided into nine black bear management units (BBMUs). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions.

District 1 consists of GMUs in part of the Northeastern BBMU. The current black bear hunting season guidelines for the Northeastern BBMU are designed to maintain black bear populations at a level which would not increase impacts to big game herds. The metrics currently used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of harvested bears that were female, the median age of harvested females, and the median age of harvested males.

WDFW does not conduct annual surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size. Trends in harvest data are used instead as population surrogates or indices. However, in 2019, biologists conducted a survey to estimate black bear density in GMU 117. Density was found to be 31 bears/100km². When compared to other areas in Washington with estimates derived using the same methodology, a density of 31 bears/100km² is on the higher end of the range. Currently, black bear populations are believed to be stable in District 1.

Black bears occur throughout District 1, but population densities vary among GMUs. The best opportunities to harvest a bear likely occur in GMUs 101 (Sherman) and 117 (49 Degrees North), mainly on account of abundant public land that is open to hunting.

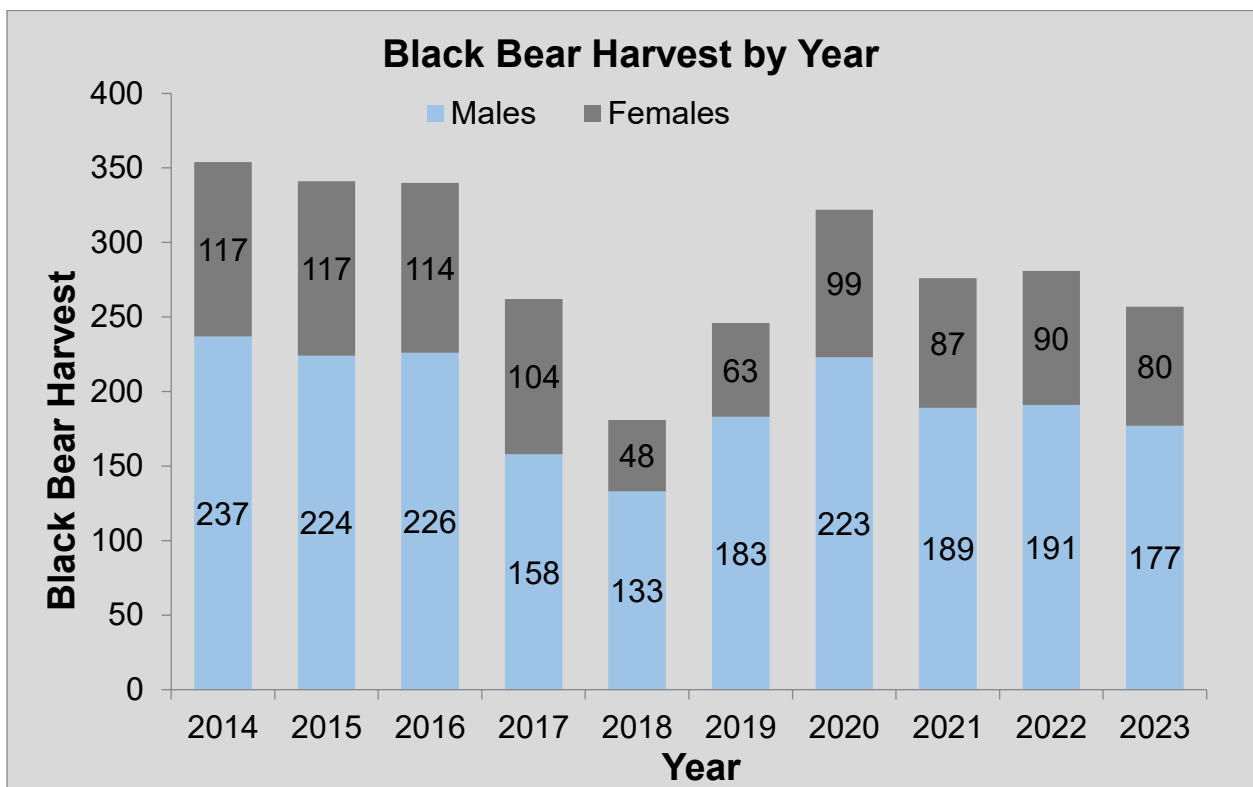
What to expect during the 2024 season

Although some hunters specifically target black bears, most bears are harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest and hunter success can vary quite a bit from one year to the next. Since 2004, hunter success in District 1 GMUs has varied from 4% to 18%. The success rate is likely higher for hunters who specifically hunt black bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while deer or elk hunting.

Overall, annual black bear harvest during the general bear season in District 1 showed a stable trend from 2014 to 2016 before declining sharply in 2017 and 2018 (Figure 6). Harvest has remained relatively stable since 2020.

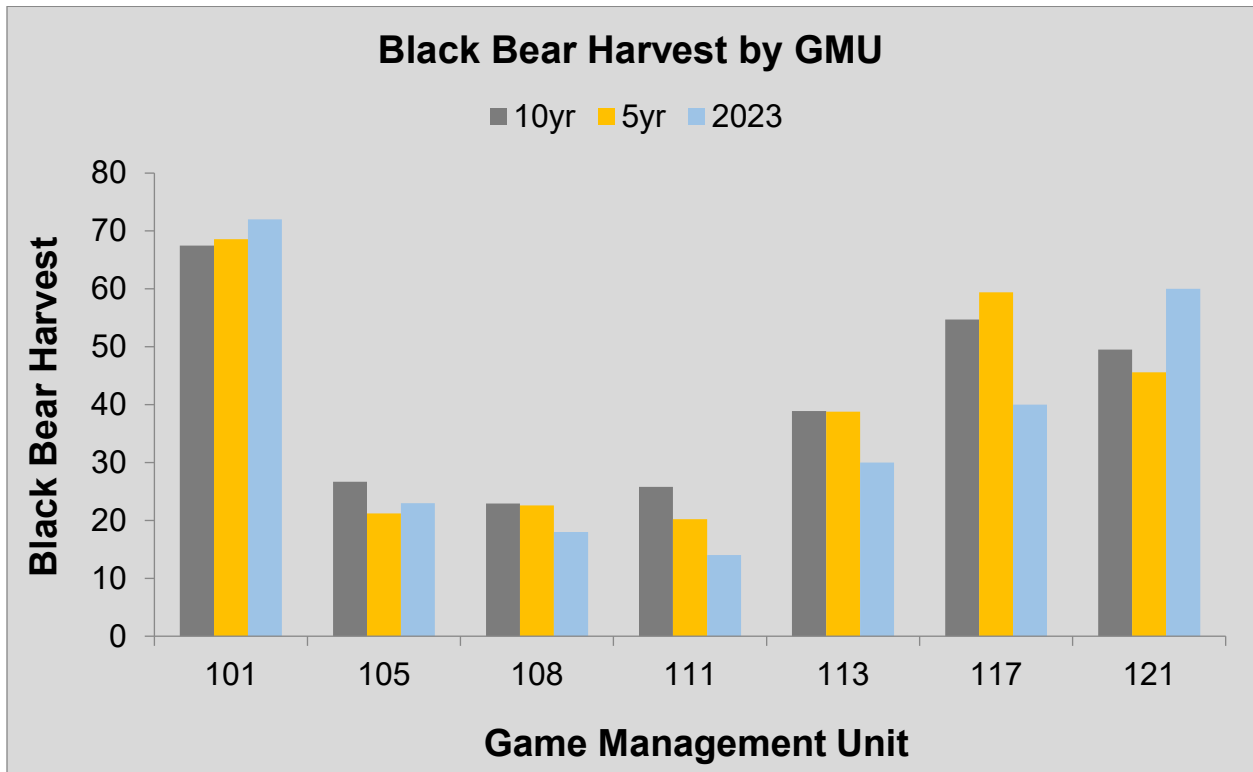
At the GMU level, most black bears will likely be harvested in GMUs 101 (Sherman), 117 (49 Degrees North), and 121 (Huckleberry). Harvest numbers, during the 2023 season and compared to long-term (ten year) and short-term (five year) averages, show a stable harvest in most GMUs within District 1 (Figure 7). Following the 2019 regulation change (August 1 opener and two bear bag limit), harvest throughout District 1 increased and has now stabilized.

Figure 6. Trends in the number of male and female black bears harvested during the general bear season in District 1 (GMUs 101-121), 2014–2023.



Harvest estimates do not include bears harvested during spring permit seasons or bears removed because they were causing damage to private property.

Figure 7. The number of black bears harvested in each GMU during the 2023 general bear season in District 1.



Also included are the 10-year (2014-2023) and 5-year (2019-2023) average for the total number of bears harvested in each GMU.

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 1. Although black bears are fairly common and occur in some areas at high densities, they are seen infrequently because of the thick evergreen conifer forest and other vegetation that dominates the landscape.

Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types, so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. In the early fall, hunters should focus their efforts at higher elevations and in open terrain (e.g., open hillsides). Huckleberries ripen throughout the summer, but in the early fall prior to heavy frost, the most berries remaining are typically at higher elevations. A large huckleberry patch yielding lots of fruit would be a good place to hunt.

Bears can also be located in recent timber harvests that contain a large number of berry-producing shrubs, including huckleberries, serviceberries, snowberries, soapberries, and thimbleberries. During the fall, hunters need to find openings with these characteristics and hike through them to see if there are any signs of bear. If they do find fresh signs, odds are there is a bear frequenting the area. If hunters are patient and sit for extended periods of time watching these areas, they stand a reasonable chance of harvesting a bear. Patience is the key.

Important considerations

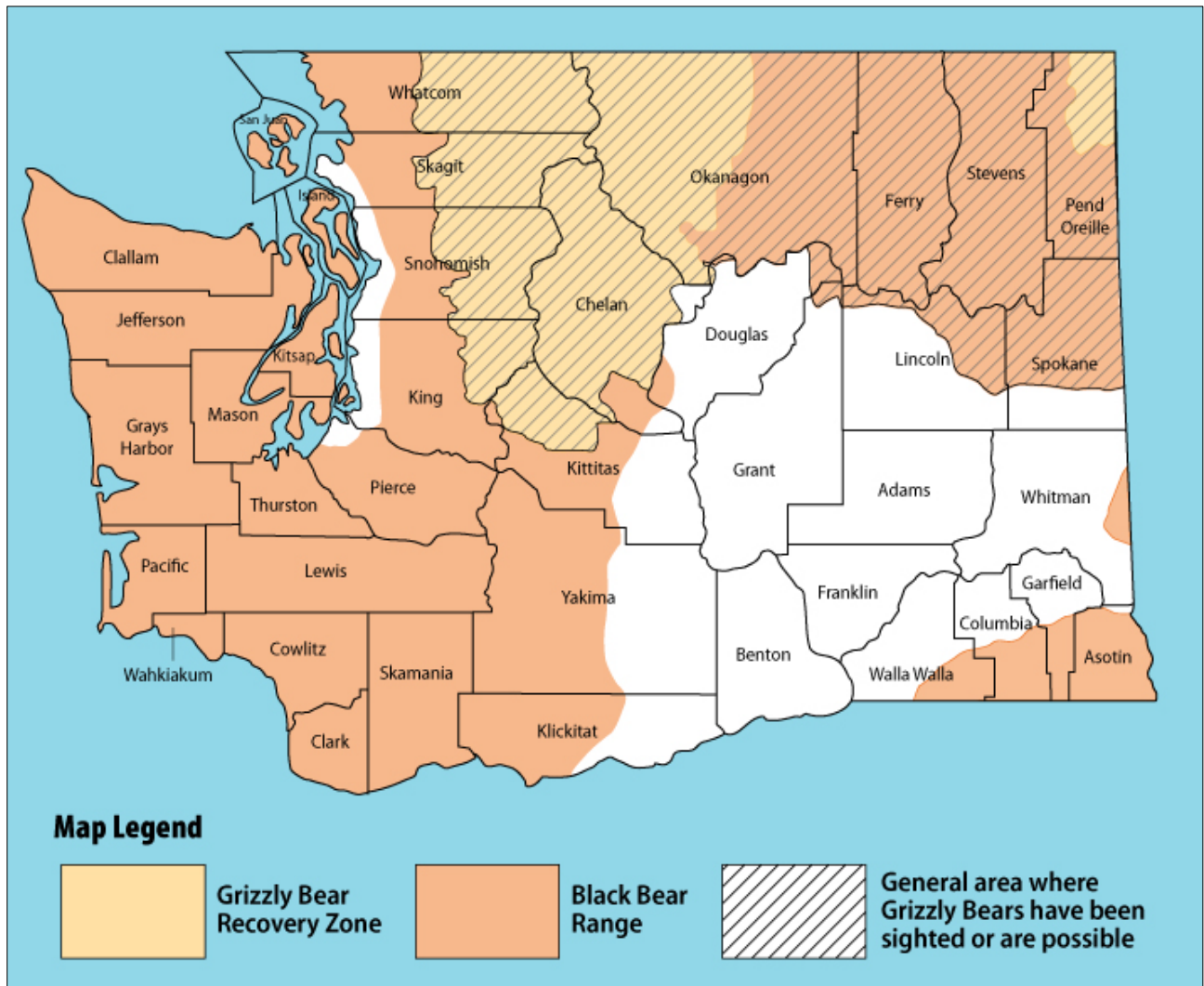
Black bear hunters in GMUs 101 through 117 are required to complete WDFW's online bear identification test each year and carry proof that they have passed. Prepare for and take the test at [Bear Identification Program](#).

There are consistent sightings and known resident grizzly bears in District 1. Grizzly bears are a federally threatened and state-listed endangered species. Killing one, either unintentionally or intentionally, can bring costly fines and penalties, and set back recovery efforts for grizzly bears. Just like with other similar looking game species such as wolves/coyotes, mule deer/white-tailed deer, bobcat/lynx, and other animal groups, Washington hunters are responsible for being able to tell the difference between black bears and grizzly bears. This knowledge and skill are critical in areas where the ranges of these two bear species overlap (Figure 8). In addition, hunters in District 1 are strongly encouraged to carry bear spray while hunting. Hunters should know how to use bear spray before heading into the field. Learn about using [bear spray](#).

Bear hunters are urged not to shoot sows with cubs. Sows may be accompanied by cubs in the fall that tend to lag behind when traveling, so please observe and be patient before shooting.

WDFW requires the submission of a tooth from successful black bear hunters. Hunters are encouraged to submit teeth by December 1 of the current hunt year. Biologists use this information to better monitor black bears, make management decisions, and evaluate the impacts of harvest on the population. In addition, black bear hunters that submit a tooth can find out the age of their harvested bear by entering their Wild ID into WDFW's [tooth age lookup tool](#). Just be aware that it takes about six months after the close of all bear seasons to receive the ages back from the lab, so there is a delay in this information being available. Hunters can pick up a tooth envelope at WDFW regional and district offices and some sporting goods stores. If available, a biologist can pull the tooth for you if the skull is not frozen. Refer to this [instructional video](#) about pulling a tooth.

Figure 8. Black bear range and grizzly bear sighting areas in Washington.



Notable changes

District 1 black bear hunters (GMUs 101 – 117) are required to complete WDFW's online bear identification test each year and carry proof that they have passed. Bear identification information can be found on the [Bear Identification Program website](#). Fall black bear season dates have been extended and bag limits have increased in eastern Washington, hunters now have the opportunity to start hunting Aug. 1 throughout the state and the bag limit has increased to two bears. Hunters must purchase a second bear tag to harvest a second bear. As of this writing, there will be no spring bear permits available for the 2024 season.

Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status



A cougar is caught walking by on a trail camera set out for monitoring wildlife. Photo by University of Montana.

Cougars occur throughout District 1, but local densities can vary among GMUs. Cougars in District 1 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population.

Beginning in 2012, WDFW changed cougar harvest management throughout 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 hunting implement restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

Beginning in 2024, WDFW cougar seasons are shifting away from the harvest guideline and implementing a harvest cap (Table 4). The cap for each Hunt Area is set at the intrinsic growth rate of 13%. Previously, only hunting mortalities counted towards the harvest guideline. With this new system, all human-caused mortalities, including hunter harvest, depredation removals, and landowner removals, will count towards the cap. If a Hunt Area reaches its cap before the hunting season opens on

September 1, the Hunt Area cap extends to 20%. Once the assigned cap is reached for each Hunt Area, the Hunt Area will close to cougar harvest. All known human-caused mortalities will be counted towards the cap from April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025 and the general season cougar hunting season begins on Sept. 1.

Cougar hunters are required to have their harvest inspected and sealed by Department staff. Part of this process includes removing a tooth. The age of the cougar is estimated at a specialized lab and the hunter can find the results using the WDFW [tooth age lookup tool](#).

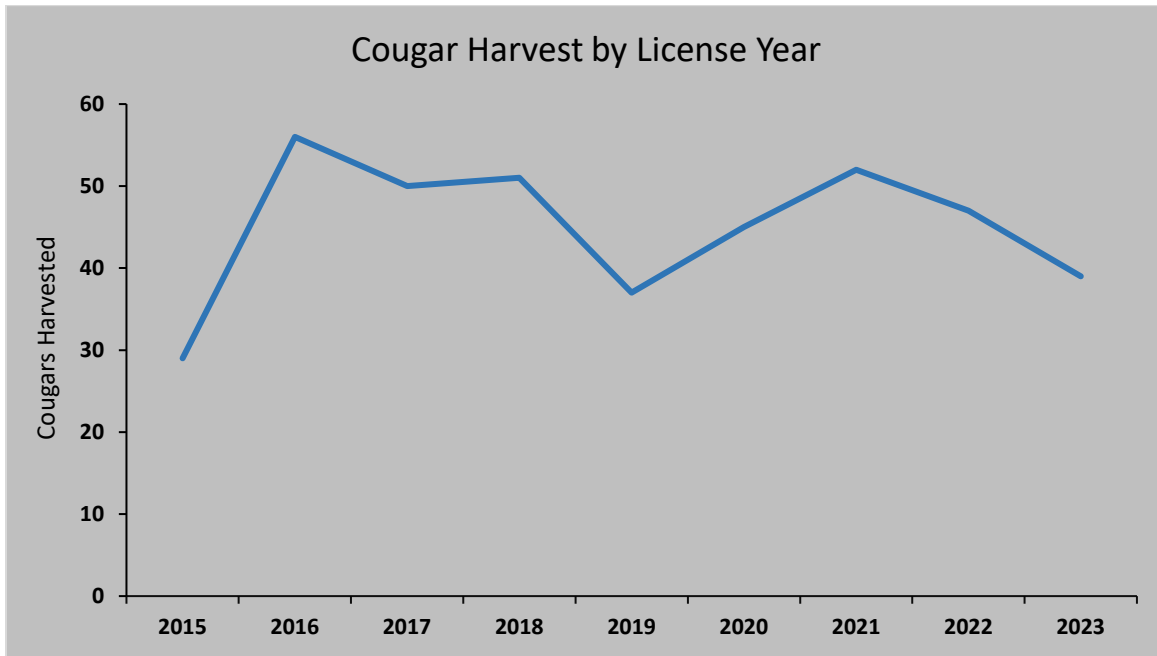
Table 4. Harvest guidelines and 2023-24 adult only cougar harvest for the six cougar hunt areas located in District 1.

Hunt Area (GMU)	13% Harvest Cap	20% Harvest Cap	2023-24 Hunter Harvest
101	8	13	7
105	2	3	2
108, 111	6	8	9
113	5	8	4
117	7	11	6
121	6	8	8

What to expect during the 2024 season

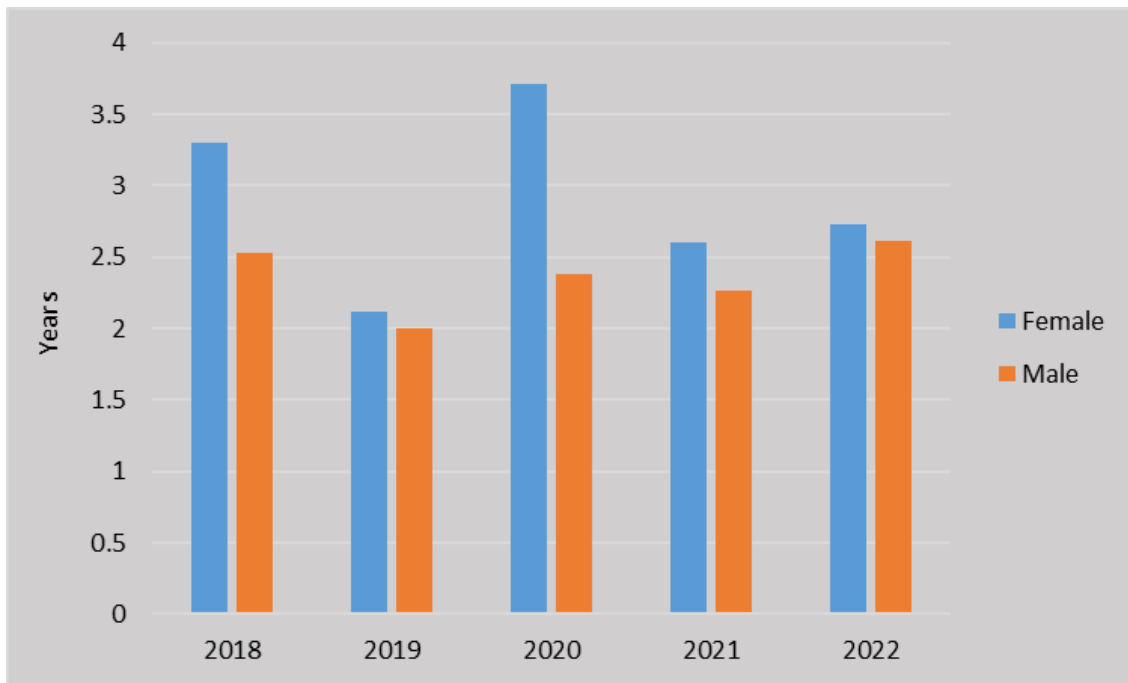
The total number of cougars harvested in District 1 in 2023 was slightly lower than in 2022 (Figure 9). Beginning in 2020, only adult harvest (two years +) counted towards the harvest guideline. The average age at harvest is variable for both males and females (Figure 10). In 2022, the latest complete tooth dataset, the average age for all general season harvest was 2.4 years. Since this is the first season of the new hunt structure, it is hard to predict what hunter harvest will be for cougars. However, the average age of hunter harvested cougars is expected to be similar to prior years.

Figure 9. General season cougar harvest in District 1, 2015-2023.



All harvest is displayed, but beginning in 2020, only adult harvest counted towards the harvest guideline.

Figure 10. Average age of female (orange bars) and male (blue bars) cougar harvested during the general season in District 1, 2018-2022.



Ages for all 2023 harvested cougars were not available at the time of publication of this document.

Notable changes

The cougar hunting season structure has changed beginning for the 2024 season. Below is an excerpt from the hunting pamphlet that explains the new structure and the steps a hunter must take before hunting cougars. After harvest, hunters should call the closest WDFW regional office to where they live or where they are hunting to schedule an appointment with a biologist to extract a tooth and seal the hide. **The skull and hide must not be frozen when presented for inspection and sealing.**

- **Hunting season: Sept. 1-March 31 or when the cap is reached, whichever occurs first.**
- All hunters must call the Cougar Hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 2 after greeting) or visit WDFW's website at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/big-game/cougar prior to hunting to check if Cougar Hunt Areas are open or closed.
- All successful hunters must: (1) Report their harvest within 72 hours to the cougar hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 3 after greeting) and state name, WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill; (2) present the unfrozen hide and skull for mandatory sealing and sample collection by WDFW within 5 days of the kill (please leave proof of sex attached).
- All hunters purchasing a cougar tag must report their hunt activity (successful or unsuccessful) via the WILD system by March 31, 2025. **Note –Agency inspection/sealing must be within 5 days of making the kill, the hotline reporting is not associated with sealing.**

Forest grouse

Species and general habitat characteristics

There are three species of grouse that occur in District 1: ruffed grouse, dusky (blue) grouse, and spruce grouse. Ruffed grouse are the most abundant and occur at lower elevations and valley bottoms. Spruce grouse are usually located in high elevation forest comprised of lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, and/or Engelmann spruce. In District 1, these habitats are prevalent within the Kettle and Selkirk mountain ranges. Dusky grouse can be found in habitats that occur at elevations between ruffed and spruce grouse habitat, but overlap does occur.

Population status

Trends in harvest data are generally used as surrogates for estimating a population or indices of population size. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), or birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 1, forest grouse populations appear to have declined since 2009. Harvest increased slightly for the 2023 season (Figure 11).

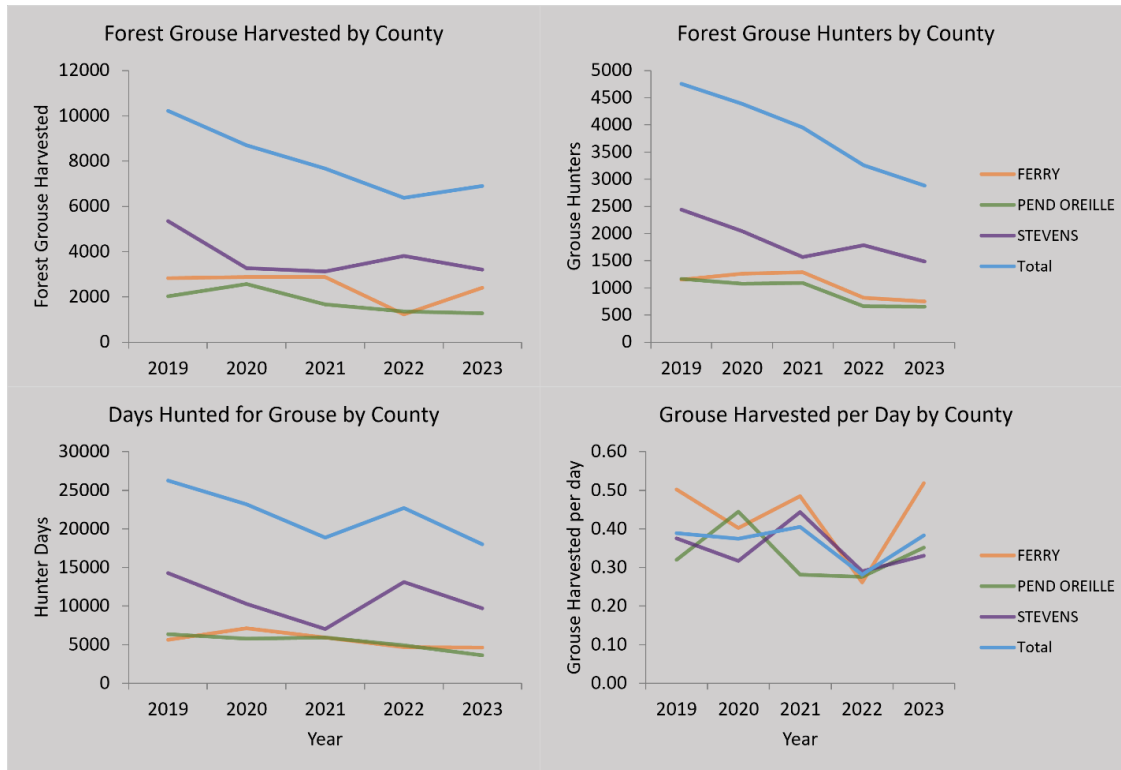
Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

The total number of forest grouse harvested in District 1 has generally declined from 2014-2022, with a small increase in 2023. WDFW also changed the way it collects small game harvest information in 2022, so it may be a few years before truly comparable data is available. We anticipate 2024 harvest to be similar to average years, but perhaps on the lower end. District 1 experienced a wet spring/early summer in 2024 and this can sometimes negatively impact chick survival. The season start date moved to September 15 to protect brood hens and chicks and hens should be more dispersed on the landscape leading to fewer encounters with several grouse at once. The average number bagged amongst hunters is typically between 0.4 and 0.6 forest grouse per hunting day.

Hunting techniques and where to hunt

In general, the most effective way to hunt forest grouse in District 1 is by walking little used forest roads and shooting them as they flush or after they roost in a nearby tree. Forest grouse tend to occur in higher densities along roads that do not receive much motor vehicle traffic. Consequently, hunters should target roads behind locked gates and roads that have been decommissioned by the respective landowner. Some forest grouse hunters use trained bird dogs, a team system that can be extremely effective. To learn more about how to hunt each of Washington's grouse species, see WDFW's [upland bird hunting webpage](#).

Figure 11. Trends in total harvest, hunter numbers, hunter days, and forest grouse harvested per hunter day during forest grouse seasons in Ferry County (orange), Stevens County (purple), Pend Oreille County (green) and throughout District 1 (blue), 2019–2023.



Notable changes

Season start date is September 15

Bag and possession limits are as follows:

- Bag limit: four grouse with no more than three of any one species.
- Possession limit: 12 grouse with no more than nine of any one species.

WDFW will have [wing and tail collection barrels](#) distributed throughout District 1 in 2024. **If you drive by a barrel, please follow the instructions at the barrel and deposit one wing and tail from each forest grouse harvested using the paper bags provided.** This information helps biologists determine the distribution of species, age, and sex in the harvest.

Pheasants

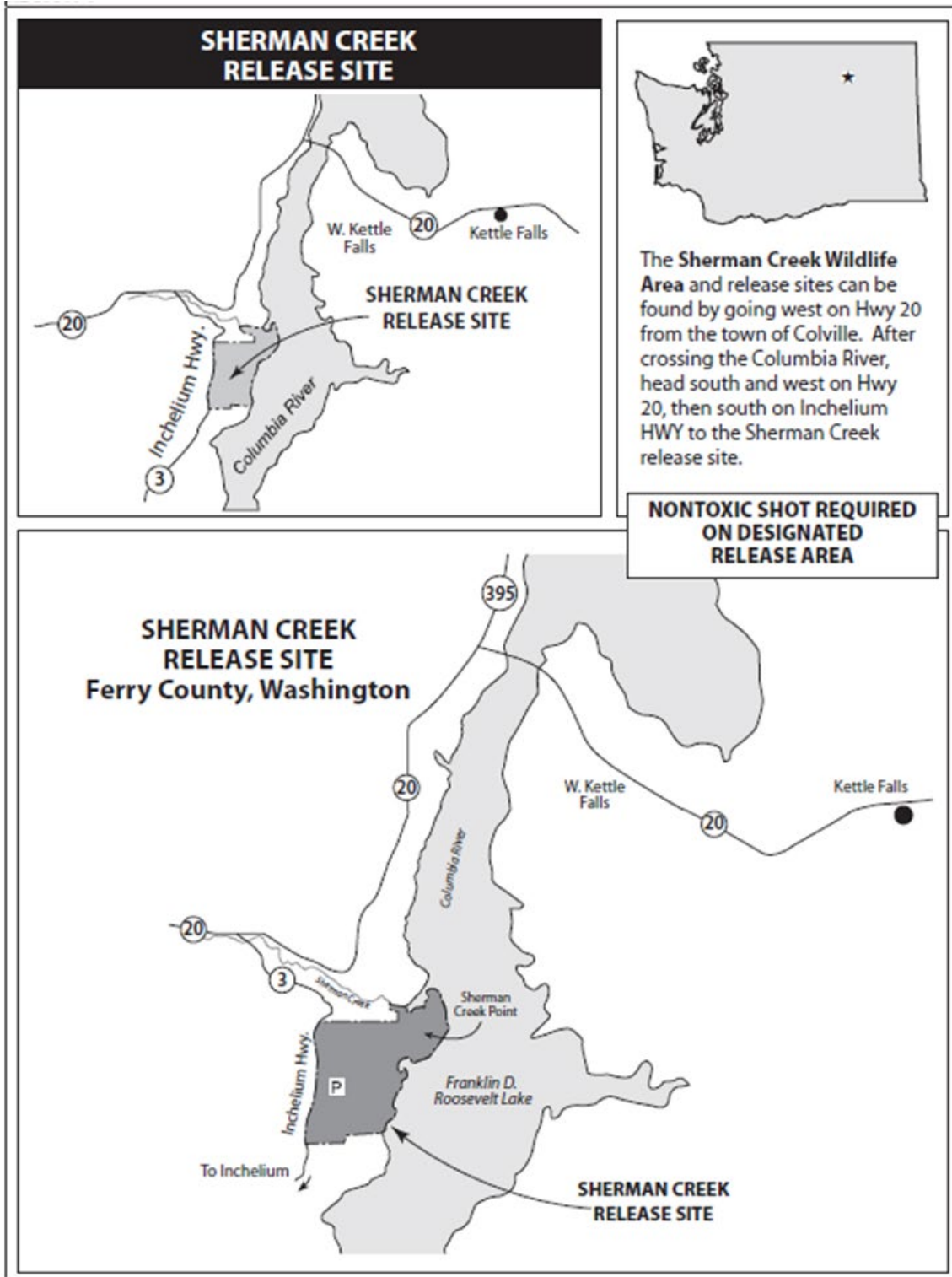


A hunter poses in a grassy field with his bird dog and pheasant harvest. Photo by Mark Divins.

There is only a small, range-limited population of wild ring-necked pheasants in District 1. The population occurs almost entirely on private lands within the Colville Valley. Consequently, most pheasant hunting opportunity within District 1 is associated with the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement and Release Program](#). The primary intent of this program is to provide an upland bird hunting opportunity and encourage participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, thousands of captive-reared ring-necked pheasants are released at 33 sites, and one of those sites (Sherman Creek Wildlife Area) occurs within District 1. The Sherman Creek Release Site is located in Ferry County south of the headquarters to Sherman Creek Wildlife Area between the Inchelium Highway and Lake Roosevelt (Figure 12).

To protect other wildlife species, including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is now required for all upland bird, dove, and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. At these release sites, hunters may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzle loading). Possession of lead shot is also regulated on some wildlife areas. See the [Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons](#) pamphlet for more information. Visit the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement and Release Program](#) website to learn more about pheasant releases.

Figure 12. Map of the Sherman Creek Pheasant Release Site in Ferry County.



Wild turkeys



A hunter poses with his wild turkey harvest. Photo by Ben Turnock.

The turkeys found in District 1 are Merriam's wild turkeys. Merriam's turkeys flourished in the district after being introduced in 1961, but then slowly declined. Since a large transplant from South Dakota in 1988-89, this population has steadily expanded in both range and abundance. In most GMUs within the district, fall harvest has increased, while spring harvest has remained relatively stable (Figure 13). The recent increase in fall harvest could be from an increase in the population but is more likely the result of a longer season and more liberal bag limit that began in 2018. Harvest in spring 2023 was a bit higher than 2022. Harvest in fall 2024 and spring 2025 should be similar to harvest during the 2023 season.

How to find and hunt turkeys in the spring

Increasing daylight between late winter and early spring triggers the beginning of breeding season, although unusually prolonged cold, wet, or warm weather may delay or advance it. Gobbling and strutting start well before mating, when turkeys are still on their winter range in late March or early April. There are normally two peaks of gobbling. The first occurs when males call and females are not yet

nesting, and the second occurs a few weeks later, when most hens are incubating eggs. Finding these gobbling toms and moving close enough to call them in without bumping (flushing) them is the challenge and excitement to traditional spring turkey hunting. Hunters may consider referring to our [Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) resource.

How to find and hunt turkeys in the fall

During fall and winter, wild turkey priorities are food and roosting areas. In the fall, food remains critical for growth of poults (juvenile turkeys) and for adults adding fat reserves. Forest edges that offer seeds, nuts, and fruits, as well as some green vegetation, are used the most. At this time of year, turkeys are at their highest population and widest distribution within northeastern Washington, including District 1. As autumn wears on and snowfall comes, the turkeys gradually constrict their range to lower elevations. Where agriculture predominates, a mosaic of short grass fields or cropland and forest is generally the best place to find turkeys.

Figure 13. Fall (orange), spring (green), and total (blue) estimated turkey harvest for each GMU in District 1, 2019-2023.

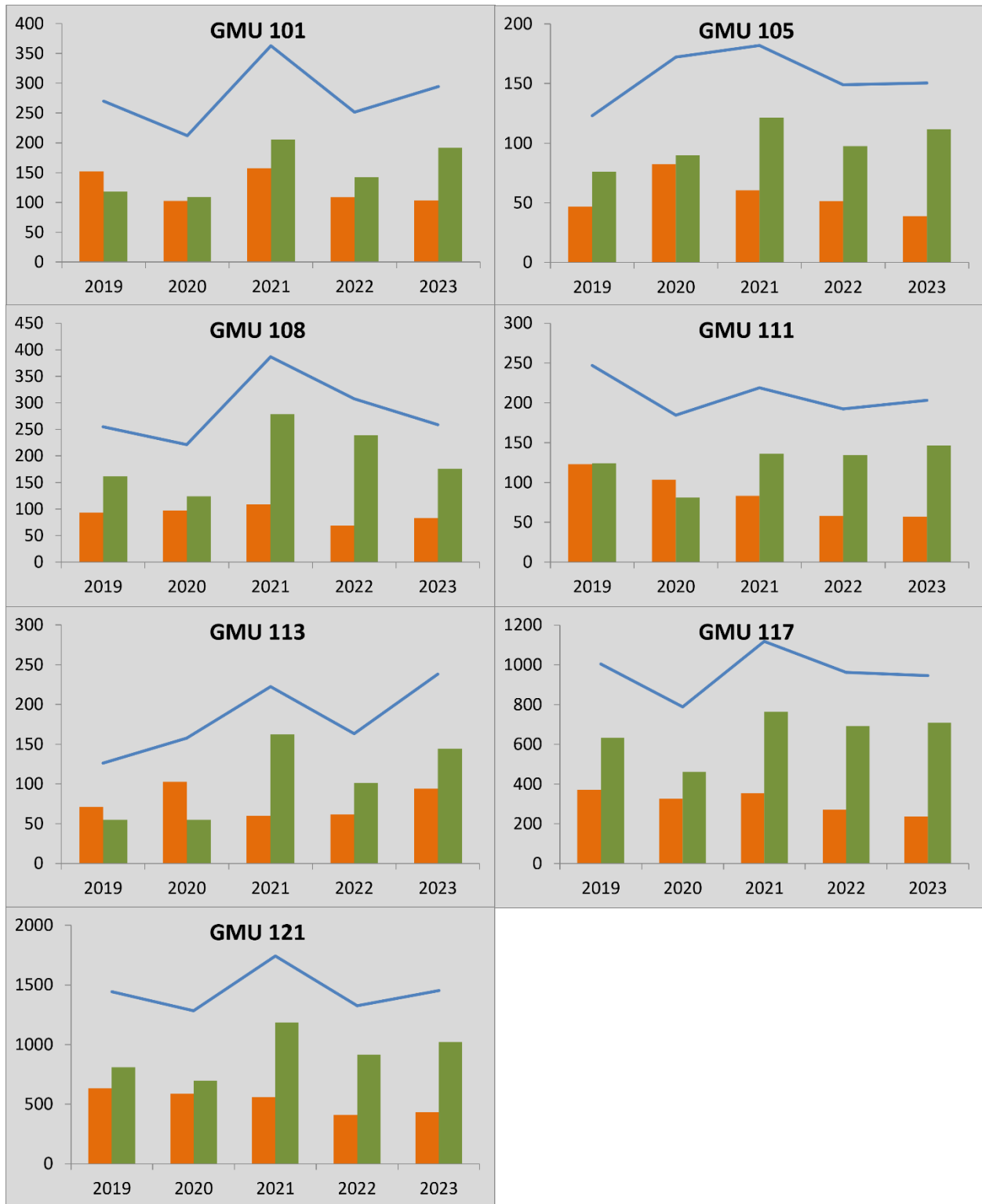
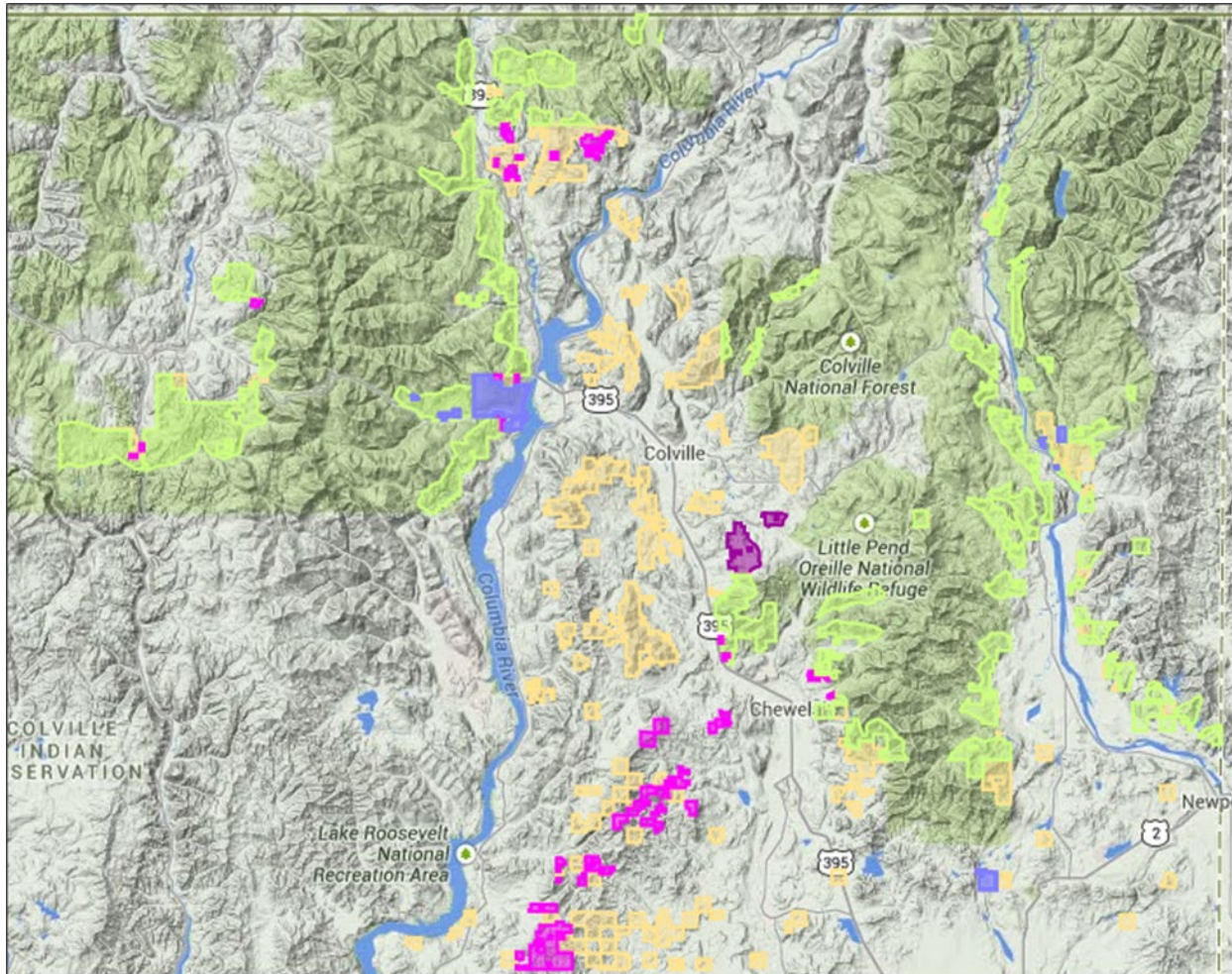


Figure 14. Map depicting public lands good for turkey hunting.



This map is produced by Map Metrics.

Waterfowl



Two hunters show off their duck harvests by a river in the winter. Photo by Trent Roussin.

Common species

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 1. Common dabbling ducks include mallard, gadwall, American wigeon, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Diving ducks are also present, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, redheads, goldeneyes, and mergansers. Nesting wood ducks can be located in the Pend Oreille, Colville, and Kettle River valleys, and can provide a unique hunting opportunity early in the season. Mallards are the most abundant duck species in Washington and constitute the majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically $\geq 50\%$). They are a commonly harvested duck in District 1 as well.

Canada geese are the only wild goose commonly found within District 1. They are abundant in the Pend Oreille, Colville, and Kettle River valleys, especially in the widest valley bottom areas where there is extensive farmland cultivation.

Best hunting areas

Pend Oreille River

The upper Pend Oreille River, from Newport downstream to Usk, offers the best general waterfowl hunting opportunity within northeastern Washington. Outside of the east shoreline, alongside the Kalispell Indian Reservation, most of the river itself is open for hunting, along with several islands. In most instances a boat is required, either to serve as a hunting blind or for access to islands and sandbars open to hunting. There are also Pend Oreille Public Utility District lands, as well as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge land (the Cusick Unit) open to public hunting. These parcels are located near the mouths of Tacoma and Trimble creeks, into the Pend Oreille River.

Dabbling ducks: Moderate numbers during migration, mostly gadwall, wigeon, teal, mallards, and some pintails.

Diving ducks: Moderate numbers with the highest densities during peak migration periods.

Geese: Canada geese occur in the greatest abundance in this part of District 1.

Lake Roosevelt

Lake Roosevelt up to the 1310 feet elevation contour is mostly federally owned and managed by the National Park Service. Much of the lake shore also borders the Colville and Spokane Indian Reservations, however, and in these areas the tribes manage the shoreline. As such, where you can legally hunt is somewhat complicated. Hunters should call the National Park Service in Kettle Falls at 509-738-6266 for clarification before hunting.

Dabbling Ducks: Low to moderate numbers during migration, mostly wigeon, and mallards.

Diving Ducks: Relatively few, but higher densities during peak migration periods.

Geese: Canada geese have a scattered distribution in this hundred-mile-long reservoir and can occur in high numbers during peak migration.

Colville and Kettle Valleys

Almost all the valley bottoms are private lands, so obtaining written permission for hunting access is essential. Ducks are most common where there are slow, meandering streams, sloughs, and/or farm ponds. Geese are most common in the agricultural areas.



A ruddy duck swimming in a lake. Photo by WDFW.

Dabbling Ducks: Low to moderate numbers during migration, mostly mallards.

Diving Ducks: Relatively few, but higher densities during peak migration periods, especially on the Colville River.

Geese: Canada geese are evenly distributed in the Colville Valley. When heavy snowfall covers fields late in the season, they tend to migrate south to warmer, snow-free areas.

Hunting techniques

Duck hunting methods are largely dependent on location. When hunting inland waters associated with ponds and rivers or feeding areas, traditional decoy setups work best. Birds are most active during early morning and late afternoon as they move from resting areas to feeding areas. See [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) for more information.

The techniques employed to harvest geese are standard. Find agricultural areas where geese are feeding and set up decoy spreads well before daylight where geese are expected to concentrate. In District 1, agricultural areas where feeding geese congregate generally include hay fields and winter wheat (or other cereal grain crop) fields. Because of this, most goose hunting opportunities occur on private property and require hunters to gain permission before hunting. Figure 15 shows harvest data through the 2023 season. Final harvest statistics can be found on the [WDFW website](#).

Figure 15. Trends in the number of ducks harvested, duck hunters, duck hunter days, and ducks harvested per hunter day in Ferry County (orange), Stevens County (purple), Pend Oreille County (green), and throughout District 1 (blue), 2019 – 2023.

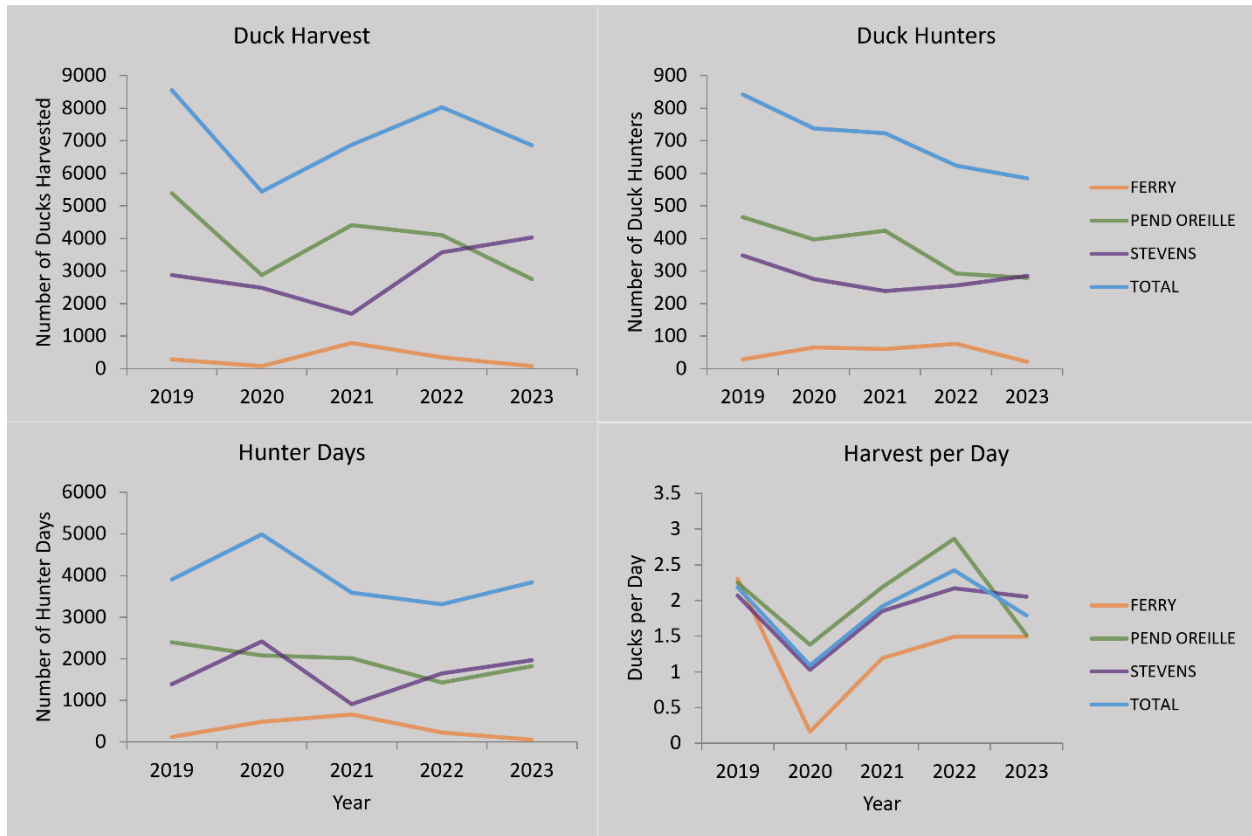
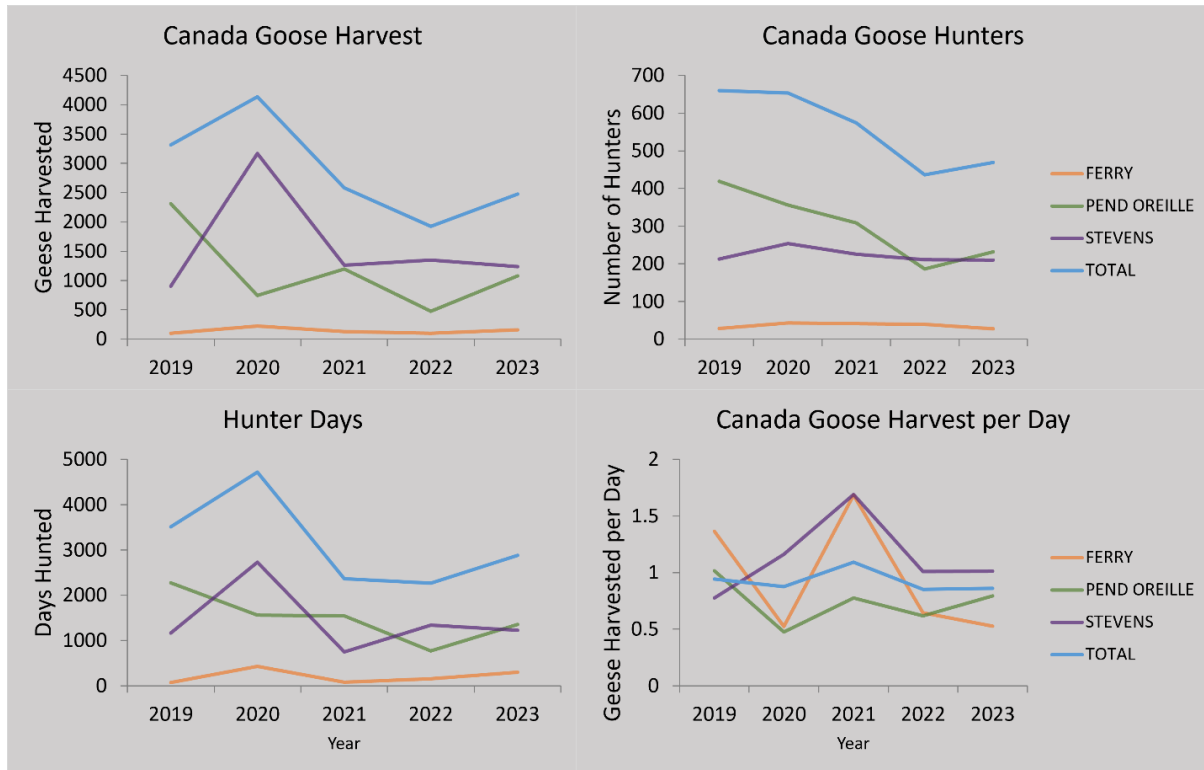


Figure 16. Trends in the number of geese harvested, goose hunters, hunter days, and geese harvested per hunter day in Ferry County (orange), Stevens County (purple), Pend Oreille County (green), and throughout District 1 (blue), 2019 – 2023.



Other small game species


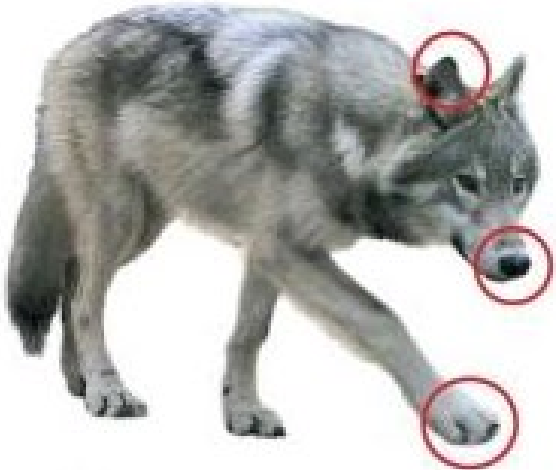
Other small game species that occur in District 1 but are not covered in detail include California (valley) quail, gray partridge, snowshoe hare, bobcat, and coyote. Additional migratory game birds include mourning dove, Wilson’s (common) snipe, and American coot.

While hunting bobcat and coyotes, hunters are reminded to correctly ID their target. Both wolves and lynx are present in District 1 and are illegal to harvest. Below are some pictures to assist in correct species identification.



Figure 17. Comparison of gray wolf and coyote.

How to recognize a gray wolf

Gray Wolf
Color: light gray to black
Dimensions: 2.5 feet tall, 5-6 feet long
Broad snout
Round ears
80-120 pounds
Paw size: 4" x 5"

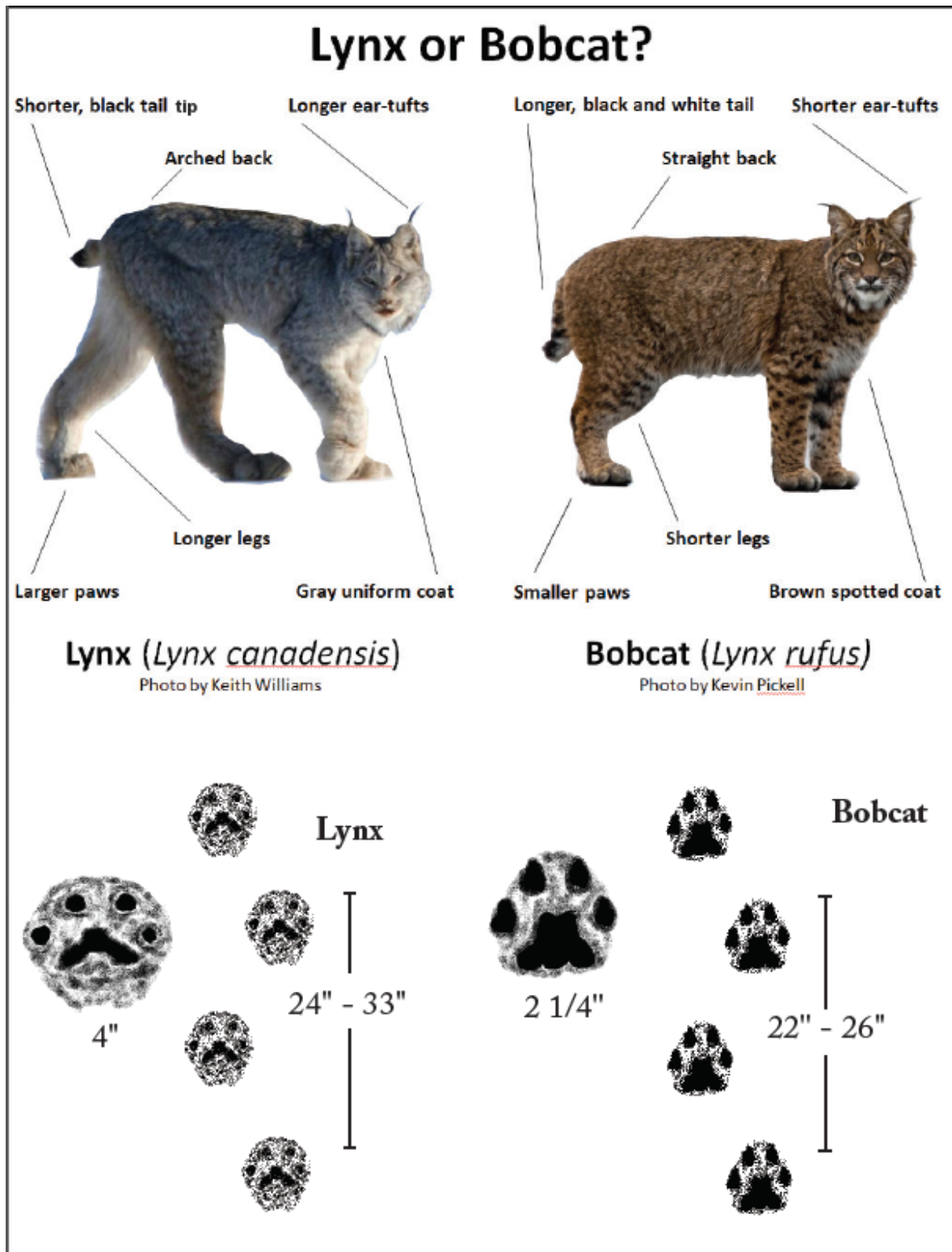


Coyote
Color: light gray/brown
Dimensions: 1.5 feet tall, 4 feet long
Narrow snout
Tall pointed ears
20-50 pounds
Paw size: 2" x 2.5"



Photos: Savannah Walker, Wildlife Biologist, Spokane Tribe of Indians; Scott McCorquodale, WDFW

Figure 18. Comparison of lynx and bobcat.



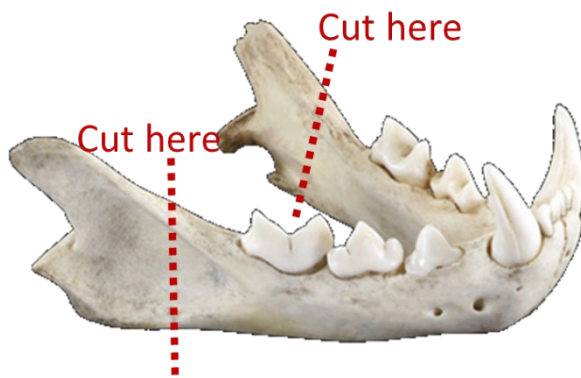
Notable changes

Hunters or trappers harvesting a bobcat must now provide a complete lower jaw (both sides), cleaned and dried, before a pelt can be sealed. WDFW uses the jaw to determine the age of the harvested bobcat.

Before bringing in the lower jaw, remove as much flesh as possible and allow it to dry in the open air, in a cardboard box or paper bag, or store in a plastic bag with salt or borax to prevent decay.

When removing the jaw, please attempt to remove the entire lower jaw from the bobcat. If you cannot get the entire jaw, then the jaw may be cut at the designated locations upon removal (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Lower jaw cut locations.



You must label both the pelt and the jaw so it is clear which pelt belongs to which jaw. You can use any form of waterproof tagging to identify the jaw to the correct pelt. One example is to use sales tags (example at left) and write a matching label on the pelt and the jaw. Alternatives could be to use different colored string, zip ties, ribbon, tape, or flagging to identify the matching pair.

We will also ask for a tissue sample at the point of sealing. This is not required, but sharing a sample can help WDFW identify the accuracy of hunter and trapper sex ID by genetically identifying the sex of the individual bobcats. If we can confirm hunter and trapper accuracy, we may be able to avoid requiring that evidence of sex be left on the pelt at the time of sealing in future rulemaking. The size of the sample should be 1 mm thick x 5 mm square and should not impact the condition of the pelt. We can even take a sample from the jaw bone that you submit if there is enough meat to collect a sample. The tissue sample can be either dried or wet, as long as it is not rotten.

Moose – Special Permit Only

WDFW recently confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in north Spokane County in GMU 124. While that detection was not in District 1, it was geographically close. CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the Cervidae ‘deer’ family and is fatal in infected moose, elk, deer, and caribou. TSEs are caused by malformed proteins called prions. There is currently no cure for CWD and it can severely impact cervid populations if it becomes widespread. CWD

can only be confirmed through testing of lymph nodes or brain tissue. Testing will be more important than ever to prevent the spread of the disease to other areas of eastern Washington and across the region and state. Information on how to have your harvested animal tested, and other steps WDFW is taking to prevent the spread of CWD, is at wdfw.wa.gov/cwd.

The moose in northeast Washington are Shiras moose which is the smallest of the four subspecies of moose in North America. Shiras moose are named after George Shiras III, an ardent conservationist, explorer, and U.S. Congressman in the early 1900s. This subspecies is native to the northern Rocky Mountains and apparently migrated on its own accord into eastern Pend Oreille County in the 1950s. The first official state documentation of moose in Washington occurred in 1954. In the decades since, moose have dramatically increased both in numbers and distribution, and are now common throughout much of northeast Washington.

Moose may only be hunted by limited special permits that are available by a lottery drawing every year. Permit hunters should take note that while moose are fairly common, they are by nature a solitary animal, and occur only individually or in small groups scattered over wide areas. They tend to select habitats based on forest successional stage and local climatic conditions. Moose can be found at any elevation in northeast Washington but are most likely found in the 3,000 to 5,000-foot elevation band. In the fall they seek deciduous browse, primarily willow, serviceberry, *ceanothus*, and other shrubs in logged over areas or burns approximately 15 years old or older. Moose are drawn to north slopes or east flowing drainages, which are cool and moist. Late fall and early winter snowfall do not seem to deter moose in any way.

Moose rut from mid-September to early October, and some hunters have been effective with calls. Hunters using calls should stay on stand for at least one hour or longer, as bulls come to the call from long distances. Early in the season, moose are widespread, and snow is generally not present for tracking. Nevertheless, road and hiking access is good in October. Usually by some time in November snow is common and locating moose tracks, as well as seeing these dark animals against a white background of snow, becomes much easier. However, by late November there is frequently deep enough snow to be concerned about having only limited road access into high elevation moose range. Inland Empire Paper Company and other private timber companies may close their roads to motor vehicle traffic depending on weather conditions.

Forest Service Ranger Stations located at Newport and Colville are good sources of information on moose, weather, camping, and forest road conditions or restrictions. The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also sells maps and has a regional office located in Colville.

Kettle Range – GMU 101, GMU 105, GMU 204

Moose continue to expand their range in the Kettle Range moose unit, but currently the most productive locations for hunting are in two general areas. The first is within GMU 101 and includes the South Fork Sherman Creek drainage, the upper Barnaby Creek drainage, and the east slope of the Kettle Crest under Snow Peak, Sherman Peak, Barnaby Buttes, and White Mountain. There also tends to be a

lot of moose sign on the west side of White Mountain up Hall Creek Road, but the dense timber makes sighting them difficult. The second area is in GMU 105 near the Canadian border in the vicinity of Churchill Mountain and Lead Pencil Mountain. The creek drainages may be most productive, including Sheep Creek, Crown Creek, and Flat Creek. The Little Boulder Creek drainage west of the Kettle River in Ferry County seems to be an area moose have recently expanded into as well.

Selkirk – GMU 113

Good areas to hunt in the western portion of the Selkirk Mountains Unit include Skookum Lakes to South Baldy, along with the LeClerc Creek, Harvey Creek, upper Sullivan Creek, and Slumber Creek drainages. On the east side of the unit, the West Branch Priest River, Flat Creek, Goose Creek, Kalispell Creek, South Fork Granite Creek, Cache Creek, Willow Creek, and Gold Creek drainages can be productive.

Douglas – GMU 108

Moose are frequently seen in the vicinity of Harrier Creek, VanStone Mine, and Rogers Mountain. Moose have also been commonly found in the headwaters area to Onion Creek.

Aladdin - GMU 111

Moose are more frequently seen in the south and central portion of GMU 111, but some hunters have had luck in the northern portion of the GMU as well. Some specific areas that generally harbor moose in GMU 111 include Big Meadow Lake, Seldom Seen Mountain, Bon Ayre Ridge, North and South Forks Mill Creek, Amazon Creek, and Clark Creek.

49 Degrees North – GMU 117

The 49 Degrees North GMU is divided by a mountain range into east and west drainages. The areas near the crest of the divide or the drainages on the east side have the most moose activity. In the southern portion, good areas would be Boyer, Nelson, and Chewelah mountains, along with the Calispell, Tenmile, and Gletty creek drainages. In the north portion of GMU 117, Winchester, Small, Ruby, and Flodell creek drainages, along with Tacoma, Dirty Shirt, Little Calispell, Calispell, Goddards, and Olson mountain peaks, tend to hold significant numbers of moose. There are many recent and older harvest units in 117, which allow ample opportunity to glass hillsides from a ridgeline or road.

Parker Lake – GMU 117 – No permits in 2024 due to extensive logging operation

The Parker Lake Hunting Closure area is approximately 21,000 acres, and is very similar to the surrounding forest, with a blend of timber harvest, mature stand forests, and reproduction/burn units. From approximately September through May, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape Training (SERE) School is present in either the Tacoma, Cusick, or Ruby Creek watersheds.

Training typically occurs 24 hours a day from Saturday through Thursday of each week, except for an approximate three-week period during the Christmas and New Year's holidays. To aid hunters in their planning and to assist in establishing a pattern of avoidance, deer or moose special permit holders will receive a map of the SERE School area of operation from the USAF Training Area Manager. Moose are found throughout the Parker Lake Closure, but seasonal timing will dictate elevations, population densities, and hunting opportunities. There are quite a few small ponds and swampy areas where moose can be found. Northern slopes and eastern drainages between 3,000 feet and the crest of Timber Mountain should provide ample opportunities. The SERE School conducts little activity above 3,500 feet in elevation.

Huckleberry – GMU 121

Good areas to hunt in the Huckleberry Range are the mountains extending north and south of the Springdale - Hunters Pass off the Springdale - Hunters Highway. The east side of the pass has the majority of moose habitat, especially the headwaters of the forks of Chimokane Creek and Deer Creek. Moose sightings are also common east of the Fruitland area with access to the mountains through the Fruitland Valley or up the "O-Ra-Pak-En" Creek drainage.

Harvest trends

Moose hunting in Washington is regulated through a permit system. Hunters are required to return their hunt report to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Permit availability, and therefore moose hunting opportunity, has increased in Washington in the last ten years. For more information about harvest trends, search for the most recent [status and trend report](#).



In a snowfield, a cow moose and her calf traverse through the deep snow. Photo by WDFW.

Important information

Hunters with permits to harvest antlerless moose are requested to refrain from taking cows with calves in their immediate vicinity. Some moose cows in Washington do not produce calves in all years or may have already lost them by hunting season. WDFW requests that hunters with antlerless moose permits avoid harvesting cows with calves.

All successful moose hunters are required to submit a tooth within 60 days of harvest in the envelope provided with your informational packet. Tooth samples allow WDFW to get an overview of the age structure of the moose population and make better management decisions based on this information. Extra tooth envelopes are available at most WDFW Regional offices. To find out the age of your harvested moose, refer to WDFW's [tooth age lookup tool](#).

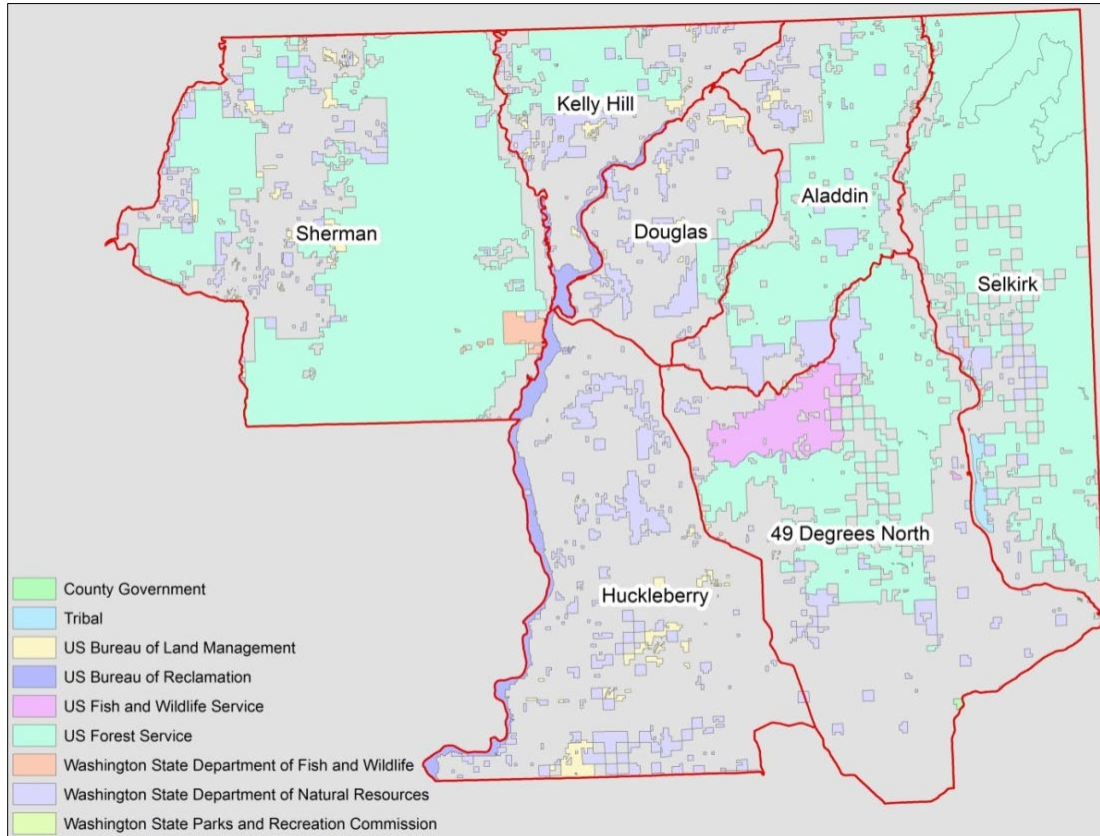
Major public lands and GMU access

Over one third (approximately 37%) of the land mass in District 1 is public, consisting of mostly national forest, but also state DNR and WDFW, federal BLM, USFWS, and a few other government agencies. Most of these lands outside of Indian reservations are open to public hunting. The public lands tend to be at higher elevations, with steep terrain, a shorter growing season, no row crop agriculture, and in general a lower density of game animals, especially deer and turkey. GMUs with the most public land include 101 (Sherman), 111 (Aladdin), 113 (Selkirk), and 117 (49 Degrees North). If you plan to hunt on DNR land,

you will need to purchase and display on your vehicle a [Discover Pass](#). For hunting on WDFW wildlife areas, you will need to display a WDFW [Vehicle Access Pass](#) (free with hunting or fishing license purchase) or a Discover Pass.

For more information related to the location of WDFW wildlife areas, see Figure 19 and see [WDFW's hunting access website](#). For more information on resources available to locate public lands, please see the Online Tools and Maps section.

Figure 20. Map depicting the location of public lands within each GMU comprising District 1.



GMU access

Sherman – GMU 101

The majority of GMU 101 is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. All of the Kettle Range has good but somewhat limited road access for automobiles. In GMU 101, there are roads leading up to the Kettle Crest from both the east and the west, but only three that cross over, including two paved and maintained roads, Sherman Pass and Boulder Pass, and one unpaved road, Little Boulder. During the late hunt, some access may be limited in the higher elevations if there is snow. A four-wheeled drive vehicle is recommended in the late season if there is a possibility of snow. A Colville National Forest map is also recommended.

Kelly Hill – GMU 105

Much of the northern portion of GMU 105 is owned by the U.S. Forest Service. Largely in the southern portion of the GMU, there are lands owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), industrial timber companies (mainly Manulife, formerly Hancock Forest Management), and other private lands. The eastern portion of the GMU also has some private timber company ownership. Road access is good throughout the unit. A Colville National Forest map is recommended.

Douglas – GMU 108

The majority of GMU 108 is private, but there are a few sizeable blocks of Colville National Forest and DNR land. Road access is good in this GMU. A Colville National Forest and/or Department of Natural Resources map is recommended.

Aladdin – GMU 111

Access is best either from Colville north on the Aladdin Road, from Highway 20 between Colville and Tiger (south of Lone), or west of Highway 31 between Lone and Metaline. GMU 111 has good driving access south of Smackout Pass, and the majority of land throughout this GMU is owned by the U.S. Forest Service (Colville National Forest) with a lesser amount owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In the northern portion of the GMU, there are fewer roads with more opportunities for walk in, bike, and/or horse access, as well as cross-country travel. Throughout the GMU, there are closed or decommissioned roads to get off of the main road system by foot or other non-motorized method. A Colville National Forest map is recommended.

Selkirk – GMU 113

The northern half of GMU 113 is mostly within the Colville or Idaho Panhandle National Forest, but many of the roads are gated or retired, which limits vehicle access. The southern half of GMU 113 is a mix of private timber company, private property, national forest, and Washington DNR. Most timber company gates are locked year-round, as well as some national forest roads. If hunting the eastern portion of GMU 113, it may be easier to access the area through Idaho. The higher elevations in GMU 113 may likely have some snow during the late hunt. A four-wheeled drive vehicle is recommended if there is a possibility of snow. A Colville National Forest map is also recommended.

49 Degrees North – GMU 117

49 Degrees North is a mix of private property, Colville National Forest, the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge, and private industrial timber company land. Road access on national forest land is fairly good, but most access on industrial timber company land is restricted to non-motorized. In some of the southern portion of GMU 117, all motorized access is restricted within the Buck Creek Road Closure Area, which includes Boyer Mountain and Nelson Peak. The Colville National Forest travel map is recommended. The Washington DNR map is also recommended, especially for the southern portion of the unit.

Huckleberry – GMU 121

The majority of GMU 121 is in private ownership, but there are scattered sections or small blocks of Washington DNR and U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. Manulife owns much of the private forest land in this area. Washington DNR maps are recommended.

Private industrial forestlands

General information

Much hunting opportunity, especially for big game and forest grouse, occurs on private industrial forest lands. Timber companies that own large tracts of land and are the most well-known include Manulife, Stimson, and Inland Empire Paper. Hunters should be aware that there are a number of other smaller timber companies that have operations in District 1 but are not mentioned here.

WDFW recognizes that some of the best hunting opportunities occur on private industrial forest lands. WDFW works cooperatively with private timber companies to maintain reasonable public access during established hunting seasons. Private industrial forestlands have typically been open for public access, but hunters should always remember that access granted to private property is a privilege. Hunters should also refrain from calling timber companies to ask hunting-related questions. Foresters are very busy, and hunters should be referring these types of questions to their local WDFW wildlife biologists.

Recently, there has been an increasing trend of timber companies restricting public access and shifting towards a permit system to limit the number of hunters who hunt on their lands. One of the primary reasons for access restrictions and loss of access is disrespect of the landowner's rules. WDFW reminds all wild land recreationists to treat this privilege with respect and follow basic access rules.

Electronic bikes (e-bikes) are a popular new mode of transportation for hunters. Please be aware that while they are not considered motor vehicles and allowed on most public land, some timber companies do not allow e-bikes behind locked gates. These include Stimson and Molpus, but there may be others that do not allow them. Check first before riding behind a locked gate.

FIRE CLOSURE INFORMATION: Confirm that land is open before going out to scout or hunt. **Obey all posted signs.** Signs and access restrictions will be removed when fire danger has abated.

Basic access rules

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forest lands vary by timber company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide these rules on their website or will provide them to hunters who call to inquire about access. However, hunters are encouraged to follow these basic rules if they find themselves in an area they are not familiar with and are in doubt about specific landowner rules. The following are intended to be a general guideline of the basic access rules that are commonplace on many private

industrial forest lands. Timber companies may have more or less restrictive rules in place and ultimately, it is the hunter's responsibility to be familiar with those rules.

- Respect the landowner and other users.
- Obey all posted signs.
- Drive slow with headlights turned on when driving on roads opened to public access.
- Avoid areas of active logging.
- No camping (unless allowed), campfires (unless allowed), littering, ORVs, off road driving, target shooting, or forest product removals. Exceptions: mushrooms and berries for personal use.
- An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.
- Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles, including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors.
- Help prevent forest fires.

Heads up for archery and muzzleloader hunters

Private timber companies have traditionally opened their lands to modern firearm hunters during established seasons. Archery and muzzleloader hunters should be aware they may not have full access, and access levels during their respective seasons varies by year and by landowner. Most often, access is influenced by industrial fire classifications issued by the Washington DNR. Hence, timber lands may be closed during archery and muzzleloader seasons, which typically begin earlier in the autumn when there is a greater risk of forest fire. Hunters are urged to respect landowners by adhering to any access restrictions they have in place.

Contact information for major timber companies

Some landowners have hotlines and/or websites where hunters can find information about public access. **It is important to remember, however, that these companies do not have personnel dedicated to answering hunter questions.** Therefore, hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 1 office in Spokane (509-892-1001) if there are questions related to public access on private industrial forest lands.

- [Inland Empire Paper](#)
- [Manulife Investment Management - Fire closure information ONLY](#)
- [Stimson Lumber](#)

Private Lands Access Program

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through a negotiated agreement. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and, in some cases, monetary compensation. In addition, lands under agreement are well known by WDFW Enforcement.

There are several private landowners in District 1 who are enrolled in WDFW’s Private Lands Access Program. Specific information, including property locations, can be found on [WDFW’s Hunter Access website](#). Below is a summary, by GMU, of cooperators and acres currently enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. The Feel Free to Hunt Program acres listed are those lands in the Cooperative Road Management Program with private timber companies. Region 1 also maintains a landowner access list for certain species and GMUs. You can receive landowner information from this list by calling the Eastern Regional Office at 509-892-1001.

Tables 7a and 7b show cooperators and acres currently enrolled in the private lands hunting access program within District 1.

Table 7a. Hunting Only by Written Permission

Game Management Unit	Cooperators	Acres
101 (Sherman)	5	907
105 (Kelly Hill)	0	0
108 (Douglas)	0	0
111 (Aladdin)	1	102
113 (Selkirk)	0	0
117 (49 Degrees North)	4	1,813
121 (Huckleberry)	9	3,922

Table 7b. Feel Free to Hunt

Game Management Unit	Cooperators	Acres
101 (Sherman)	12	30,259
105 (Kelly Hill)	8	28,533
108 (Douglas)	13	42,474
111 (Aladdin)	15	23,970
113 (Selkirk)	11	105,722
117 (49 Degrees North)	17	155,894
121 (Huckleberry)	15	111,729

Online tools and maps

Most GMUs in District 1 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 but provide valuable information that helps solve the

landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources that are available to the general public.

Department of Natural Resources Public Lands Quadrangle (PLQ) maps

A good 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, many hunters are not aware that it exists. Information for parcels in these areas can be used as a resource.

- [Stevens County tax parcels](#)
- [Ferry County tax parcels](#)
- [Pend Oreille tax parcels](#) *You will need the address of the property to use this search tool.

WDFW's online mapping tools

WDFW's [Hunting Webmap](#) has been revamped and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public and private land hunting opportunities within each GMU.

Colville area maps

There are a variety of maps showing trails, camping locations, public lands, and popular landmarks available for download on the [Colville Chamber of Commerce website](#).

Other online resources

- [Ferry County hunting page](#)
- [Colville Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Ferry County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [North Pend Oreille Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge](#)
- [Colville National Forest](#)
- [LC Sportsmaps, Inc, and OnX](#)

Common wildlife diseases

Wild animals can have a variety of diseases and parasites, many of which pose little to no risk to humans. Below is a list of diseases and parasites commonly encountered by hunters, either in the field hunting or while processing an animal for consumption. More information can be found by following the link for each listed disease or parasite. Please note, this is just a few of the most common diseases or parasites encountered by hunters. If you observe dead or sick/injured wildlife while out hunting, please report your observations on the [Wildlife Health](#) page of the WDFW website.

Chronic Wasting Disease

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) recently confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in north Spokane County in game management unit (GMU) 124. While that detection was not in District 1, it was geographically close. CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the Cervidae 'deer' family and is fatal in infected deer. TSEs are caused by malformed proteins called prions. There is currently no cure for CWD and it can severely impact cervid populations if it becomes widespread. CWD can only be confirmed through testing of lymph nodes or brain tissue. Testing will be more important than ever to prevent the spread of the disease to other areas of eastern Washington and across the region and state. Information on how to have your harvested animal tested, and other steps WDFW is taking to prevent the spread of CWD, is at wdfw.wa.gov/cwd.

Papillomas or warts

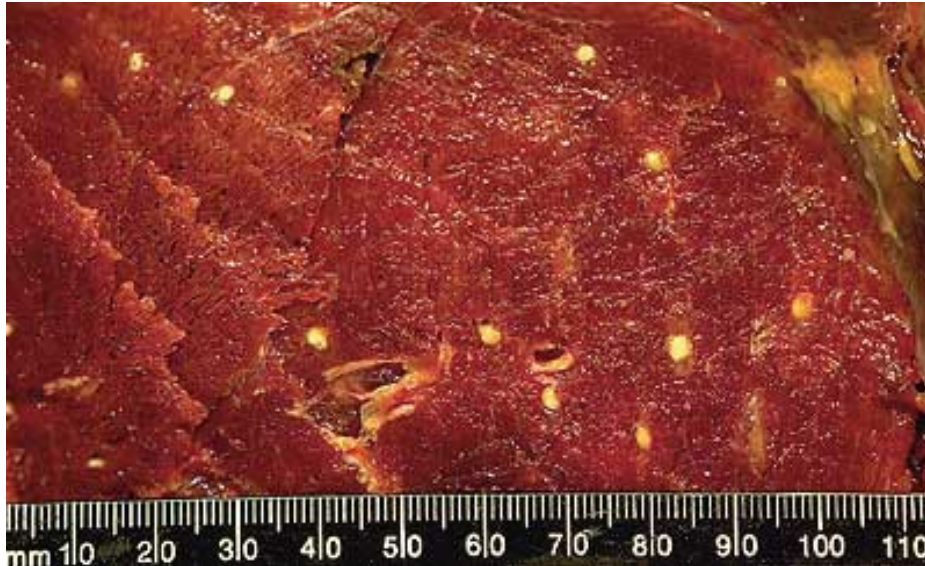


Deer with Papillomas. Photo by Matt Harbin.

Safety - The viruses that cause papillomas in wildlife are not contagious to humans. Pets and livestock are not susceptible to the viruses that cause papillomas in wildlife. However, they can become infected with papilloma viruses that affect their own species. Papillomas are limited to the skin and can easily be trimmed away. The meat from animals with papillomas is suitable for consumption.

Papillomas are most frequently observed on deer, elk, and moose.

Tapeworm cysts



Tapeworm Cysts. Photo by Alaska Fish and Game.

Safety – Humans cannot become infected with *Taenia krabbei*. Meat from infected animals is suitable for human consumption and cooking the meat will kill the parasite. Dogs can be infected with tapeworms if fed the uncooked meat, so it is recommended not feeding raw infected parts to dogs.

Tapeworm cysts are commonly observed in moose, deer, and elk.

Liver flukes



Liver flukes. Photo by Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Safety – Humans cannot become infected with *F. magna*. However, the appearance of the liver may be off-putting and undesirable to eat.

Liver flukes are most common in deer and some elk.

Abscesses



Abscesses. Photo by Alaska Fish and Game.

Safety – Be careful not to cut into an abscess as the pus can be spread and contaminate other parts of the carcass. The portions of the meat with abscesses should not be eaten. Unaffected portions of the carcass are suitable for consumption.

Abscesses can occur anywhere inside or on the body and can occur in any hunted species.

Pharyngeal bots or nasal bots



Pharyngeal bots. Photo by Indian Department of Natural Resources.

Safety – Nasal bots do not pose a risk to humans. Meat from infected animals is safe to eat.

Most common in deer.

Sarcocystis (“rice breast”)



Sarcocystis, or rice breast, is a parasite found mostly in waterfowl appearing like grains of rice in harvested meat. Photo by Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

Safety – Humans cannot be infected by the cysts of *Sarcocystis* spp. Cooking will kill the parasite. It is recommended not feeding infected meat to dogs.

Sarcocystis is most common in waterfowl but can occur in elk and deer.

2024 District 2 Hunting Prospects

Spokane, Lincoln, and Whitman counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

June 2024

2024 District 2 Hunting Prospects

Spokane, Lincoln, and Whitman counties

Author

Carrie Lowe, District Wildlife Biologist

Matt Brinkman, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

Cover photo by WDFW.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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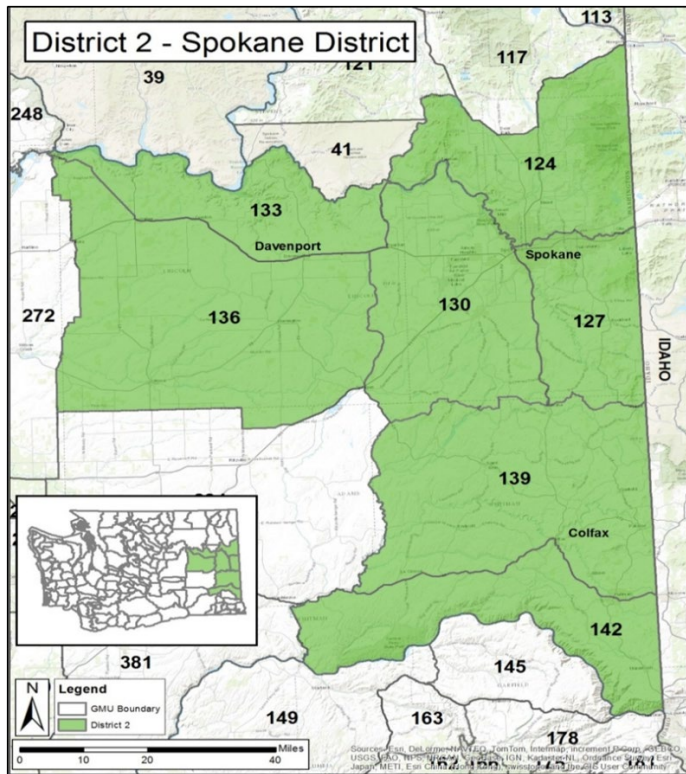
District 2 general overview

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) District 2 is in eastern Washington, bordering Idaho, and covers Lincoln, Whitman, and Spokane counties. Game management units (GMUs) in District 2 include 124 (Mount Spokane), 127 (Mica Peak), 130 (Cheney), 133 (Roosevelt), 136 (Harrington), 139 (Steptoe), and 142 (Almota) (Figure 1). Most of the district is in private ownership, so hunters are highly encouraged to secure access prior to the hunting season or applying for special permits.

The geography of District 2 includes the edge of the Rocky Mountain Range in the east, the Columbia Basin in the west, and the Channeled Scablands and Palouse in between. This diverse geography supports a wide range of habitats that include mixed coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir, western larch, and Ponderosa pine, scattered aspen groves, scabland, sagebrush steppe, grasslands, and extensive agricultural lands. Topography varies from ~500 feet above sea level along the Snake River in the south to the 5883-foot Mount Spokane in the north. Dominant river drainages include the Spokane, Palouse, Columbia, and Snake rivers.

District 2 is best known for its deer hunting opportunities, including white-tailed deer in the Spokane and Palouse agricultural lands and mule deer in the Channeled Scablands and breaks of the Snake River. Quality hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including pheasant and elk, if hunters have secured access to private lands. Moose and bighorn sheep hunters can enjoy quality hunting if they are selected for special permit hunts and if they have secured private land access prior to applying.

Figure 1. General location and game management units (GMUs) for WDFW District 2.



Chronic wasting disease

WDFW recently confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in the Fairwood community of north Spokane County in District 2. CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the Cervidae ‘deer’ family and is fatal in infected animals. TSEs are caused by malformed proteins called prions. There is currently no cure for CWD and it can severely impact cervid populations if it becomes widespread. CWD can only be confirmed through testing of lymph nodes or brain tissue. Testing will be more important than ever to prevent the spread of the disease to other areas of eastern Washington and across the region and state. Information on how to have harvested animals tested, and other steps WDFW is taking to prevent the spread of CWD, is at WDFW.WA.GOV/CWD. New emergency rules were adopted to reduce the spread of CWD, including mandatory CWD testing for all cervids (deer, elk, or moose) harvested or salvaged within GMUs 124, 127 or 130. The [emergency rules](#) also made it unlawful to use bait for hunting deer, elk, or moose within those same GMUs.

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. In addition to potential wildfires, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

and WDFW may be conducting prescribed burns and/or forest-thinning projects in your hunt area. For more information, visit:

- Wildfire status updates ([InciWeb – Incident Information System](#))
- [Northwest Interagency Coordination Center](#)
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#)
- [WDFW fire restrictions and closures](#)

Elk

General information, management goals, and population status

All elk that occur in District 2 are Rocky Mountain elk and belong to the Spokane sub-herd of the Selkirk elk herd. The Selkirk herd originated in Pend Oreille County and has expanded its range over the last 40 years to this area. As elk habitat in District 2 continues to be lost to agricultural conversion and urban sprawl, WDFW’s goal is to maintain the population at its current level (roughly 1000–1500 elk) while limiting agricultural damage and conflict within exurban (areas outside the denser inner suburban area, at the edge of a metropolitan area) areas. Consequently, an “any elk” harvest is offered for the general season in all GMUs in District 2. Most of the land in the district is in private ownership, so managing this population requires landowner tolerance and cooperation. Elk in this herd can be highly mobile and difficult to locate, so learning their behavior and gaining access to numerous private lands will greatly increase your chance of success.

Currently, WDFW does not conduct formal population surveys to monitor elk populations in most of District 2. Rather, harvest data, opportunistic surveys, sightings, and damage complaints are used to indicate population trends. The exception to this is the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge located in GMU 130 (Cheney). Aerial surveys have been conducted on and near Turnbull over the last 15 years to obtain herd size and composition data. The survey area only covers a small portion of the Spokane sub-herd range; it is designed to inform management decisions for the Refuge and is not likely representative of the entire area. WDFW’s herd composition objective is to maintain a ratio of 15 to 35 bulls per 100 cows pre-hunt and/or 12 to 20 bulls per 100 cows post-hunt. The most recent pre-hunt aerial survey of Turnbull and the surrounding area within GMU 130 was in 2020; the survey found the bull to cow ratio to be well above this management objective. Also based on the survey, 2020 calf production was above average, with a calf to cow ratio of 60 calves per 100 cows. Combined data sources for the entirety of District 2 over the last ten years indicate an overall stable population with some local populations declining and others increasing. For more details on the status of elk in Washington, refer to WDFW’s most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#). Also available is a general how-to guide for elk hunting entitled “[The Basics of Elk Hunting in Washington](#).”

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

This question does not have an easy answer, because it depends on access to private land, hunting method, and the type of hunting experience desired. For archery hunters, GMUs 124 and 127 provide the best terrain and generally contain more forested land, irrigated agriculture, small, developed lakes, and riparian areas. The terrain in GMUs 136–142 is better suited for muzzleloader and modern firearm, with open landscapes dominated by shrubsteppe, scablands, and dryland farming.

Most of the district's elk harvest (25 to 50%) is usually in GMU 130, though a high proportion consistently occurs in GMUs 124 and 127 as well. Hunters who gain access to private lands in GMUs 127 and 130 have often had the highest success, though success in GMU 133 has also been increasing over the past few years. In GMU 130, hunters likely benefit from animals moving on and off Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge during the season. Elk are often targeted by nearby landowners due to seasonal crop, fence, and haystack damage. GMU 124 (Mt. Spokane) sustains the greatest hunting pressure, with one-third of the total elk hunters in District 2. As a result, overall hunter success is lower there, although the unit periodically produces one of the higher harvests of mature 6-point bulls. Private timber companies, especially Inland Empire Paper (IEP), offer public access in this unit with a paid permit. Refer to IEP's [Recreational Use](#) webpage for their rules and regulations. Hunters should be aware that motorized access may be limited or closed completely on IEP and other timber company lands due to road conditions, logging operations, or fire danger. Hunters are advised to check closures and restrictions before setting out. Axxess Recreation Management, the property access manager for IEP, provides [access updates online](#). Also be aware that GMU 124 contains several County Parks, Conservation Areas, and State Parks, and they do not allow hunting. In addition, Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge in GMU 130 is NOT open for hunting except for Turnbull special permit holders.

The information in Table 1 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. The table also summarizes the number of elk harvested per square mile and hunters per square mile to account for the variation in sizes between GMUs.

Each GMU was ranked for elk harvested/mile², hunters/mile², and hunter success rates during the general season. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, the lower the score the better. Comparisons are most straightforward for modern firearm because seasons are the same across all GMUs. However, when choosing which GMU to hunt, differences that should be taken into consideration are:

1. In addition to the early general archery season in all GMUs, there is a late archery season in GMUs 124 & 127.
2. In addition to the early general muzzleloader season in all GMUs, there is a late muzzleloader season in GMUs 130-142.
3. There is a late Antlerless Only Master Hunter season for all weapon types in GMUs 127-142.

4. There are considerable differences in the sizes of GMUs, so looking at only total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison.

Tables 1a, 1b, and 1c provide rank sum analysis for a quick and general summary of how harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons. As a generalization, the lower the rank, the better the overall elk hunting opportunity is within a GMU. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2019-2023).

Table 1a. Modern Firearm

GMU	Size (mi ²)	% public land open to hunting	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
124	771	4%	50	.06	2	541	.70	7	9%	5	14
127	509	1%	58	.11	1	307	.6	6	19%	2	9
130	940	7%	52	.06	2	303	.32	5	17%	3	10
133	555	6%	18	.03	3	124	.22	4	14%	4	11
136	1586	11%	4	.00	6	45	.03	1	9%	5	12
139	1327	3%	18	.01	5	130	.10	2	14%	4	11
142	771	8%	18	.02	4	91	.12	3	20%	1	8

Table 1b. Archery

GMU	Size (mi ²)	% public land open to hunting	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
124	771	4%	14	.02	1	226	.29	5	6%	4	10
127	509	1%	12	.02	1	153	.30	6	8%	3	10
130	940	7%	11	.01	2	67	.07	4	16%	2	8
133	555	6%	2	.00	3	15	.03	3	16%	2	8
136	1586	11%	0	.00	3	6	.00	1	0%	5	9
139	1327	3%	4	.00	3	23	.02	2	16%	2	7
142	771	8%	4	.01	2	18	.02	2	24%	1	5

Table 1c. Muzzleloader

GMU	Size (mi ²)	% public land open to hunting	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
124	771	4%	11	.01	4	95	.12	4	11%	7	15
127	509	1%	14	.03	2	71	.14	5	20%	2	9
130	940	7%	39	.04	1	248	.26	7	16%	4	12
133	555	6%	12	.02	3	92	.17	6	12%	6	15
136	1586	11%	3	.00	5	18	.01	1	14%	5	11
139	1327	3%	21	.02	3	115	.09	3	18%	3	9
142	771	8%	9	.01	4	44	.06	2	21%	1	7

Elk areas

Most of the special permit elk hunts available in District 2 occur in Elk Area 1015, which is located within Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Turnbull special permit hunts were created in 2010 to address damage to aspen stands on the Refuge and address damage complaints from landowners in the area. Except for those selected for the disabled hunt, these are walk-in only hunts, and the area open to hunt is limited and assigned by Refuge staff. Permittees receive detailed information from Turnbull on their assigned hunt area, parking, and other regulations. In the first several years of the hunt, one Any Bull permit (any weapon type) and 62 Antlerless permits were offered. Beginning in 2023, youth hunters were allowed to harvest a Spike or Antlerless elk. For the 2024 season, there are 57 total permits: 1 Any Bull, 3 Spike-only, 47 Antlerless, and 6 Spike or Antlerless. Permits include each weapon type as well as hunts for youth, master hunters, and hunters with disabilities. Several hunters did not hunt or failed to report on their permit in 2023; those that did averaged 14% success for antlerless hunts, compared to the previous 5-year average of 12%. The Any Bull permittee harvested a 5-point bull, and none of the Spike hunters who reported were successful. For more detailed harvest information, view the [2023 Elk Individual Hunts](#). For more information about elk management in the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, visit [Turnbull - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#).

To address winter property damage in the area, there are also several late-season raffle permits and one WDFW special permit offered on Columbia Plateau Wildlife Management Association (CPWMA) properties in areas near Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Refer to the Private Lands Program section for more information on acreage enrolled in Private Land Access programs, and the [CPWMA](#) website for details on their hunt management.

What to expect during the 2024 season

General season elk harvest in District 2 has averaged 215 antlered and 166 antlerless elk per year over the last 5 years. In the 2023 season, 30% of bulls harvested were 6-point or better, and 27% of bulls were 5-point. Across all GMUs, elk hunter success during the general season has averaged 14% over the last 10 years, and hunter effort (days/kill) has averaged 36 days/kill. These numbers vary widely by GMU. A good predictor of future harvest during general seasons is the recent trend in the harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill. Figures 2 and 3 provide trend data for these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where to hunt. These numbers are highly variable between GMUs, so pay attention to the scale of each chart as they are not all the same.

Elk harvest in GMUs 139 (Steptoe) and 142 (Almota) has been highly variable over the last few years (Figure 3). Timing and access to private lands will be the key to successful elk hunting in these GMUs, as elk likely move back and forth between Idaho and Washington. Complaints of agricultural damage have risen, especially in areas where crops have been recently converted to legumes. Scattered groups of 20–100 elk have been reported causing damage in several areas including Fairfield south to Tekoa in GMU 127, the area from Dusty east to Palouse, south to Uniontown, and along the Snake River breaks in GMUs 139 and 142, and from Tyler near the Lincoln/Spokane County border to Sprague and north to Edwall in GMU 130. Additionally, there has been an increase in reported crop damage by 30–60 elk along the river breaks in northern GMU 133 in recent years; this GMU has also seen a steady increase in harvest over the past 5 years. Herds of 30 and 160+ elk also frequent private lands in the Deer Park area bordering GMUs 124 and 117.

Success depends heavily on the work the hunter is willing to put in to obtain access to private property. There are nearly 150 properties enrolled in WDFW's private land hunting access programs in District 2. Many of these are built around upland game and deer hunting, however some also support elk hunting, so opportunities exist for elk hunters who do their research. For locations of these properties, visit our [Hunt Planner Web map](#). For more detailed harvest information, refer to [District 2 - 2023 Elk General Season Harvest Reports](#).

Figure 2. GMUs 124 – 130. Left column: Ten-year trends in general season elk harvest by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Right column: Ten-year trends in general season hunter effort (measured in days per kill) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the difference in scales for each GMU.

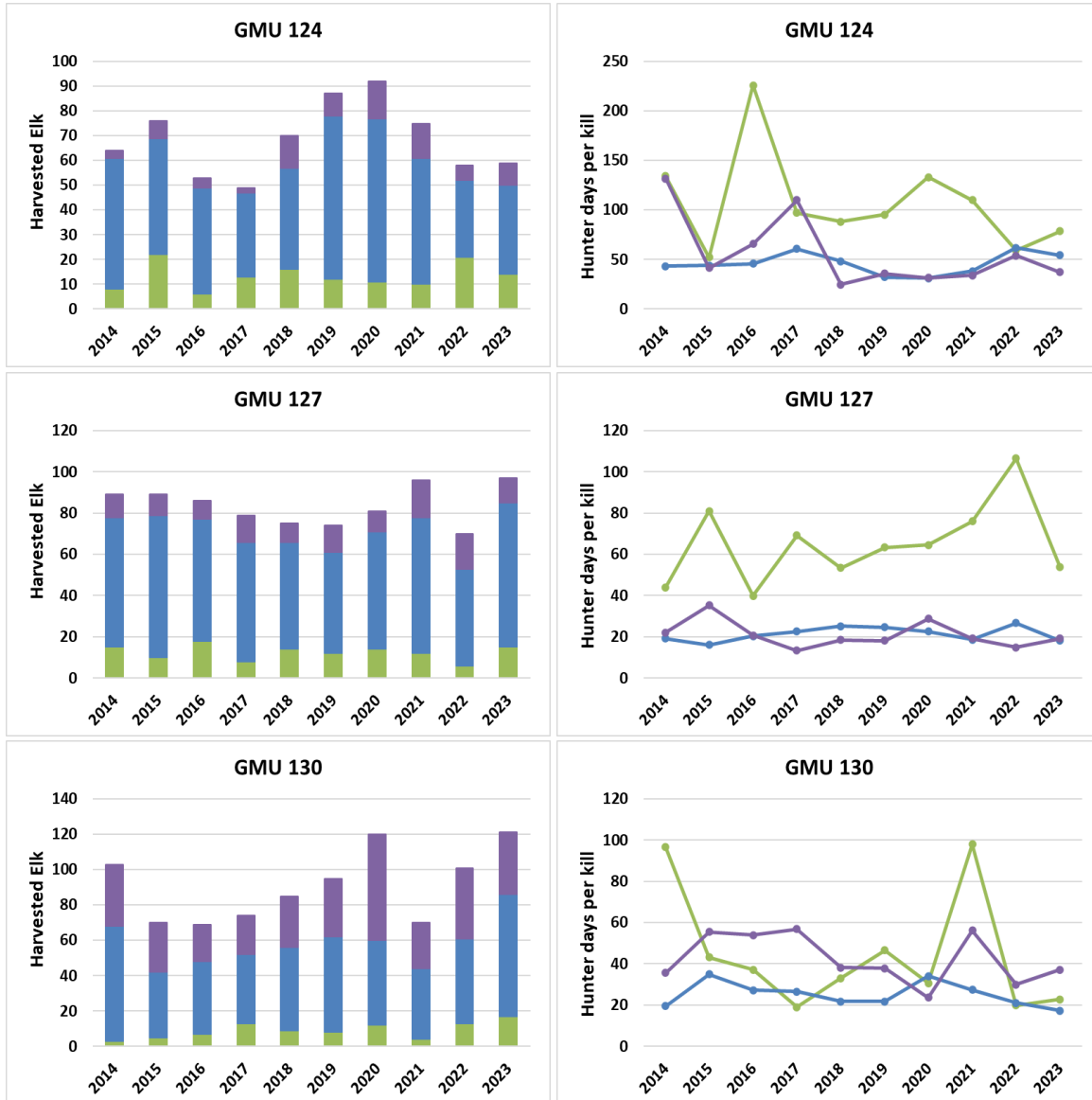
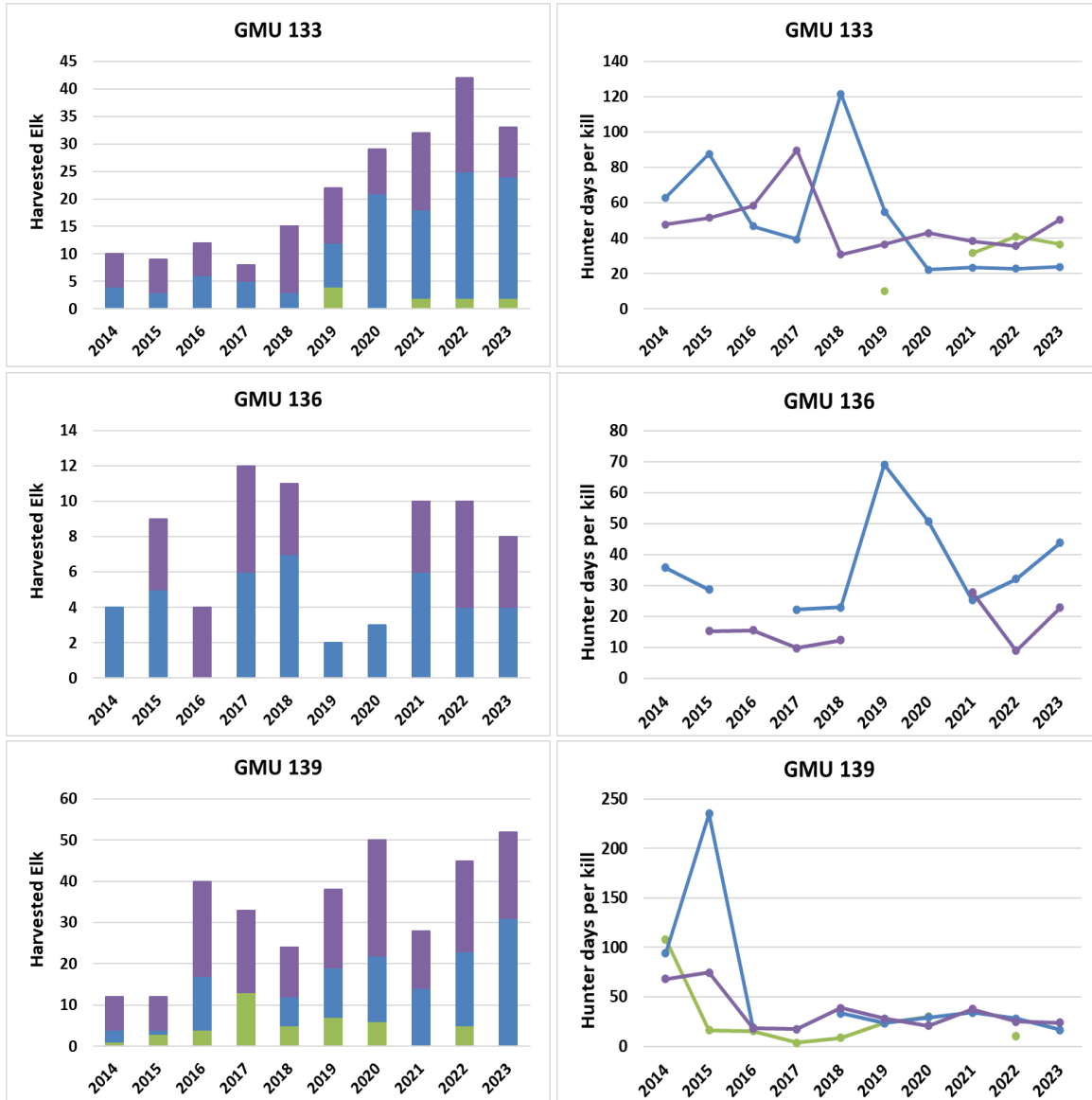
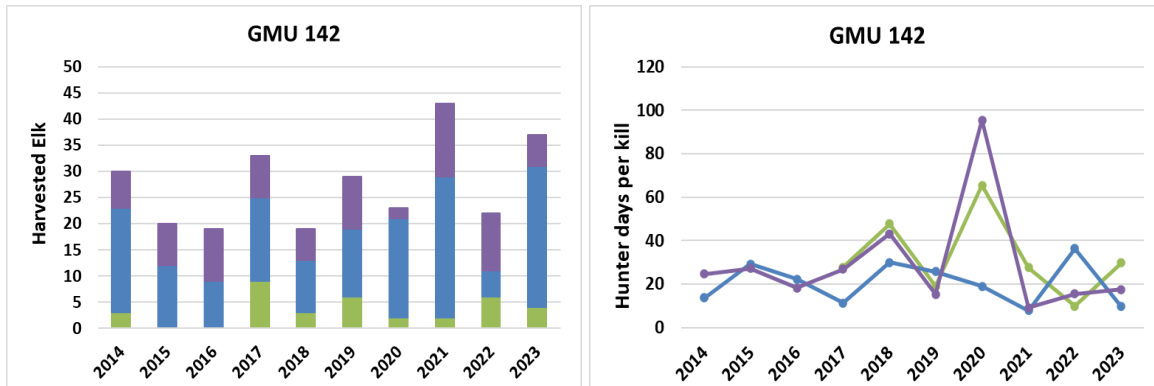


Figure 3. GMUs 133 – 142. Left column: Ten-year trends in general season elk harvest by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Right column: Ten-year trends in general season hunter effort (measured in days per kill) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the difference in scales for each GMU.





Elk hoof disease (treponeme bacteria)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased in southwest Washington, with some observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009–2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis County. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including three counties east of the Cascades. It has **NOT** been detected in the Selkirk herd to date.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Susceptibility:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect hooves of any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

- **Hunting in areas where TAHD is uncommon (GMUs in the 100, 200, and 300 series):** If you harvest an elk with abnormal looking hooves (for example, overgrown or broken hoof claws or skin lesions), please keep the hooves and report your observation to your local WDFW regional office. While there are several conditions other than TAHD that may cause hoof deformities, we may want to examine the hooves and/or arrange for diagnostic testing.

- **Hunting in TAHD prevalent areas (GMUs in the 400, 500, and 600 series):**
 - If you harvest an elk, remove the hooves, and leave them onsite.
 - Help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of healthy or limping elk and dead elk with hoof deformities on the Department’s online [reporting form](#).
 - Clean shoes and tires: Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in an area known to be affected can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage [TAHD](#). Additional information on TAHD and the west-side incentive program to harvest elk with TAHD, can be found on pages 65–66 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.

Deer



A mule deer doe standing in a grassy field. Photo by WDFW.

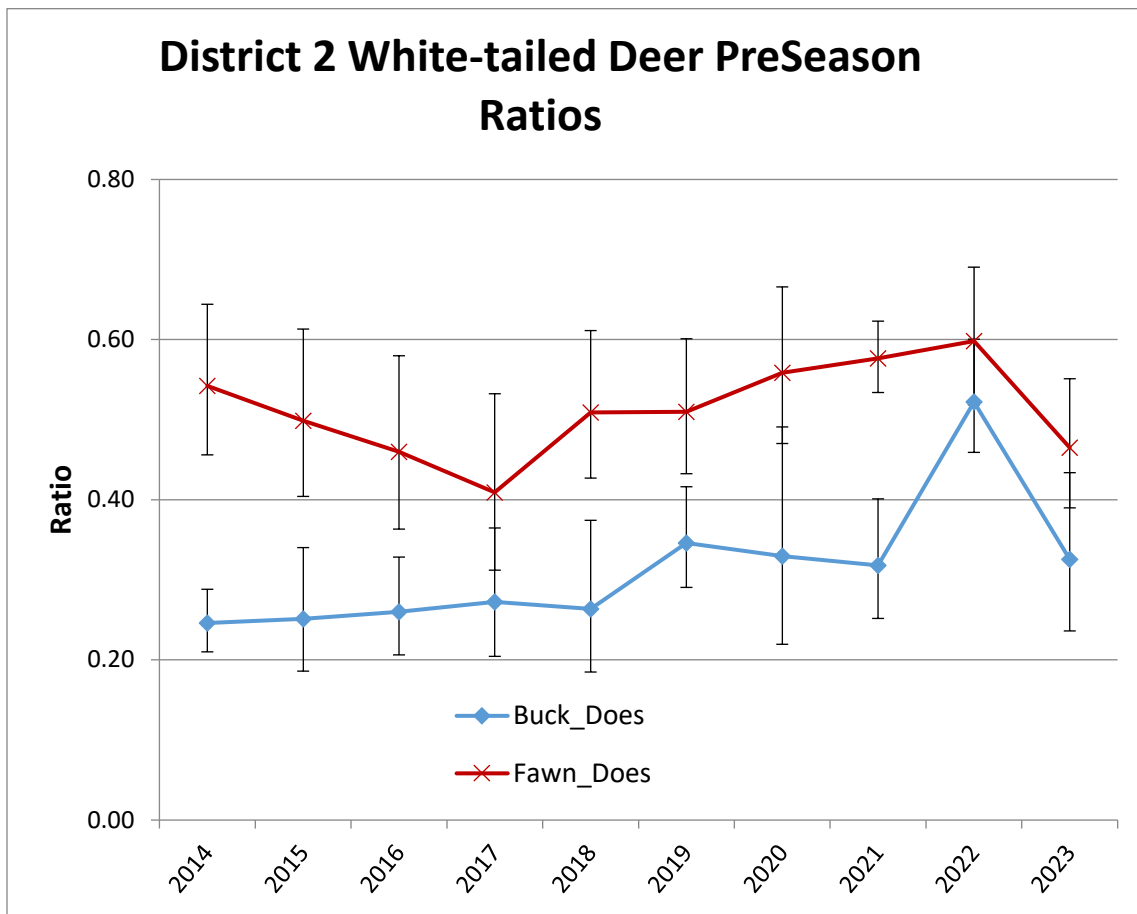
General information, management goals, and population status

District 2 has both white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). White-tailed deer are found predominantly in the north and east portions of the district in forested habitat, irrigated ag fields, and along riparian corridors. Mule deer are predominantly found in the west and south of the district in the shrub steppe, scablands, and farmland habitats.

Deer population levels are closely tied to droughts, severe winters, disease, and land-use practices. The primary management objective for white-tailed and mule deer in District 2 is to keep the herds stable to slightly increasing and within landowner tolerance. Given that most of the land in the district is in private ownership, managing these populations without landowner cooperation is impossible.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to manage white-tailed deer populations in District 2. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, days per kill, and pre-hunting season sex and age ratios are used to monitor populations. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using these data to monitor trends in population size and is evaluating new approaches to monitoring white-tailed deer populations. Harvest metrics indicate a significant decline in the white-tailed deer population from the high in 2014. This decline has been predominantly driven by hemorrhagic disease outbreaks. Pre-season ground surveys noted a slightly lower fawn to doe ratio (i.e., recruitment) in 2023 than has been observed since 2017 (Figure 4). This may be a result of low sample sizes as the deer population is still suppressed after the hemorrhagic disease outbreak in 2021. The buck to doe ratio observed in 2023 (33 bucks/100 does) was slightly above the 10-year average of 31 bucks/100 does. The buck to doe ratio observed in 2022 was artificially inflated because of a reduction in total deer on the landscape (i.e., there were not necessarily more bucks available to harvest, but just fewer animals overall and therefore a skewed buck to doe ratio observed).

Figure 4. District 2 pre-season buck to doe (August) and fawn to doe (September) ratios (90% Confidence Interval in black) for white-tailed deer.



The harvest statistics noted above are also used in managing mule deer, but congregations of mule deer on wintering grounds allow for viable postseason aerial surveys to estimate populations. Flights are conducted every three to five years in conjunction with Districts 4 and 5, and ground surveys for ratios are completed every year. The last aerial survey for the Benge sub-herd (GMUs 139, 142, 284, & 381) was completed in 2021, resulting in an estimate of ~13,000 mule deer, in line with the two previous surveys conducted in 2011 and 2015. The 2023 ground survey estimated ~73 fawns per 100 does, which is above the 10-year average and the second highest observed since surveys were initiated in 2009. The Odessa sub-herd (GMUs 133, 136, & 272) was last surveyed from the air in 2023, resulting in an estimate of ~12,000 mule deer, nearly the same as the previous estimate from 2019 flights. The 2023 ground survey estimated ~63 fawns per 100 does, which is the same as the long-term average, but higher than in 2021 and 2022.

For more details, please refer to the Columbia Basin Mule Deer Management Zone section and the Palouse White-tailed Deer Management Zone section of the [2023 Game Status and Trend Report](#).

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 type of hunting experience desired. Some hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature buck, while others just want to “fill the freezer,” and still others prefer to hunt an area with the lowest chance of running into another hunter.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would be entirely or mostly comprised of public land, 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 2. 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 deter them from hunting 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, and/or it provides a backcountry experience.

The information provided in Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding 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. Furthermore, harvest and hunter numbers were divided by the area of each GMU to account for the variation in sizes between GMUs. Mule deer and white-tailed deer are combined in this table. Because both species can be hunted with the same tag, we cannot separate white-tailed deer hunters from mule deer hunters. However, the percentage of mule deer in the total harvest is given to provide a gauge of how prominent each species is in each GMU.

Each GMU was ranked for deer harvested/mile², hunters/mile², and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, the lower the score the better. Comparisons are relatively straightforward because bag limits and seasons are similar between GMUs.

However, when choosing which GMU and/or species to hunt, differences that should be taken into consideration are:

1. There is a 3-point minimum harvest restriction for both species in all GMUs, except for white-tailed deer in GMU 124 where “any buck” is legal.
2. There is a late general modern firearm season for white-tailed deer in GMU 124. The late modern firearm season for white-tailed deer is by permit only for all other GMUs.
3. There is a late general muzzleloader season for white-tailed deer in GMUs 130-142.
4. There is a late general archery season for white-tailed deer in GMUs 124 & 127.

Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c provide rank sum analysis for a quick and general summary of how harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. As a generalization, the lower the rank, the better the overall deer hunting opportunity is within a GMU. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2019-2023).

Table 2a. Modern Firearm

GMU	Size (mi ²)	% public land open to hunting	Total Harvest	% mule deer	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
124	771	4%	1030	1%	1.34	1	3404	4.41	7	31%	1	9
127	509	1%	101	12%	0.20	5	560	1.10	4	19%	6	15
130	940	7%	133	76%	0.14	7	772	0.82	3	17%	7	17
133	555	6%	177	74%	0.32	3	798	1.44	6	21%	5	14
136	1586	11%	278	95%	0.17	6	957	0.60	1	29%	3	10
139	1327	3%	273	57%	0.21	4	1041	0.78	2	27%	4	10
142	771	8%	291	78%	0.38	2	932	1.21	5	29%	2	9

Table 2b. Archery

GMU	Size (mi ²)	% public land open to hunting	Total Harvest	% mule deer	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
124	771	4%	244	2%	0.32	1	855	1.11	7	28%	1	9
127	509	1%	94	2%	0.18	2	357	0.70	6	26%	4	12
130	940	7%	25	64%	0.03	4	128	0.14	4	15%	7	15
133	555	6%	28	71%	0.05	3	102	0.18	5	22%	5	13
136	1586	11%	21	100%	0.01	7	91	0.06	3	21%	6	16
139	1327	3%	21	73%	0.02	6	72	0.05	2	27%	3	11
142	771	8%	13	80%	0.02	5	42	0.05	1	27%	2	8

Table 2c. Muzzleloader

GMU	Size (mi ²)	% public land open to hunting	Total Harvest	% mule deer	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Rank Sum
124	771	4%	26	11%	0.03	4	110	0.14	5	20%	6	15
127	509	1%	9	50%	0.02	7	24	0.05	1	22%	5	13
130	940	7%	58	44%	0.06	2	281	0.30	6	18%	7	15
133	555	6%	61	54%	0.11	1	226	0.41	7	25%	4	12
136	1586	11%	40	86%	0.03	6	110	0.07	2	31%	1	9
139	1327	3%	53	35%	0.04	3	183	0.14	4	28%	2	9
142	771	8%	26	55%	0.03	5	101	0.13	3	25%	3	11

What to expect during the 2024 season

Overall, the white-tailed deer population is still down significantly in District 2 due primarily to two large hemorrhagic disease outbreaks: Bluetongue (BT) in 2015 and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) in 2021; you can learn more about these [diseases](#) from our website. Additionally, between these two outbreaks the area experienced hard winters; the winter of 2016/17 was one the most difficult in the past 10 years and decreased overwinter fawn survival, and the winter of 2018/19 was another tough winter, though not as bad as 2016/17.

Overall, mule deer herds are near their long-term averages. The mule deer populations also suffered losses due to the same series of events noted above, though mule deer do not typically die from BT and EHD, and the snows left the Columbia Basin sooner than in the northeast, so the effects were not as devastating. However, the severe drought and heat wave of 2021 did impact mule deer, especially fawn survival/recruitment. The past few winters have been relatively mild which means overwinter fawn survival should have been above average for mule deer and may help offset some of the losses from the summer of 2021.

In general, the best opportunities to harvest a white-tailed deer in District 2 occur in GMUs 124 and 127. The best opportunities to harvest a mule deer in District 2 occur in GMUs 136, 139, and 142. For archery hunters, GMUs 124 and 127 provide the best terrain, whereas the terrain in GMUs 136–142 is better suited for muzzleloader and modern firearm.

White-tailed and mule deer hunting opportunities in District 2 vary from marginal to excellent, depending on the GMU and if private land access has been secured. A good predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in the harvest and catch per unit effort (CPUE) or its inverse, days per kill. Figures 5 and 6 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 to hunt.

Figure 5. GMUs 124 – 130. *Left column:* Ten-year trends in general season harvest of deer bucks (solid) and antlerless (slash) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the different scale for GMU 124. *Right column:* Ten-year trends in general season hunter days per kill by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note the different scale for GMU 130 due to high effort for archery in 2021-2023 and high effort for muzzleloader in 2021.

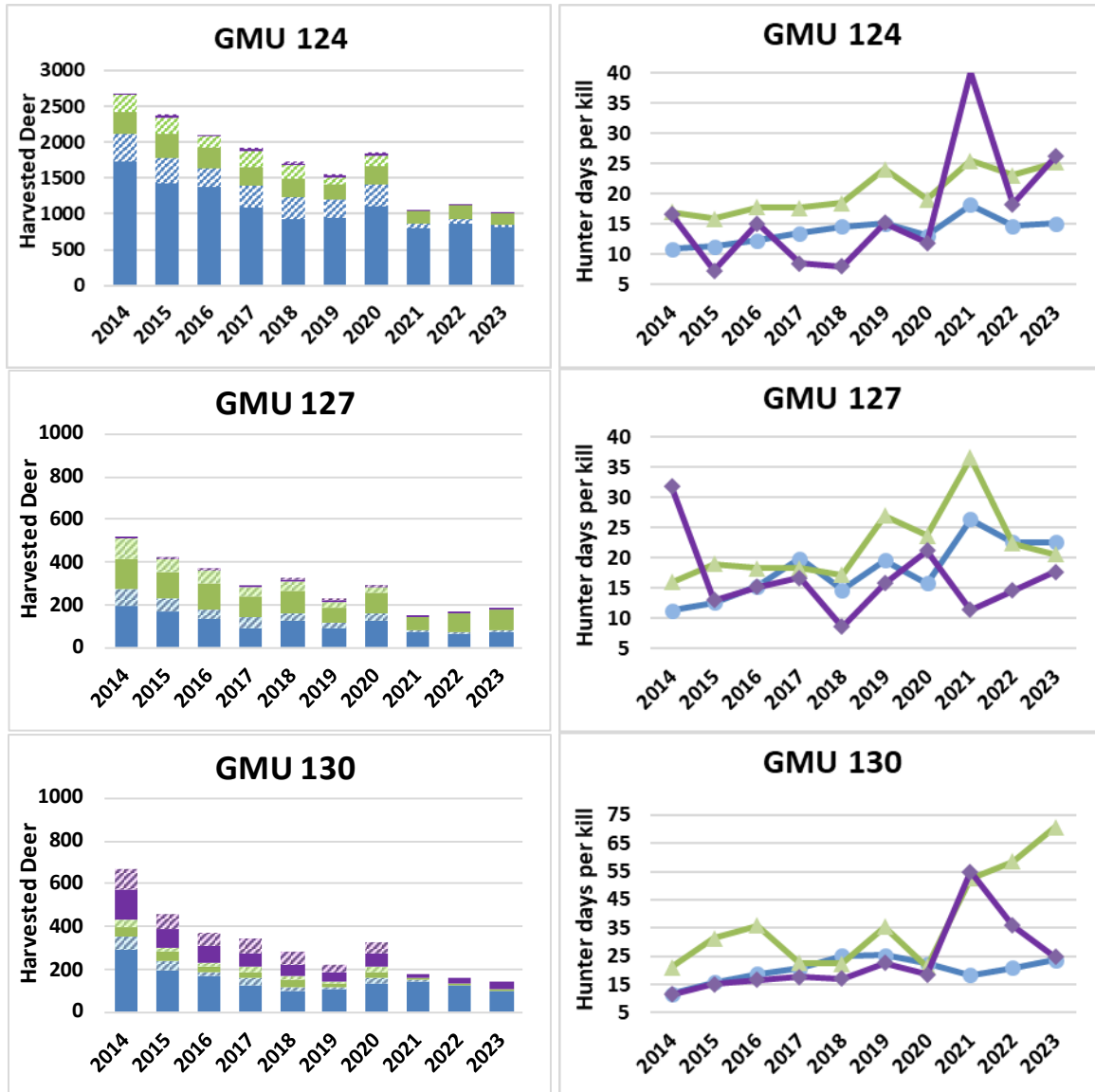
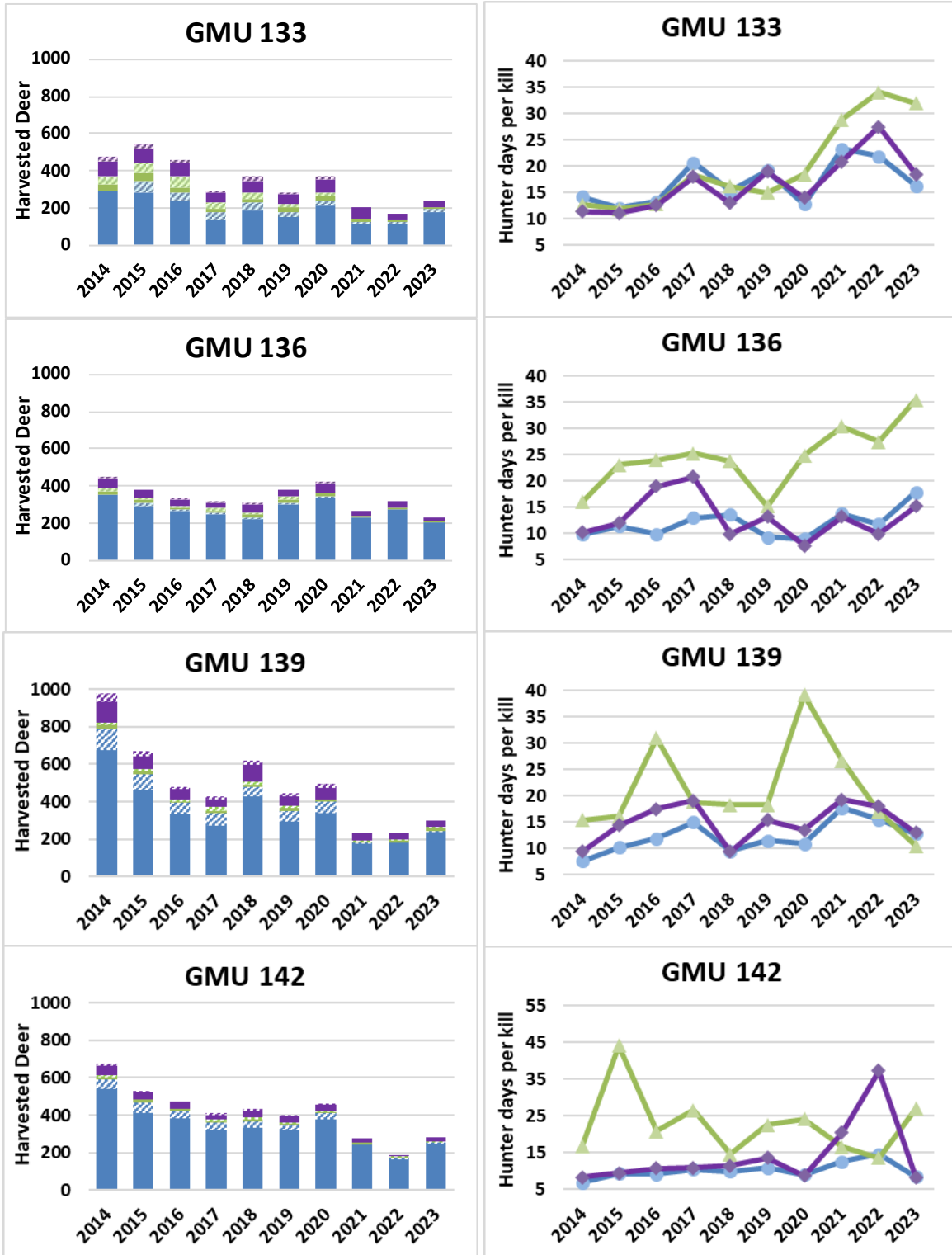


Figure 6. GMUs 133 – 142. *Left column:* Ten-year trends in general season harvest of deer bucks (solid) and antlerless (slash) by weapon type: modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). *Right column:* Ten-year trends in general season hunter days per kill by weapon type modern firearm (blue), archery (green), and muzzleloader (purple). Note different scale for GMU 142.



There is a 3-point minimum antler point regulation in GMUs 127–142 for white-tailed deer, and the late white-tailed deer season in GMUs 127–142 is by permit only (the Palouse Special Permit Hunt) as of 2006. Hunter success over the previous ten years is, on average, slightly higher for the Palouse hunt (39% versus 29% in the general season). This includes data from the 2021 season where the success rate for the Palouse hunt dropped to only 13%, however the success rate improved to 35% in 2022, and was 39% in 2023. Additionally, 5+ point bucks make up, on average, a greater percentage of the harvest (35% versus 30% in the general season). Historically there have been between 600-750 permits offered for the Palouse hunt, in 2022 it was dropped to 300 permits due to the decline in this population and remained at this level for the 2023 season.

Mule and white-tailed deer populations overlap in District 2, so make sure to identify the species before harvesting an animal, as regulations can differ between species within a GMU. The bulk of District 2 is private land, and buck hunters will have to put in time to get access. Doe hunters should have an easier time given the agricultural nature of this district. Many landowners are enrolled in WDFW's hunter access programs in southeastern Washington. Refer to the Private Lands Program section of this document and note that their locations can be mapped by selecting the Private Lands Hunting Opportunities on the [WDFW Hunt Planner](#).

For more 2023 harvest information from District 2:

- [Deer General Harvest District 2](#)
- [Deer Special Permits Harvest District 2](#)

Bighorn sheep

General information, management goals, and population status

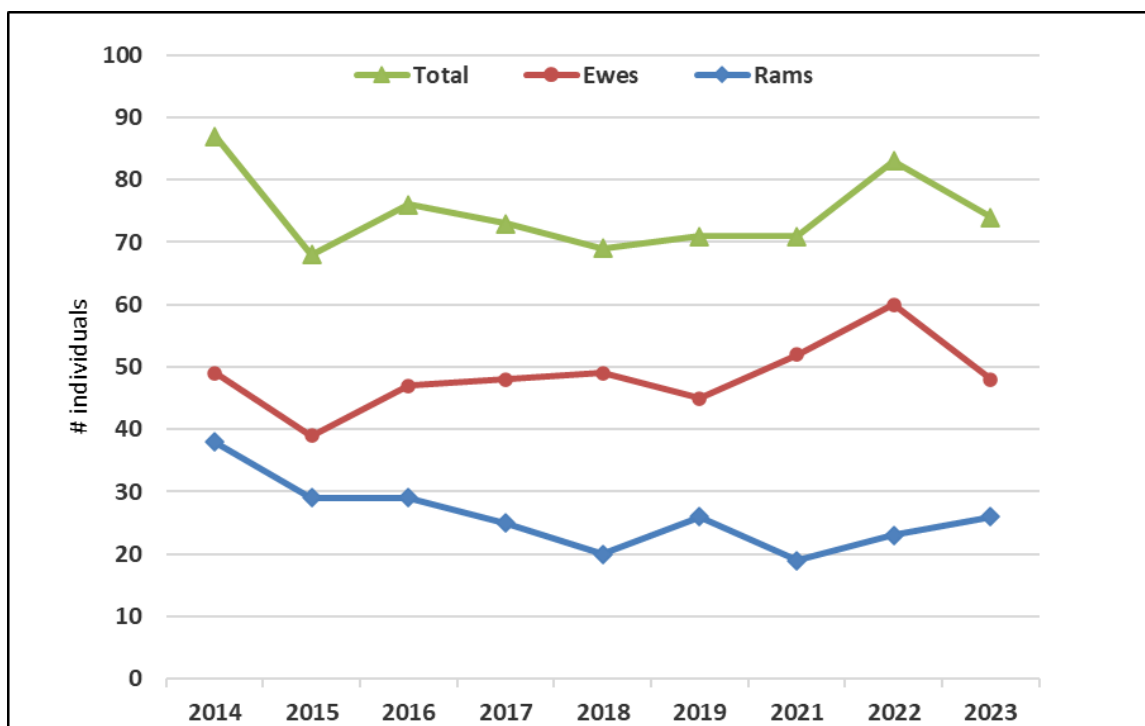
District 2 is home to one herd of California bighorn sheep, the Lincoln Cliffs herd, found in GMU 133 north of Highway 2 in Lincoln County (visit the [Hunt Planner Web map](#) for a map). These sheep can most often be seen throughout the residential community of Lincoln and the cliffs above it, and in the cliffs around Whitestone Rock approximately seven miles downriver from Lincoln on Lake Roosevelt. Sheep are also observed frequently in the cliffs and canyons above Sterling Valley (the area between Lincoln and Whitestone) and in surrounding agricultural fields, where they are sometimes reported causing crop damage.

WDFW has conducted annual aerial surveys to assess the status of the Lincoln Cliffs herd since 2002. The minimum population size is estimated by the count of rams and ewes observed during these flights (Figure 7). After several years of increase, the population is showing signs of leveling off and has likely reached the largest feasible herd size here due to human tolerance and availability of quality habitat. For more details on the history of the Lincoln Cliffs herd and the status of bighorn sheep in Washington, refer to WDFW's [2023 Game Status and Trend Report](#).

What to expect during the 2024 season

Bighorn sheep hunting in Washington requires a special permit. One ram permit for the Lincoln Cliffs herd was offered each year from 1997–2013 and in 2017. Based on ram numbers and population size, this was increased to two permits in 2014–16 and again starting in 2018. The average number of applicants for this ram hunt over the last five years is 2,402 and harvest success for reporting hunters has been 100%. Ewe permits were introduced in 2018, with two offered—one in the Whitestone Unit and one in the Lincoln Cliffs Unit. From 2020 to 2023, only one ewe permit was offered and only for the Whitestone Unit. Two ewe permits were offered in the Whitestone Unit for the 2024 season to help mitigate some of the crop damage being reported from sheep in this area. The 2021 Whitestone ewe permittee did not report, and the 2020 permittee was unsuccessful in harvesting an ewe after 3 days of hunting. All other ewe hunters have reported 100% success on their hunts, including the 2023 hunter in 2 days of hunting. The Lincoln Cliffs area is almost entirely private property and permittees will need to obtain permission to access these properties for their hunt.

Figure 7. Lincoln Cliffs minimum population estimate by sex for 2014–2023. Estimated as the maximum adult count from helicopter surveys conducted each year. No survey was conducted in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.



Moose

General information, management goals, and population status



Two hunters with a harvested moose. Photo by John Moore.

Moose in northeast Washington are Shiras moose (*Alces alces shirasi*), the smallest of the four subspecies of moose in North America. Moose were not believed to be common or widely distributed in the Rocky Mountain states in the 1800s, and it was not until 1908, when explorer George Shiras III found a fairly large population in Yellowstone National Park, that this mountain race was described. Shiras moose were only rarely noted in Washington until the late 1950s when distribution began to expand into eastern Pend Oreille County. Moose dramatically increased in number and distribution in the decades that followed and are now relatively common throughout northeast Washington.

Statewide moose management goals are to 1) Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage moose and their habitats to ensure healthy productive populations; 2) Manage for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes; and 3) Manage statewide moose populations for a sustained yield. The proximity of a moose population near the Spokane metropolitan area adds the challenge of balancing population objectives with human safety and the community's tolerance of moose.

From 2013-16, WDFW completed a project to develop a new survey methodology that would produce a reliable population estimate over the entire northeast area of Washington (GMUs 101–130). This project resulted in an estimate of 5,169 (95% credible interval = 3,510 to 7,034) moose in the northeast in 2015. Though the estimate produced by the new method was less variable than previous methods, the larger area of coverage made it impractical to apply the results to individual hunt units and the cost makes it unrealistic to repeat annually.

Currently, WDFW uses harvest, success, and hunter effort to monitor and manage moose populations in District 2. Based on these harvest metrics, and results from a WDFW/University of Montana partner study from 2014–2018 in northeast Washington, it appears that the ~5000 moose in 2015 was a high point in the moose population in northeast Washington that has since started to decline. Primary drivers of this decline are the poor body condition of cows and reduced calf survival.

WDFW initiated a new project to [monitor moose](#) in northeast Washington in February of 2024. This project will last for several years to identify key factors influencing population status and trend and will ultimately assist in setting hunting seasons and harvest levels for moose. A total of 28 cow moose were fitted with GPS collars in 2024. Of those 28 moose, 13 were captured in District 2 (six in the Spokane West MHU and seven in the Mt. Spokane area).

Harvest management emphasizes quality hunting opportunities through limited special permits drawn by lottery each year. A total of 34 permits are offered in District 2 in a variety of categories (Table 3). Prior to 2012, District 2 had two moose hunt units (MHU), Mount Spokane (GMU 124 east of Highway 395), and Hangman (GMUs 127 and 130). In 2012, the Mount Spokane MHU was split into [Mount Spokane North and Mount Spokane South Moose Areas](#) to help distribute hunters more evenly across the area and increase hunter opportunity. In 2015, the Hangman MHU was split into the Mica Peak (GMU 127) and Cheney (GMU 130) MHUs, for the antlerless hunts only, to better distribute hunters and try to address increasing moose conflict in Cheney. The Hangman MHU was retained for bull hunts. Additionally, in 2015, the Spokane West MHU was split off from the Huckleberry MHU to distribute hunters and increase opportunity. In 2022, GMU 139 was added to the Hangman and Cheney MHUs; there are not many moose in GMU 139 but there are some and they periodically cause damage and nuisance issues. Adding this GMU allows for easier use of hunters to address these issues when they occur.

Table 3. Permits offered in District 2 by moose hunt unit for 2024.

Moose Unit	Antlered Bull General	Antlerless General	Antlerless Disabled	Antlerless Youth
Mount Spokane North	8	2	1	0
Mount Spokane South	8	2	0	1
Spokane West	2	2	0	0
Hangman	4	0	0	0
Mica Peak	0	2	0	0
Cheney	0	2	0	0

What to expect during the 2024 season

Hunters should take note that moose are a solitary animal by nature and are scattered over very wide areas as individuals or in small groups. While they can be found at any elevation, they are most likely found between 3,000 and 5,000 feet. In the fall they are looking for deciduous browse, primarily willow brush, alder, serviceberry, ceanothus, and other shrubs in clear-cuts or burns 10–20 years old. Moose seek out cool, moist drainage basins and slopes, and generally prefer north slopes or east-flowing drainages.

Moose are still in the rut in early October and some hunters have been effective with calls. By November, snow is common and locating moose tracks and seeing these dark animals with a snowy background is much easier. However, by mid to late November, there is usually enough snow that motor vehicle access can be limited.

Moose seek out snow rather than avoid it in late fall and early winter because they are in their winter coats and start to experience thermal stress at temperatures exceeding 28°F. In years without much snow, they are typically found at a higher elevation and on north slopes with tree cover. In years with a lot of snow, they move down to the foothills of the mountains. Moose habitat in District 2 is largely located on private timber company lands, but smaller private ownerships can also harbor good moose concentrations. Permit holders should exercise caution and know where they and the targeted moose are at all times given the percentage of private land ownership, proximity to Idaho, and non-hunting lands (State and County Parks, National Wildlife Refuge) within the moose hunting units. WDFW requires all successful moose hunters to submit tooth samples in the envelopes provided with their informational packet. Tooth samples allow biologists to get an overview of the age structure of the moose population, which will help inform future management decisions.

Specific harvest metrics and access for each MHU

Mount Spokane North Moose Area

The success rate for the eight Bull Moose permits in this unit was 86% in 2023, although only seven of those permit holders reported. The success rate for this hunt has averaged 88% since its creation in 2012. Hunters have spent 11 days per kill on average; however, the trend is increasing with hunters spending on average 16 days per kill in the last five years of the hunt compared to just five days per kill in the first five years. In 2023, hunters spent an average of nine days per kill, much lower than the average over the past five years. The average antler spread of bulls harvested is 35 inches, with the largest bull harvested measuring 49 inches.

Success rates for the Antlerless Only hunt in this unit was 100% in 2023 and has averaged 90% since its creation in 2012. Hunters have spent six days per kill on average, though it reached as high as 19 days per kill in 2016. Decreasing hunter success rates and increasing hunter effort combined with low pregnancy rates and low calf survival in a local study led the department to reduce antlerless opportunity in this area to two permits starting in 2020. One antlerless permit is also offered to disabled hunters in this unit; the permittees for this disabled hunt were unsuccessful in 2020 and 2021 having

spent 18 days and 35 days hunting, respectively. The permittee in 2022 declined the permit after being selected, so no hunting occurred on that permit in 2022. In 2023, the hunter on the disabled permit was successful after spending 12 days hunting.

Access in this unit is primarily on timber company lands, Inland Empire Paper (IEP) and Hancock Timber, and DNR lands around the [East Blanchard Road area](#). The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates – they might be open in the morning if crews are working but you might get locked in that evening. IEP typically allows full-sized vehicles through October but may close gates at any time if conditions present risk of road damage or fire. IEP does charge an access fee, but it is reasonable and comes in daily and annual versions. For more information on IEP and maps of their property please visit [their website](#).

Hancock has traditionally had a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with WDFW to allow **non-motorized** access for free to hunters, but please check with Hancock or WDFW to confirm this MOU is still in place prior to hunting their properties. WDFW Enforcement officers monitor their property and will ticket offenders. Please respect the agreement or this access could be lost. Hancock does not supply a map of their property; hunters are encouraged to use the Spokane County Assessor's [online parcel map](#) to identify Hancock ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps).

A [wildfire](#) burned through a large portion (~11,000 acres) of the Mount Spokane North MHU in 2023, which may impact moose distribution in this area for the next few years. Much of the fire was on private property, but some of the private timber company lands, including a block of IEP property were at least partially impacted by this fire.

Mount Spokane South Moose Area

The success rate for the eight Bull Moose permits in this unit was 100% in 2023 and has averaged 93% since its creation in 2012. Hunters spent seven days per kill on average in 2022; the average for this hunt since its creation is eight days but was higher than average the previous five years (9-15 days per kill on average from 2018-2022). The average antler spread of bulls harvested is 35 inches, with the largest bull harvested measuring 52 inches (this bull was harvested in 2023).

Two antlerless permittees hunted this unit in 2023, but only one was successful. Success has averaged 77% since its creation in 2012 but has varied considerably from 100% in 2020 and 2022 to zero in 2021. Hunters have spent seven days per kill on average, though it has been as high as 16 days per kill and the single permittee during the 2021 season hunted 22 days without success. This is drastically different from the two permittees that hunted in 2022 as they averaged just 3 days per kill. Observed decline in hunter success rates and increasing hunter effort combined with low pregnancy rates and low calf survival in a local study led the department to reduce antlerless opportunity in this area to two permits in 2020. There is also one antlerless permit offered to youth hunters in this unit; the 2023 youth was successful after 18 days of hunting.

Access in this unit is primarily on Inland Empire Paper (IEP) timber company lands in the [Thompson Creek](#) and Brickel Creek areas. There is a small parcel of DNR lands north of the Brickel Creek area as

well. The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates – they might be open in the morning if crews are working but you might get locked in that evening. IEP typically allows full-sized vehicles through October but may close gates at any time if conditions present risk of road damage or fire. IEP does charge an access fee, but it is reasonable and comes in [daily and annual versions](#). IEP lands are adjacent to Mount Spokane State Park, which is not open to hunting, and the border with Idaho, so hunters need to know where they are before shooting at an animal. Hunters are recommended to use the Spokane County Assessor’s [online parcel map](#) to identify ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps). For more information on IEP rules and maps of their property please visit [their website](#).

Spokane West Moose Hunt Area

The success rate for the two Bull Moose permits in this unit was 100% in 2023 and has averaged 100% since its creation in 2015; however, the single permittee in 2017 did not report and did not respond to calls. Hunters spent only four days per kill on average in 2023; the average for this hunt since its creation is five days. The average antler spread of bulls harvested is 37 inches, with the largest bull harvested measuring 48 inches.

The success rate for the Antlerless Only hunt in this unit was 100% in 2023, however only one of the two permittees hunted. The average success rate for this antlerless hunt is 89% since its creation in 2015. Hunters have spent six days per kill on average, with the one successful hunter in 2023 spending 9 days to harvest a moose.

Harvest stats and limited composition flights suggest the moose population in this unit may be doing better than the other units in District 2. However, most of the access is non-motorized, so **do not apply** for this unit if you are not in good physical condition or do not have private land access. Access in this unit is primarily on Hancock Timber Company lands and scattered DNR parcels. The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates; they might be open in the morning if crews are working but you might get locked in that evening. Hancock has traditionally had an MOU with WDFW to allow **non-motorized** access for free to hunters, but please check with Hancock or WDFW to confirm this MOU is still in place prior to hunting their properties. WDFW Enforcement officers monitor their property and will ticket offenders. Please respect the agreement or this access could be lost. Hancock does not supply a map of their property; we recommend hunters use the Stevens County Assessor’s [property map](#) to identify Hancock ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps). Access to Hancock lands in this unit are from the gate east off [Hwy 231 just south of the intersection with Reservation Road](#).

Hangman Moose Hunt GMUs 127, 130, and 139

The number of Bull Moose permits offered for this hunt was reduced from seven to four in 2017, due to reduced success, $\leq 86\%$, and increased effort (as high as 23 days) observed the previous four years. This reduction in permits seemed to improve hunter success as the average success rate was 90% and hunter effort averaged 6 days per kill from 2017-2021. This was not the situation in 2022, as the success rate was 50%, the lowest ever recorded despite increased effort (47 days per kill). In 2023, the success rate

rebounded to 100% for the three hunters that reported, though hunter effort was still higher than average at 16 days per kill. The average antler spread of bulls harvested in the last 10 years is 35 inches, with the largest bull ever harvested in this area measuring 52 inches in 2012. Overall, the moose population in this unit appears to be declining in areas open to general hunting access (e.g., DNR and Inland Empire Paper Company), but increasing in areas closed to hunting or where access is limited (Conservation Areas and suburban Spokane). *Hunters are strongly encouraged to secure private land access for this hunt before applying.*

Access in this unit is primarily on Inland Empire Paper (IEP) timber company lands on Mica Peak and scattered sections of DNR throughout. The DNR lands are free to hunt but do require a Discover Pass. Full-sized vehicles are not typically allowed, so be careful and read signage at gates before entering. IEP does **NOT** allow vehicular access on their lands in this unit due to a history of road damage. Because it is non-motorized only, IEP does not require an access permit on Mica Peak. IEP lands are adjacent to Spokane County Parks lands, which are not open to hunting, and are on the border with Idaho, so hunters need to know where they are before taking a shot. Hunters are advised to use the Spokane County Assessor's [online parcel map](#) to identify ownership or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps). For more information on IEP, maps of their property, and access rules please visit [their website](#). Two primary entry points for this hunt are the [Belmont Road County Park](#) trailhead and [FAA Starr Road gate](#).

Mica Peak Moose Hunt GMU 127

There are no Bull Moose permits specific to just this unit (Hangman MHU incorporates both Mica Peak and Cheney MHUs). The following Antlerless harvest statistics include the Hangman Unit data because most permittees prior to 2015 harvested their animals in Mica Peak. Due to declining hunter success, Antlerless Only permits were reduced from seven to four in 2017. The success rate for this hunt increased to 100% in 2017, up significantly from the previous 5-year average of 69% and remained at 100% in 2018. However, success dropped to 50% in 2019 and effort spiked to an all-time high of 21 days/kill on average. Permits were reduced to two in 2020; hunter success rebounded to 100% and hunter effort was similar (average of 5 days per kill) to that observed before the reduction in tags. In 2021 hunter success remained at 100%, but effort increased to 10 days on average. Effort increased again in 2022 (30 days per kill) and hunter success decreased to 50%. In 2023, the two permittees for this hunt spent a combined total of 18 days hunting and neither was successful. Overall, the moose population in this unit appears to be declining in areas open to general hunting access (e.g., DNR and Inland Empire Paper), but increasing in areas closed to hunting or where access is limited. *Hunters are encouraged to secure private land access for this hunt if they want to increase their odds of success.*

Refer to the Hangman unit section for more access information.

Cheney Moose Hunt GMUs 130 and 139

There are no Bull Moose permits specific to just this unit (Hangman MHU incorporates both Mica Peak and Cheney MHUs). This MHU was split off from the Hangman MHU in 2015 for Antlerless only hunts because very few permittees hunted it while the number of complaints regarding moose in the unit's

suburban/rural areas increased. This unit is almost entirely private land. The larger blocks of public land are NOT open to hunting, and the moose are dispersed and highly mobile. Since inception of this hunt in 2015, two antlerless permits have been offered annually and average hunter success has been 83%, with an average effort of 10 days per kill. From 2017-2022, all permit holders that hunted and reported were successful (one permit holder did not hunt in 2017, and one did not report in 2020). In 2023 only one of the two permit holders was successful, and effort averaged 14 days per kill. **Hunters are strongly encouraged to secure private land access for this hunt prior to applying for the permit.**

Cougar



Adult cougar in an evergreen tree. Photo by WDFW.

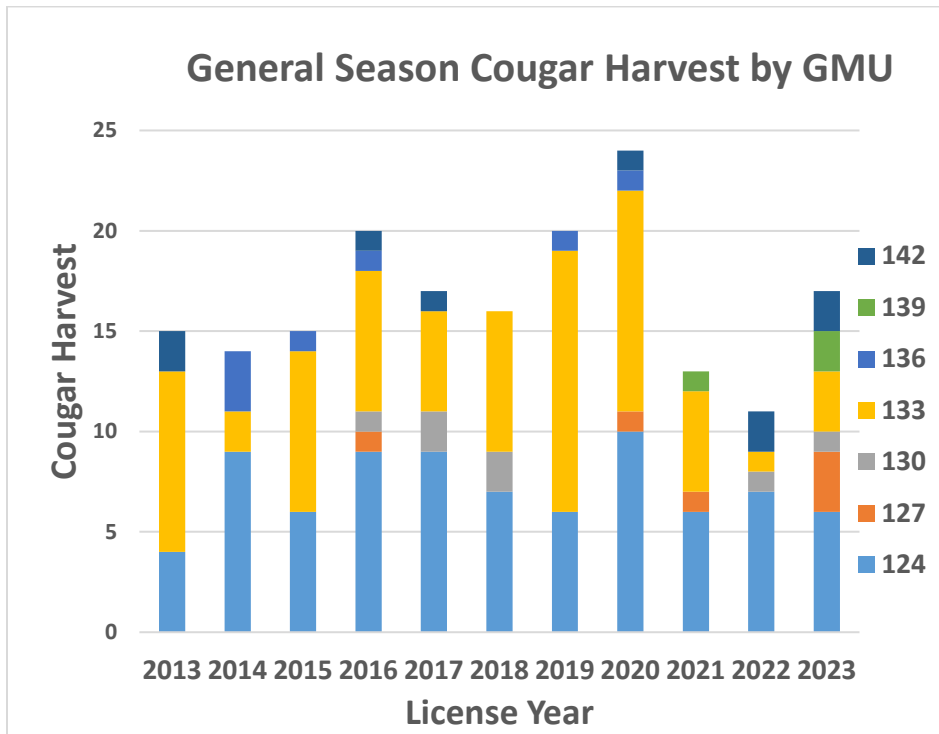
General information, management goals, and population status

Cougars may be found in varying densities throughout District 2, depending on habitat availability. Cougars are managed to provide maximum harvest opportunity while promoting population stability and social structure and minimizing human-cougar conflict.

In July 2024 the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved changes to cougar hunting seasons. The new cougar hunting season will be from September 1 to March 31, but there will be a cap set for each population management unit (PMU) at the intrinsic growth rate of 13% based on specific statewide density estimates. All known human-caused cougar mortalities will count towards the 13% cap (e.g., cougars removed to protect humans or livestock will count towards the cap). If a PMU reaches the 13% cap before the season opens September 1, the cap for that PMU will extend to 20%. Once the assigned cap is reached, that area will close to cougar harvest. All hunters are responsible for knowing if their

hunt area is open or closed; to confirm its status, all hunters must call the cougar hotline (1-866-364-4868) or [check WDFW's website](#) prior to hunting. To facilitate implementation of the cap, all successful cougar hunters are required to report their harvest to WDFW via the hotline within 72 hours of harvest (press 3 after greeting), and state name, WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill. The **unfrozen** hide and skull must be presented to WDFW within five days of the kill (please leave proof of sex attached). More [information about changes to the cougar hunting season](#) can be found on the WDFW website.

Figure 8. General season cougar harvest by GMU for license years 2013–2023.



What to expect during the 2024 season

In general, cougar harvest was increasing in District 2 through the 2020 license year when it reached a high of 24 cougars; however, harvest in 2021 and 2022 declined to the lowest levels reported since the 2012 license year (Figure 8). This decrease in cougar harvest may have been due, in part, to the large hemorrhagic disease outbreak in 2021 that resulted in a die-off of white-tailed deer, cougar’s primary prey. Having fewer deer available to hunt may have resulted in cougars moving to other areas with more abundant prey or switching to other prey items such as livestock or pets, resulting in conflict situations with landowners. Less commonly, cougars will die of starvation when prey is less abundant, a situation that is more likely to occur with young cats (kittens or juveniles). A decrease in hunter participation may have also contributed to the lower cougar harvest, as most of the general season cougar harvest in the district is opportunistic, occurring while hunters are seeking deer or elk. During the 2023 license year there was an increase in cougar harvest from the previous two seasons, but still not reaching the levels observed in 2019 and 2020.

The average harvest across the District over the last 10 license years is 17 cougars annually. Harvest is typically the highest in GMUs 124 and 133, and sightings in these units are also more common than in other GMUs in District 2. Cougar harvest in all other GMUs in District 2 is often very low, but harvest in 2023 was more evenly distributed among District 2 GMUs than what is usually observed (Figure 8).

The proportion of males and females in the harvest varies each year, but the typical age at harvest is three years or younger. For harvest details by GMU, refer to the [Game Harvest Reports](#). The Department website has more information on [reporting and pelt-sealing requirements](#).

Black bear



Black bear walking through the forest. Photo by WDFW.

General information, management goals, and population status

Black bears in Washington are managed with the goal of ensuring healthy and productive populations while minimizing conflict with people. The state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs); District 2 is part of both the Northeastern BBMU (GMUs 124–130) and the Columbia Basin BBMU (GMUs 133–142). Harvest levels vary within and between BBMUs depending on local habitat conditions and corresponding bear densities, as well as hunter effort and access limitations. WDFW does not currently conduct annual surveys or have formal population estimates for bear but relies on harvest statistics to infer population trends and evaluate management decisions. Density monitoring projects have been ongoing throughout the state since 2013 and that data will soon be incorporated into harvest guidelines.

Bear harvest in District 2 is substantially lower than in the rest of the Northeastern BBMU, likely due to habitat and hunter access limitations. Bear harvest in District 2 also varies widely year by year (Figure 9), as bears are most often harvested opportunistically by deer and elk hunters. The proportion of males and females in the harvest is also highly variable year to year, likely for the same reason (Figure 10).

Most of the harvest in the past 10 years has occurred in GMUs 124 and 127. Although the Columbia Basin BBMU is not thought to support resident black bear populations due to lack of forested habitat, GMU 133 has averaged 7 bears per year over the past 10 years. Bear harvest in the other GMUs in the Basin (136–142) is very low or nonexistent and therefore would not be worthwhile to target this species in these units.

Figure 9. The number of black bears harvested in each GMU during the 2023 general season in District 2. Also included are the 10-year (2014–2023) and 5-year (2019–2023) average for the total number of bears harvested in each GMU.

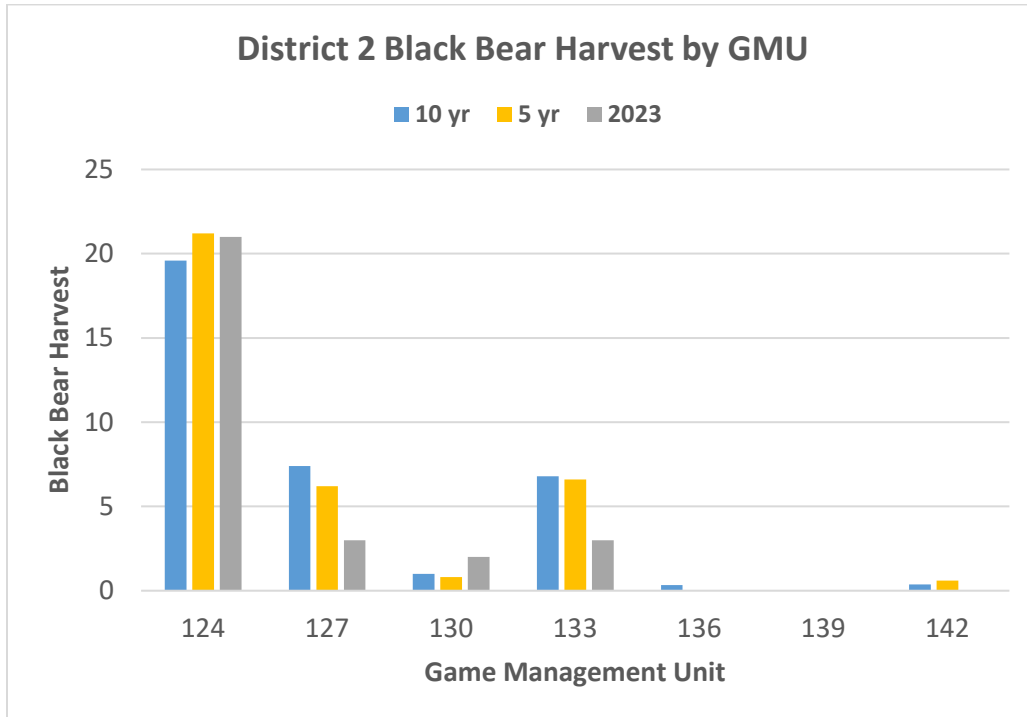
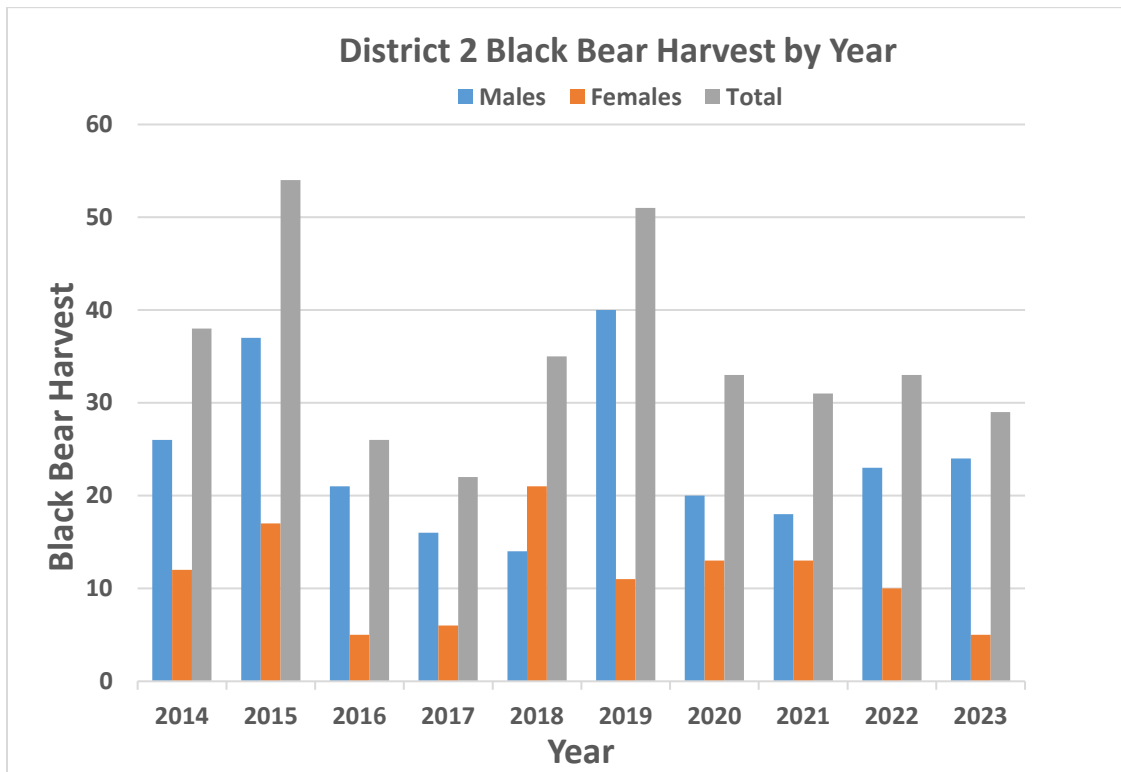


Figure 10. Black bear total harvest in District 2, 2014–2023.



What to expect during the 2024 season

Beginning in 2019, the fall general season dates were standardized statewide, allowing eastside hunters to start hunting August 1 in all GMUs. Additionally, the bag limit was increased to two bears, regardless of location. Hunters must purchase a second bear tag to harvest a second bear. District 2 is not known for black bear hunting, though an increase in harvest in recent years suggests the local population is doing well, especially in the forested areas of Spokane and Lincoln counties.

Scouting and securing private land access are extremely important factors that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 2. Although black bears are fairly common in some areas, they are seen infrequently because they tend to spend most of their time in forest cover and limit their time in the open to cooler times of the day. Much of the bear habitat in the district is either in State or County Parks and Conservation Areas (which are not open to hunt), or private timber company land (where you may need an access permit). Refer to the public and private lands sections at the end of this document for more information on hunting access in District 2.

Bear hunters are strongly urged not to shoot females with cubs. In the fall, cubs are 30 to 50 pounds and tend to lag behind when traveling. Please be patient and spend time watching for cubs before shooting a bear. Remember that it is **mandatory** to submit a premolar tooth from all fall season harvested bears. Tooth envelopes are available at WDFW offices, and hunters are welcome to make an appointment for help with pulling the tooth if needed. If you are unable to reach a regional WDFW office for a tooth

envelope, contact the Wildlife Program at 360-902-2515. Hunters that submitted a tooth can [look up the age of their harvest](#) several months after the close of the season.

Waterfowl



Flock of mallard ducks flying. Photo by WDFW.

At the statewide level, District 2 is not known for its duck hunting and is not a substantial duck production area due to the ephemeral nature of the water bodies in the Channeled Scablands. The most common breeding duck species in the area are mallard, gadwall, green-winged teal, and redhead. Other common waterfowl species in District 2 during the spring/summer include blue-winged and cinnamon teal, ruddy duck, and American coot. Species that are seen in larger numbers during migration include northern pintail, American wigeon, scaup, ring-necked ducks and common goldeneyes.

Aerial breeding population surveys (BPOP) for the entire Potholes region of eastern Washington show a decreasing trend in ducks and coots observed since 2018; however, there are two years without data because flights in 2020 and 2021 were canceled due to COVID-19 (Figure 12). Observations of geese during BPOP surveys increased from 2018 to 2019 but were down in 2022 and 2023 (Figure 12). This trend aligns with brood counts from ground surveys in District 2 except in 2023 where a slight increase was observed in both duck and coot broods (Figure 11).

Given the limited number of local nesting ducks, waterfowl hunting opportunity in this district is dependent upon the number of migrants coming from Canada and Alaska, the amount of precipitation, and how long waterbodies remain ice-free. Although coot and goose brood counts were higher this year than the past two years, the duck broods observed were the lowest recorded in the past 10 years (Figure 11). This could mean that early season hunting opportunities for ducks in District 2 could be limited with fewer local birds available. Hunters should focus their efforts on larger perennial waterbodies unless fall rains are significant, then shallow, flooded agricultural fields become duck and goose hot spots. Scouting after fall/winter storm events for incoming migrants and flooded agricultural fields, and subsequently attempting to secure permission on those private agricultural lands may provide the best opportunities for success later in the season. For more information on waterfowl hunting techniques and waterfowl hunting areas in Region 1, refer to the [WDFW waterfowl webpage](#).

Figure 11. Total number of young of the year observed on District 2 brood ground survey routes for the past 10 years.

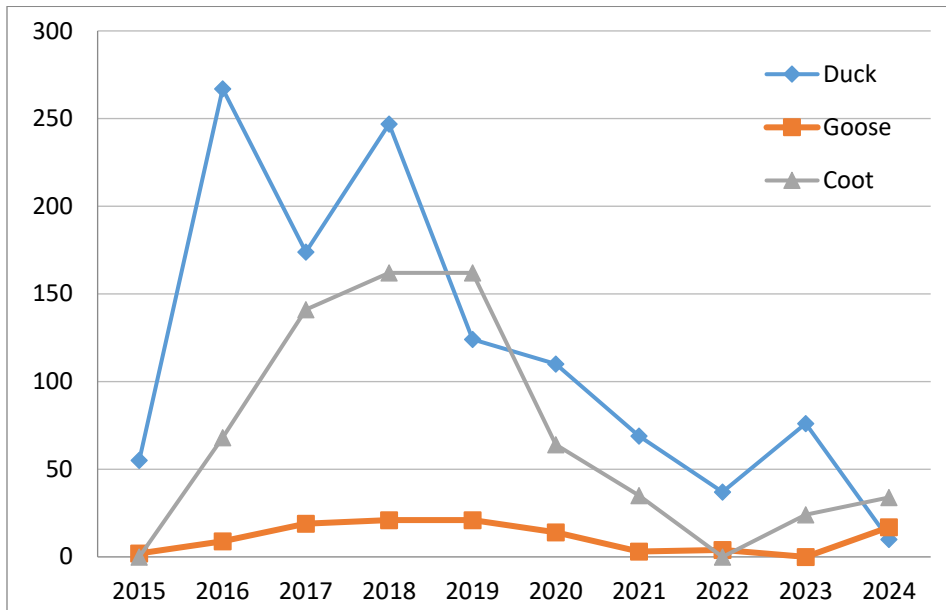
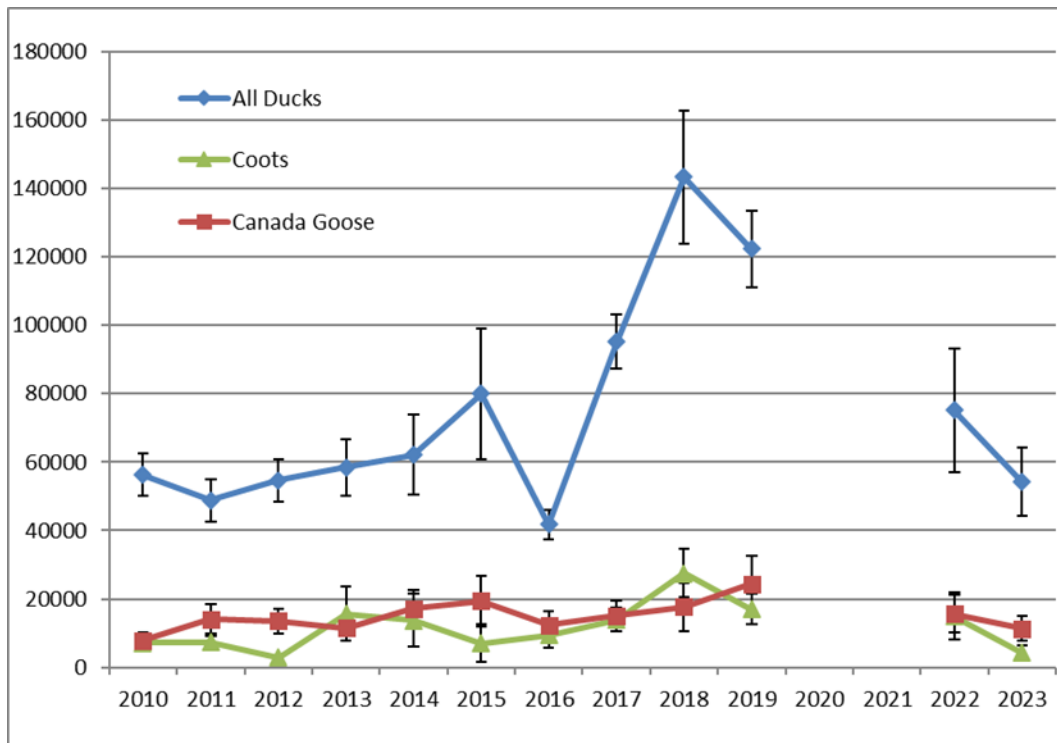


Figure 12. Waterfowl estimates from aerial breeding population surveys for the Potholes region of eastern Washington. BPOP flights were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19.



Pheasants



A male ring-necked pheasant perched in a shrub. Photo by WDFW.

The pheasant population available for harvest in the fall is highly dependent on annual recruitment. The winter of 2023/24 was relatively mild, as was much of the spring so overwinter survival should have been above normal for juvenile birds, and hatching success should have been decent this spring. However, consistent high temperatures observed in July may reduce forage available in late summer/early fall which could decrease chick survival prior to hunting opener.

District-wide harvest was on an increasing trend, reaching a 10-year high in 2020, but saw a steep decline in 2021 (Figure 13). WDFW's methods for analyzing harvest data changed in 2022 so estimates from the past two seasons should not be compared directly with previous seasons. Approximately 15.8% of estimated statewide harvest of pheasants occurred in District 2 (n = 8,324 pheasants; 29.6% of eastern WA pheasant harvest) in 2023. An estimated 2,238 hunters targeted pheasants in District 2 in 2023, compared to 2,043 in 2022 (20.5% of pheasant hunters statewide), but again this should not be compared with previous seasons as new analyses were used to develop this estimate. Days per hunter have remained relatively stable in the district, but harvest per hunter dropped in 2021 (Figure 14). The 2022 and 2023 estimates of days per hunter (4.42 and 4.27, respectfully) were similar to previous trends observed. Harvest per hunter increased from 2022 (3.05) to 2023 (3.72), which aligns with the trend observed statewide. The declines seen in harvest in 2021 were likely tied to the extreme drought and excessive heat of 2021, reducing nest success and chick survival. Statewide harvest appears to have increased since then, which suggests an increase in recruitment that may have occurred with milder winters and higher than average overwinter survival.

Most of the pheasant hunting occurs in Whitman County, which has about three times the harvest and about two times more hunters than Lincoln or Spokane counties. For more information on the harvest statistics refer to the most recent Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: [Pheasant – Statewide Only](#).

For more information on pheasant status in Washington, refer to the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Overall, pheasant populations are experiencing long-term declines. This is a trend seen across the country and it is likely associated with current cleaner farming practices and habitat loss. Examples of this include the switch to large-scale monoculture farming, removal of hedgerow (farming through small creeks beds and up into the gravel of the road), the more efficient harvest machinery leaving less waste grain, increased use of herbicides and pesticides, and more recently the use of neonicotinoid insecticides. These factors combine to reduce adult, nest, and chick survival through less food (fewer insects and forbs) and less cover, and in the case of neonicotinoids, potential direct mortality of individuals that consume the coated seeds.

Since most of the land in this district is private ownership, hunters will need to spend some time seeking permission for access to the better sites. Many private landowners have recently enrolled in WDFW hunter access programs in southeast Washington. Refer to the Private Lands Program section for access program acres by GMU, and the [Hunt Planner Web map](#) for mapped locations. The Department has [tips on pheasant hunting in general](#) and recommends hunters use the “[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)” publication.

WDFW will be releasing game farm-produced roosters once again this fall at the traditional release sites, which are also mapped on the Hunt Planner Web map and the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program publication](#). There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

Figure 13. Pheasant harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

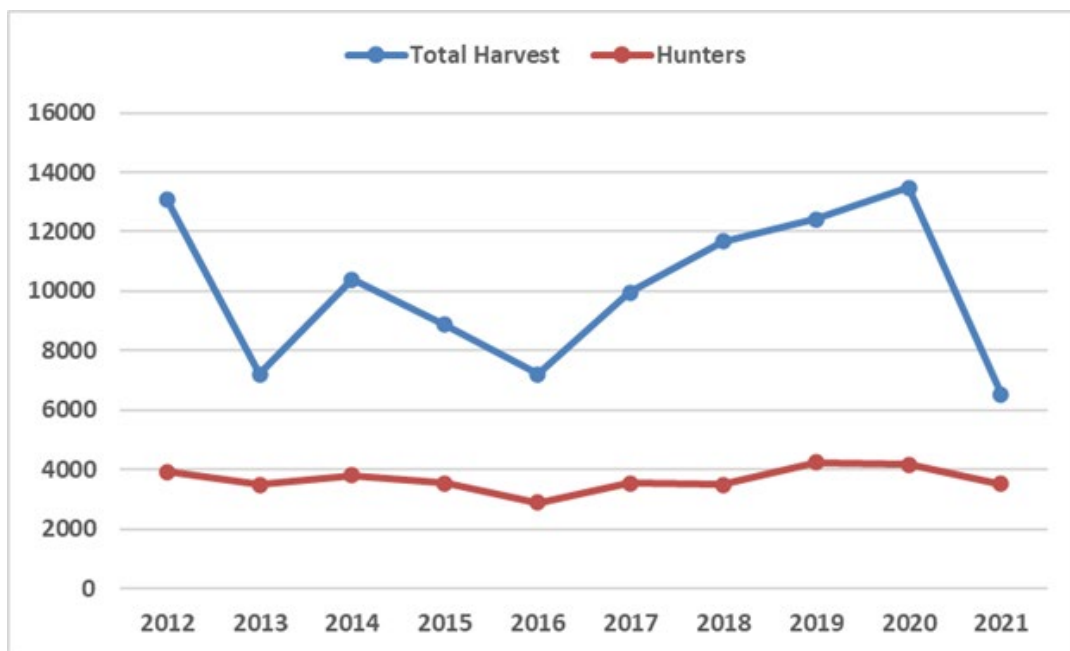
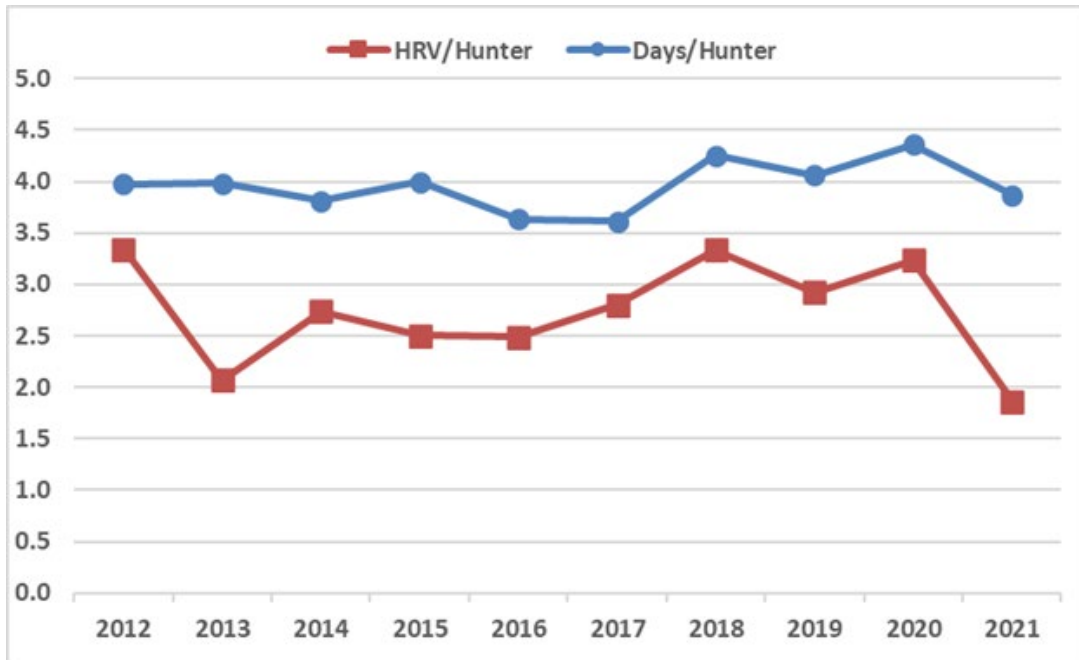


Figure 14. Pheasant harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW's methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.



Chukar and gray partridge



Two gray partridge in a dry hay field. Photo by Alan L. Bauer.

Nest and early chick survival for chukar and partridge likely suffered from the cold wet spring in 2022, but the late nesters and re-nesters likely benefited from the increased forage and insects. The winter of 2023/24 was typical for the inland northwest, even a little on the mild side overall which should have resulted in average to above-average juvenile overwinter survival. The spring of 2024 was also relatively mild so hatching success should have been high. Precipitation levels are below normal for the year, and that, coupled with above average temperatures may reduce forage in late summer and could decrease juvenile survival if those conditions continue into fall.

Harvest has varied over the past ten years with spikes in 2012 and 2018 and declines in 2020 and 2021 (Figures 15 and 16). Harvest estimates were calculated using different analyses in 2022 so the numbers should not be compared directly with previous seasons. In 2022, hunter effort for chukar and partridge in District 2 averaged approximately 3.6 days per hunter which resulted in 2.0 birds harvested per hunter. Harvest effort increased in 2023 to 5.3 days per hunter, but despite this increased effort, harvest declined slightly to 1.6 birds harvested per hunter.

Statewide numbers for chukar and partridge were more favorable for hunters in 2023 than in 2022, as harvest increased from 4.0 birds per hunter in 2022 to 4.9 birds per hunter in 2023. This may have been, in part, due to increased hunting pressure as hunting effort also increased from 5.3 days per hunter in 2022 to 6.5 days per hunter in 2023.

Partridge are most common in Lincoln and Whitman counties and are most often seen in, and adjacent to, agricultural fields. When hunting for partridge in Lincoln County please be sure to identify your bird before pulling the trigger - there are populations of Sage grouse and Sharp-tailed grouse in the county, and both are State Endangered species.

There are few chukar in District 2. They are predominantly found along the breaks of the Snake River, where the terrain is steep and rocky with limited public access from above. There is some access via the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers land along the Snake River from below, but not all the Corps lands allow hunting. Refer to the [Army Corps website](#) for details.

For more information on gray partridge and chukar harvest, refer to the [Statewide small game harvest statistics](#), and check out the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

The Department has tips on [chukar](#) and [gray partridge](#) hunting in general and recommends hunters use the “[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)” publication as well. There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

Figure 15. Chukar and partridge harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

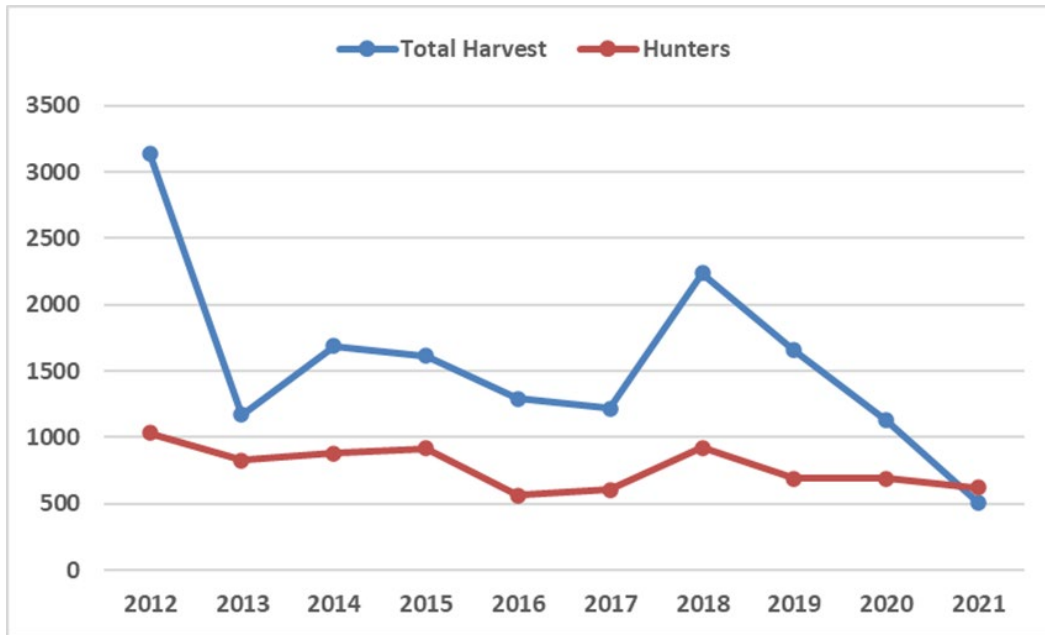
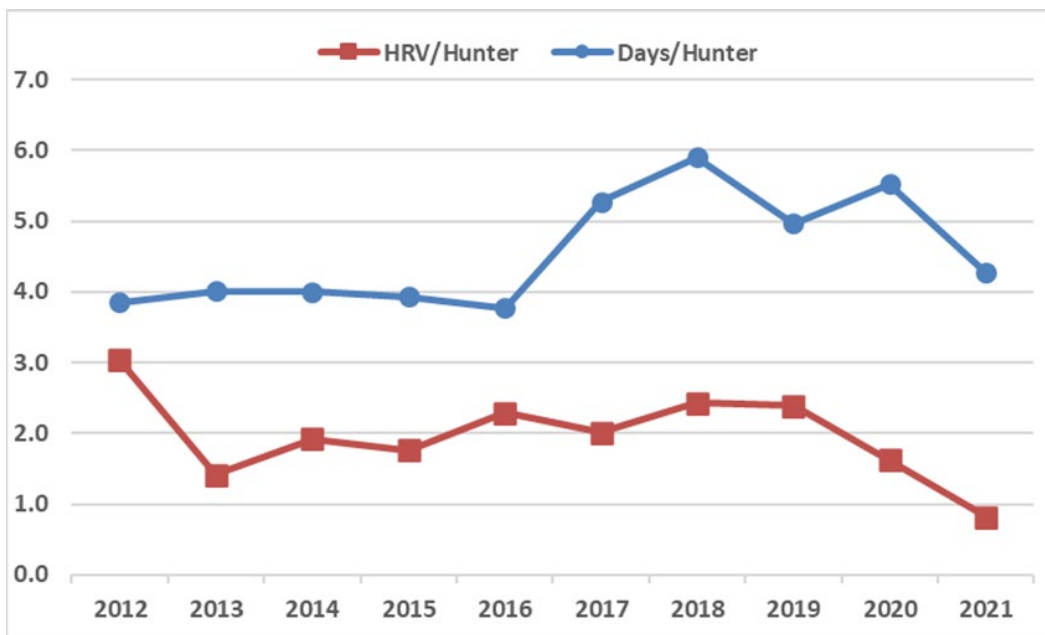


Figure 16. Chukar and partridge harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.



Forest grouse



Ruffed grouse in the forest. Photo by WDFW.

The forest grouse season opener was delayed to September 15 in 2021 and will be opening on this date again in 2024. Statewide harvest data indicated a declining trend in the forest grouse population, and wing barrel data showed that early season harvest was biased towards young of the year and brood hens. This delay has been implemented to allow for more brood break up to occur, thereby reducing brood hen vulnerability to harvest, ultimately resulting in a growing population.

Overall, forest grouse populations appear to be low but stable in District 2, with the best success found in the forested portions of GMUs 124, 127, and 133. Of the four forest grouse species, only ruffed and dusky grouse are found in District 2. Ruffed grouse are the most common of the two, but dusky grouse can be found in higher elevations of the District. The relatively dry and warm spring in 2024 should have improved hatching success and chick survival of early nesters, but those hot and dry conditions continuing into the summer may decrease recruitment as it could limit forage availability.

Hunter numbers prior to 2022 were down relative to long term averages but were stable during the previous few seasons (Figure 17). Similarly, total grouse harvested, and hunter success (harvest per hunter) were down in 2021 which may have been due to drought conditions in spring/summer 2021 (Figure 18). In 2022, WDFW's methods for estimating small game harvest underwent significant modifications so data from 2022 should not be directly compared with previous seasons. In District 2, hunters averaged 4.8 days of effort in 2022 with an average harvest of 1.3 birds per hunter. Effort in 2023 decreased to only 3.7 days per hunter, and harvest also decreased to 1.1 birds per hunter. In both years, this effort was lower than statewide estimates (8.6 and 8.1 days per hunter in 2022 and 2023, respectively). Average harvest was similar in 2022(1.6 birds per hunter), but in 2023 statewide harvest increased to an average of 2.4 birds per hunter.

For more information on forest grouse, refer to the [Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics](#), and the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#). There are [tips on hunting forest grouse](#) and the department recommends hunters use the “[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)” publication as well. There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

To evaluate population trends and harvest changes, WDFW began collecting forest grouse wings and tails from hunters in 2016 and will continue to do so in 2024. Collection barrels will be distributed at various hunting access points, as well as WDFW offices throughout Region 1. You can help with this effort by dropping off a wing and tail from each forest grouse harvested, following the instructions at the barrel. [Locations of wing barrels and other information about this sampling effort](#) can be found on WDFW’s website.

Figure 17. Forest grouse harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

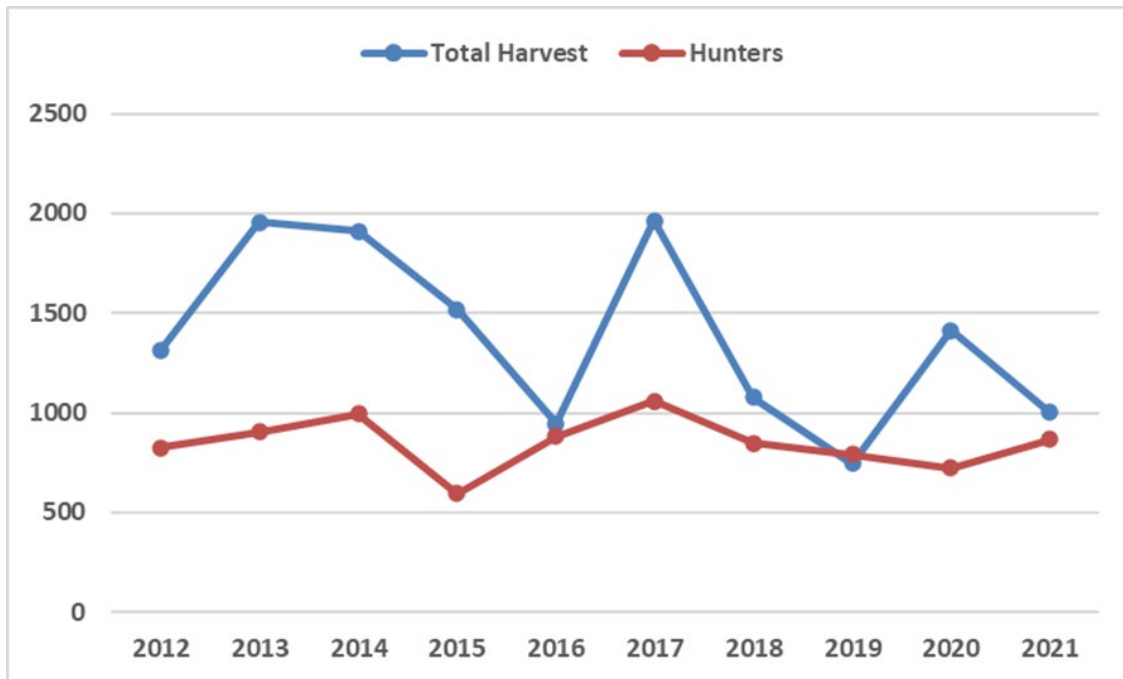
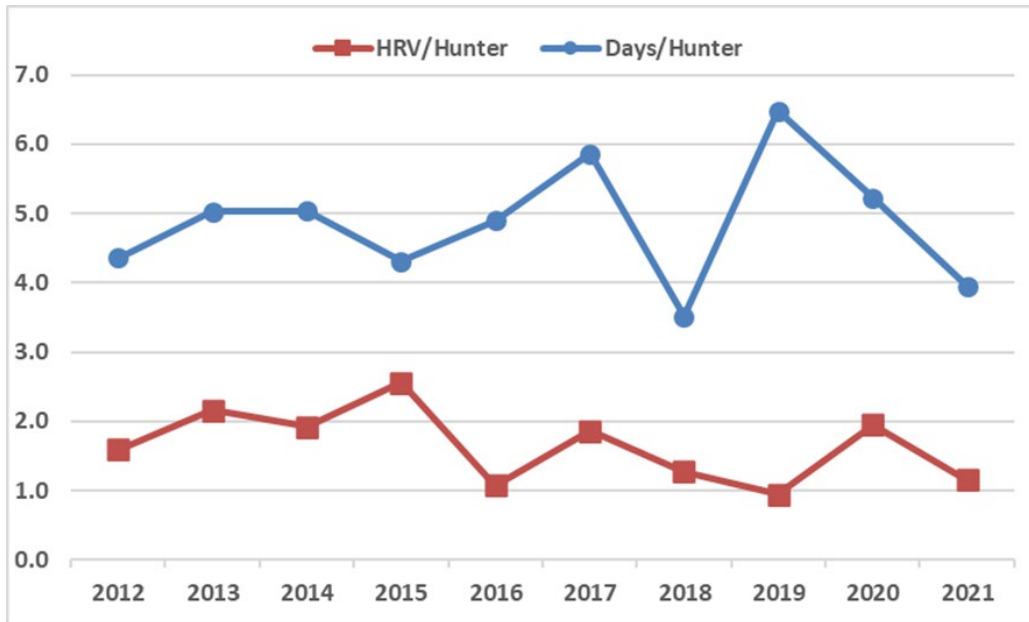


Figure 18. Forest grouse harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW's methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.



Quail



Male California quail perched on a wooden structure. Photo by Carrie Dugovic.

The 2023/24 winter was milder than normal which should have resulted in average overwinter survival and the relatively dry and warm spring in 2024 should have improved hatching success and chick survival of early nesters. However, the hot and dry conditions experienced in July may decrease recruitment as it could limit forage availability later in the summer/early fall.

Harvest was down and hunter numbers slightly up in 2021, but both were in line with the ten-year average (Figure 19). Hunter success (harvest/hunter) was below average and hunter effort (days/hunter) was average (Figure 20). Harvest estimates were derived using different analyses in 2022 so the numbers should not be compared directly with previous seasons. Average hunter effort in District 2 during the 2022 season was 4.4 days and success rates were estimated at 4.3 birds per hunter. Both estimates increased in 2023: hunters spent more time targeting quail, 5.7 days on average, and harvested an average of 6.3 birds per hunter. In 2022, hunter effort and harvest were lower than statewide estimates (5.2 days per hunter and 6.5 birds per hunter), but the estimates in 2023 are more similar to statewide estimates of 6 days per hunter and 6.9 birds per hunter. It is important to note that statewide totals include harvest of mountain quail which are only legal to hunt on the west side of the state.

Access can be challenging, especially with most of the good quail habitat occurring in and around farmsteads and towns. For more information on harvest statistics, refer to the Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: [Quail - Statewide](#). For more information on quail status in Washington, refer to the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Consider reviewing tips on [quail hunting in general](#), as well as the “[Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)” publication available on the WDFW website. There is also a [summary of upland game bird seasons](#).

Figure 19. Quail harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW's methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

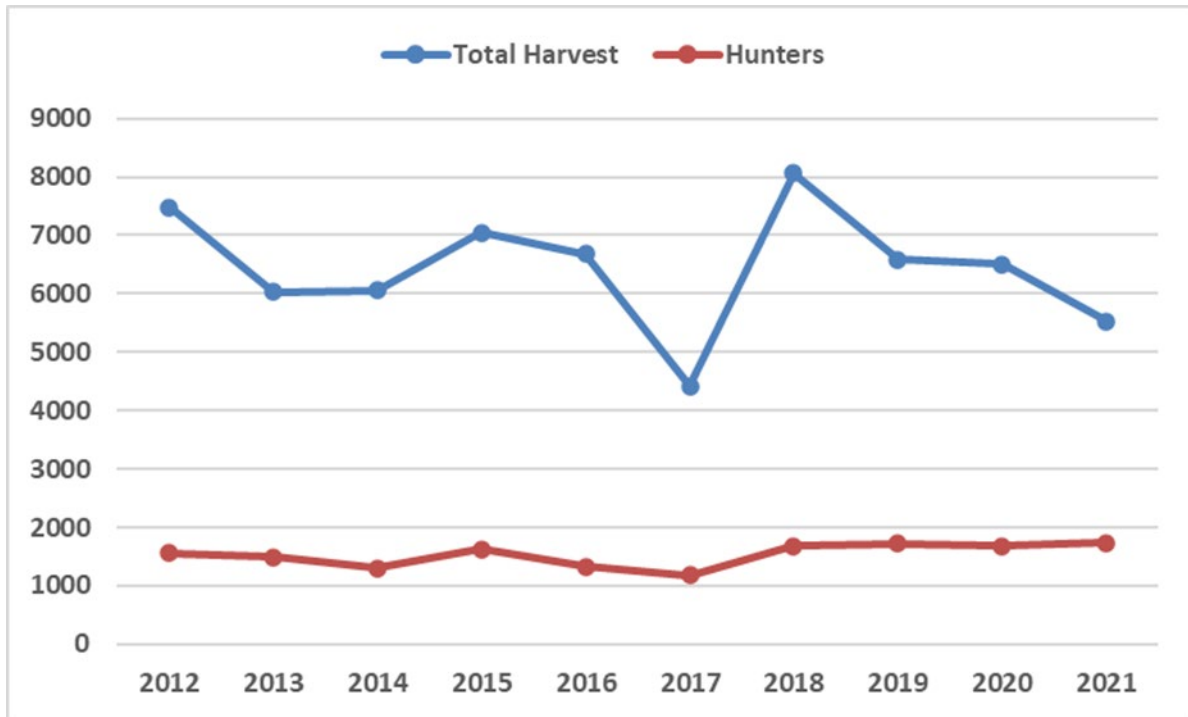
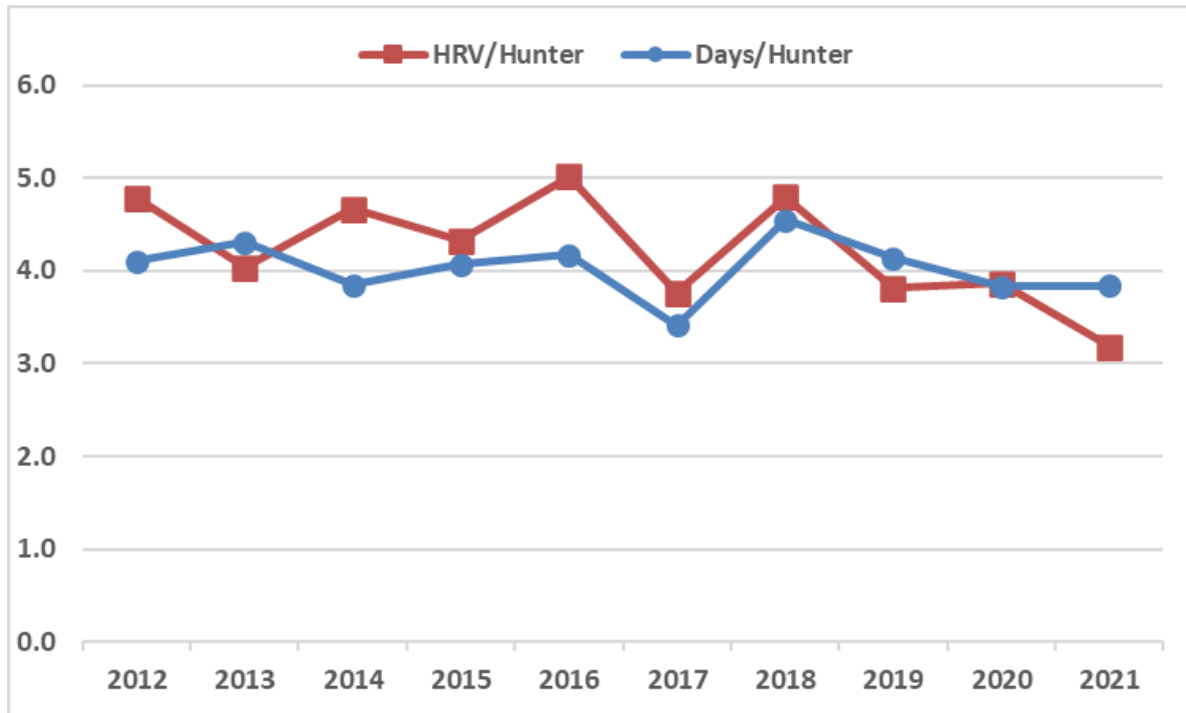


Figure 20. Quail harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2012-2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW's methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.



Turkey

Opportunistic observations during fieldwork, public reports, and damage claims all indicate that the turkey population is doing well in GMUs 124–133 and stable in GMUs 136–142. Spring harvest decreased slightly in 2023 after two consecutive years of record harvest (Figure 21). However, the number of spring turkey hunters also decreased in 2023 which could explain some of this reduction in harvest (Figure 21). Fall hunter participation was the lowest recorded in the past 10 years and fall turkey harvest was also down 15.5% from the previous 10-year average of 814 birds.

Hunter effort during the spring season in 2023 was ten days/kill which is only slightly above the previous 5-year average of nine days/kill. There was also an increase in effort per success during the fall 2023 season as hunters averaged 13 days/kill and the previous 5-year average was 10 days/kill. The decrease in fall hunter numbers from 2021 (Figure 21) is likely associated with lower deer populations after the large hemorrhagic disease outbreak because fall turkey harvest is often more opportunistic in nature while hunters pursue other game species (i.e., fewer deer means fewer hunters and therefore less opportunity to harvest fall turkeys).

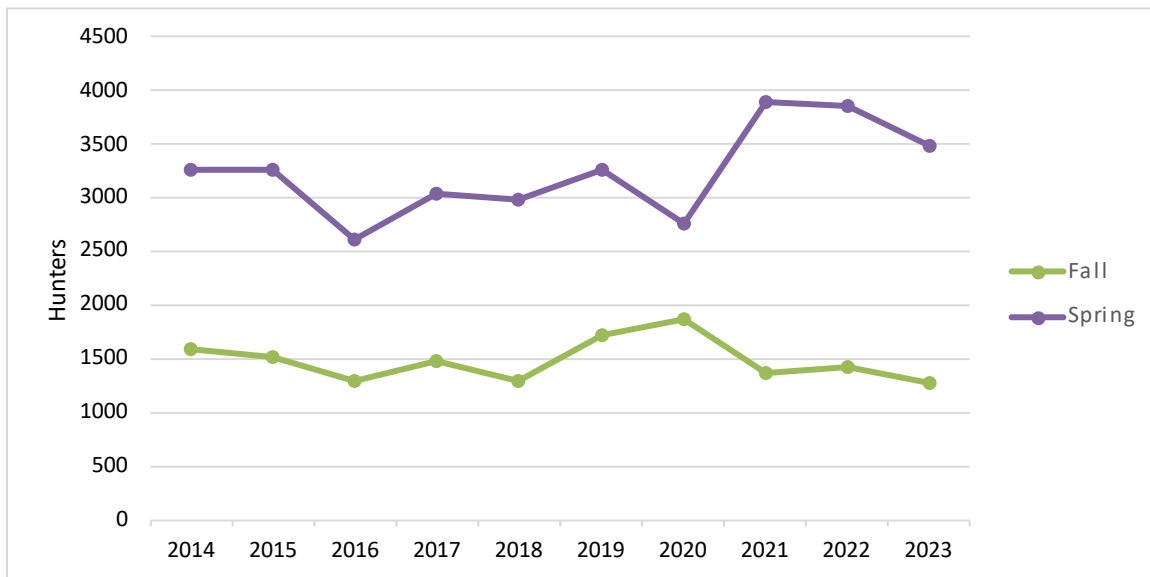
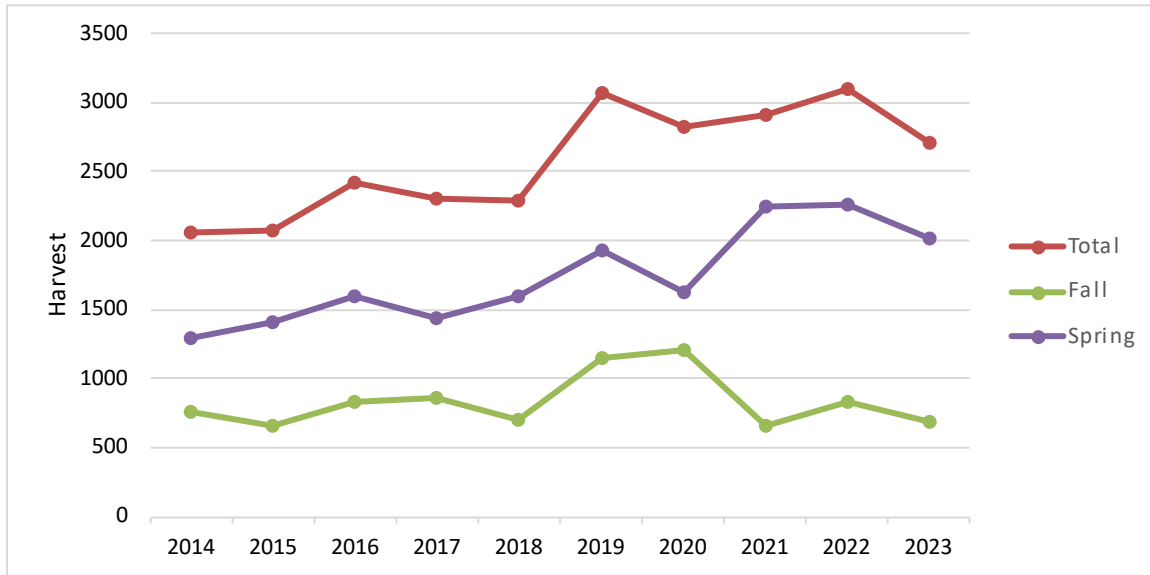
GMU 124 has the most turkeys and the most turkeys harvested (1461 on average for the past five years), but with this comes the most hunters (average of 1582 in spring and 708 in fall for the past 5 years). GMUs 130 and 133 come in a distant second for turkey harvest (581 and 529, respectively for 5-year averages) followed by GMU 127 (199 on average). GMUs 136, 139, and 142 have relatively few turkeys (less than 100 harvested in each) compared to these other units, but hunting can be very good in some areas within these GMUs.

Again, the district is predominantly private land and securing access to private land will likely increase odds of success. Access during the spring hunt can be competitive but should be easier to acquire in GMU 124 for the fall “either sex” season, given the extensive turkey damage complaints the Department has received from this area. Many private landowners have enrolled in WDFW Hunter Access programs recently in southeast Washington. Refer to the Private Lands Program section for access program acres by GMU, and the [Hunt Planner map](#) for mapped locations.

For more information on turkey harvest in Washington, refer to the [Turkey Game Harvest Statistics](#) and the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

For more information and tips on hunting turkey in Washington check out “[The Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#)” publication from WDFW.

Figure 21. Top graph: Turkey harvest (spring, fall, & total) for District 2 for the past 10 years. Bottom graph: Turkey hunters (spring & fall) for District 2 for the past 10 years.



Dove



A mourning dove perched on a branch. Photo by WDFW.

Doves in District 2 occur at low population densities relative to the Columbia Basin and similar regions. As often as not, cool temperatures just prior to or during the dove season push many doves further south out of the district. Hunter harvest metrics have been variable (Figure 22), but prior to 2022, harvest averaged about 3,200 birds a year by about 400 hunters. Hunter effort (days per hunter) has not changed much over the past ten years, although harvest per hunter spiked in 2020, to 10 birds, then dropped to 4.6 in 2021, a new ten year low (Figure 23). Harvest estimates were calculated using different analyses in 2022 so the numbers from 2022 and 2023 should not be compared directly with previous seasons. Hunters in District 2 in 2022 averaged 1.8 days of effort which resulted in an average of 6.8 birds killed per hunter. Hunter effort increased in 2023 to 2.7 days per hunter, but success decreased to 5.9 birds killed per hunter. As expected, these numbers are lower than the statewide averages of 4.3 and 3.6 days of effort per hunter and success rates of 15.5 and 14.5 birds per hunter in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

It is important to note that eastside hunters have an additional dove opportunity – the Eurasian collared dove. This dove is an exotic dove that has invaded most of eastern Washington. It can be hunted and trapped with a license year-round. Eurasian collared doves are commonly found in and around towns and around grain elevators.

For more information on doves, refer to the Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: [Statewide and by County](#), and the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Figure 22. Dove harvest and hunter numbers for District 2 from 2011–2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.

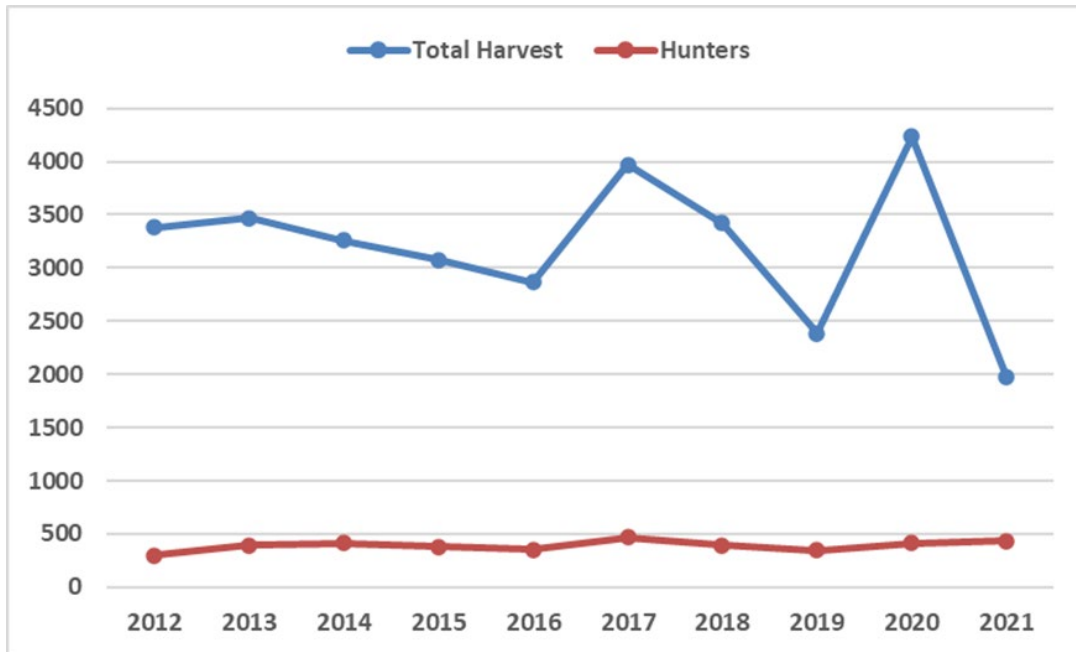
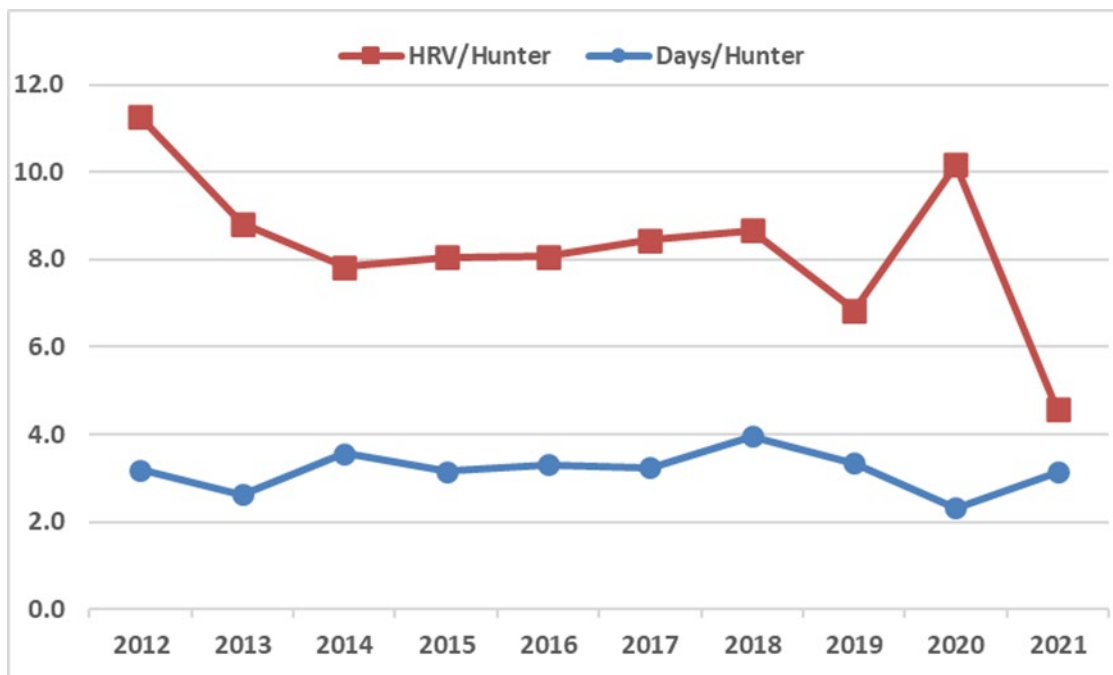


Figure 23. Dove harvest and days hunted per hunter for District 2 from 2011–2021. Data from 2022 and 2023 were not included as WDFW’s methods for analyzing small game harvest underwent significant modifications that nullifies direct comparison with previous seasons.



Major public lands

The majority of District 2 is privately owned. However, WDFW and BLM own about 60,000 acres in the center of Lincoln County and about 15,000 acres in northwest Whitman County. For more information on BLM property, or to order maps, please visit the [BLM](#) website. To hunt on WDFW Wildlife Areas, you will need to display a WDFW Vehicle Access Pass (free with hunting or fishing license purchase) or a Discover Pass. For more information on WDFW lands, refer to the [Wildlife Areas webpage](#).

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) maintains land open to the public for recreational purposes. Visitors to DNR land should be aware that a [Discover Pass](#) is required for access. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on DNR land can be found on the [DNR website](#).

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains [lands](#) associated with the Snake River open to the public for recreational purposes. Not all these lands are open to hunting, so hunters will want to research beforehand.

Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR) has a limited entry youth waterfowl hunt (details available through [TNWR](#)) and allows elk hunting by permit only (permits allotted via WDFW special permit draw in June). TNWR also allows fall turkey hunting, which is a new program that began in 2023. The turkey hunt is managed through WDFW’s [Hunt by Reservation program](#).

Riverside State Park and Mount Spokane State Park, along with all County Parks and Conservation Areas in Spokane County, are open to public access, but NOT to hunting. There is one exception to this; Mica Peak Conservation Area in GMU 127 has special white-tailed deer and turkey hunting opportunities that can be reserved through the Hunt by Reservation system.

Several private timber companies allow hunting in Spokane County. The largest of these is Inland Empire Paper (IEP), which does allow vehicular access but will close gates to full-sized vehicles once there has been enough rain to soften the roads (typically in late October or early November). IEP does charge an access fee, but it is reasonable and comes in daily and annual versions. For more information on [IEP and maps of their property](#) please visit their website. Manulife/Hancock is another large timber company in Spokane County that allows free walk-in access to hunters. WDFW Enforcement monitors their property. Please respect the agreement or this access could be lost. Hancock does not supply a map of their property; we recommend hunters use the Spokane County Assessor's online parcel map to identify Hancock ownership (which also includes System Global Timberlands, Golden Pond Timberlands, and Boston Timber) or invest in third-party software (e.g., OnX maps).

Throughout the district there are private landowners enrolled in WDFW hunt access programs (refer to Private Lands Program and visit the [WDFW Private Lands Access](#) website).

Private lands

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through a negotiated agreement. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases, monetary compensation. In addition, lands under the agreement are well known by WDFW Enforcement.

Currently, the private lands access program includes five basic access agreement types: Hunt by Written Permission (HBWP), Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH), Hunt by Reservation (HBR), Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP), and Register to Hunt (RTH). As of July 2024, the total accessible acreage in District 2 is over 154,000 acres. The breakdown of these acres by GMU and access program type are in Table 4. The LHP in GMU 130 is managed by the Columbia Plateau Wildlife Management Association (CPWMA). Access to the LHP is only available through WDFW special permitting and CPWMA raffle permit hunts (refer to WDFW's 2024 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet). More information on the other access programs and where these enrolled lands occur can be found at WDFW's [Hunt Planner Web map](#) and the [WDFW Private Lands Access](#) page.

Stimson and Hancock timber companies have traditionally had MOUs with WDFW to allow for **non-motorized** access for free to hunters, but please check with each company or WDFW to confirm these MOUs are still in place prior to hunting their properties. WDFW Enforcement monitors their properties and will ticket offenders. Please respect the non-motorized access agreement or this access could be lost.

Table 4. Acres of private land enrolled in WDFW access programs by GMU in District 2 as of July 2024: Hunt by Written Permission (HBWP), Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH), Hunt by Reservation (HBR), and Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP).

GMU	HBWP Properties	HBWP Acres	FFTH Properties	FFTH Acres	HBR Properties	HBR Acres	LHP Properties	LHP Acres
124 Mt Spokane	3	179	0	0	1	1,020	0	0
127 Mica Peak	4	2,913	0	0	1	1,821	0	0
130 Cheney	3	5,936	0	0	3	3,603	1	3,800
133 Roosevelt	15	20,992	0	0	0	0	0	0
136 Harrington	13	14,768	6	5,509	0	0	0	0
139 Steptoe	17	13,130	4	3,901	36	32,702	0	0
142 Almota	14	17,581	0	0	23	26,805	0	0
TOTAL	69	75,499	10	9,410	64	65,951	1	3,800

2024 District 3 Hunting Prospects

Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

June 2024

2024 District 3 Hunting Prospects

Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla counties

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Mark Vekasy, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

Cover photo by Paul Wik.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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Be aware of fire conditions and road closures

Wherever you choose to hunt, be sure to check on fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. In addition to potential wildfires, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) may be conducting prescribed burns and/or forest-thinning projects in your hunt area.

As of mid- August 2024, the [4-0 Ranch unit](#) and the [Grouse Flat unit](#) of the [Chief Joseph Wildlife Area](#) in Asotin County were closed due to the Cougar Creek wildfire. For more information, see:

- [Wildfire status updates \(InciWeb – Incident Information System\)](#)
- [Northwest Interagency Coordination Center](#)
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#)
- [WDFW fire restrictions and closures](#)

It is recommended that hunters [check for road closures](#) before going on their hunts.

Chronic wasting disease confirmed in eastern Washington

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) recently confirmed a case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in north Spokane County. While that detection was outside of District 3, it was in the same WDFW region. CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the Cervidae ‘deer’ family and is fatal in infected deer. TSEs are caused by malformed proteins called prions. There is currently no cure for CWD, and it can severely impact cervid populations if it becomes widespread. CWD can only be confirmed through testing of lymph nodes or brain tissue. Testing will be more important than ever to prevent the spread of the disease to other areas of eastern Washington and across the region and state. Information on how to have your harvested animal tested, and other steps WDFW is taking to prevent the spread of CWD, is at wdfw.wa.gov/cwd.

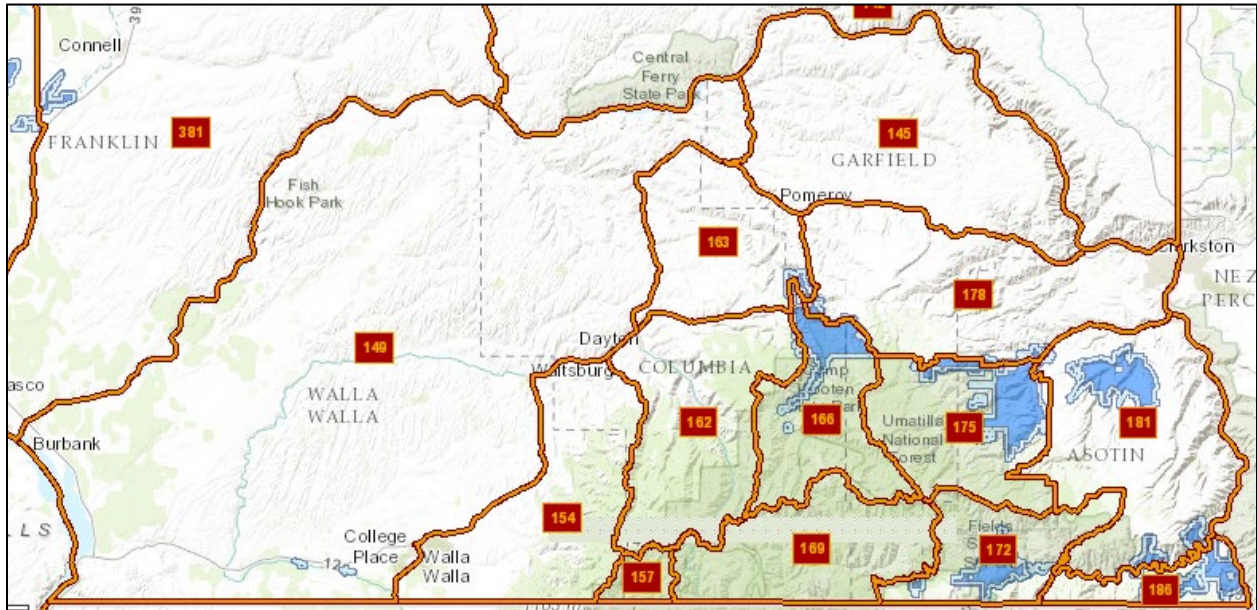


Asotin Creek Wildlife Area, Smoothing Iron Ridge. Photo by WDFW.

District 3 general overview

WDFW's District 3 is in southeast Washington and consists of 13 game management units (GMUs). 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. GMUs in District 3 include 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), 157 (Watershed- **Closed entry except elk hunting by permit only**), 162 (Dayton), 163 (Marengo), 166 (Tucannon), 169 (Wenaha), 172 (Mountain View), 175 (Lick Creek), 178 (Peola), 181 (Couse), and 186 (Grande Ronde). 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 depicting District 3 GMU boundaries, west and south of the Snake River, east of the Columbia River, and north of the Oregon border. Dark green boundary shows U.S. Forest Service lands 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 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 steep draws and canyons carved by numerous creeks and rivers. The Tucannon and Touchet rivers flow north out of the mountains, while major tributaries of the Wenaha and Grande Ronde Rivers generally flow south. Numerous creeks drain the western edge of the foothills, including Mill Creek, with its drainage located in the Walla Walla Watershed. Asotin Creek is a major watershed on the eastern side of the Blue Mountains that flows northeast into the Snake River.



Blue Creek in the western foothills of the Blue Mountains. Photo by Mark Vekasy.

District 3 is best known for its elk hunting opportunities in the Blue Mountains and mule deer hunting opportunities in grassland/agricultural GMUs. However, hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, such as white-tailed deer, black bear, cougar, chukar, turkey, and pheasant. Let's not forget some good duck, goose, and dove opportunities on the west side of District 3. Table 1 presents estimates of harvests and harvest-per-unit effort (HPUE) for most game species in District 3 during the 2023 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2022 season and the five-year averages. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Table 1: General season harvest estimates for most game species found in District 3 during the 2022 and 2023 hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year averages and a comparison of 5-year estimates and previous year to 2023 estimates. New methods to calculate small game metrics began in 2022, and 5-year averages are shown but are not a valid comparison.

Species	5-year Harvest average	2022	2023	% change (5-year avg.)	% change (2022)
Elk (General)	104	98	110	5.8%	12.2%
Elk (Bull Permit)	66	42	57	-13.4%	35.7%
Deer	2,094	1,567	1,833	-12.5%	17.0%
Bear	112	187	68	-39.2%	-63.6%
Cougar	20.8	21	26	25.0%	23.8%
Wild Turkey	1,001	979	1,142	14.0%	16.6%
Canada Goose	3,968	4,485	1,993	Invalid	-56%
Chukar Partridge	2,326	659	1,362	Invalid	107%
Cottontail Rabbit	350	18	58	Invalid	222%
Duck	28,424	24,856	22,204	Invalid	-11%
Forest Grouse	1,624	1,091	682	Invalid	-37%
Gray Partridge	696	201	353	Invalid	76%
Mourning Dove	2,755	548	1,085	Invalid	98%
Pheasant	9,069	5,130	6,221	Invalid	21%
Quail	3,570	1,662	2,879	Invalid	73%
Snowshoe Hare	40	10	8	Invalid	-20%

Table 2: Harvest per unit effort (HPUE) estimates for most game species found in District 3 during the 2022 and 2023 hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year averages and a comparison of 5-year estimates and previous year to 2023 estimates. 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). New methods to calculate small game metrics began in 2022, and 5-year averages are shown but are not a valid comparison.

Species	5-year HPUE average	2022	2023	% change (5-year avg.)	% change (2022)
Elk (General)	115.2	97.9	85.6	-25.7%	-12.5%
Elk (Bull Permit)	Not estimated	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Deer	16.1	19.2	16.6	2.7%	-13.6%
Bear	75.1	41.6	110.2	46.8%	164.7%
Cougar	Not estimated	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wild Turkey	0.09	0.07	0.07	-24.0%	-4.4%
Canada Goose	1.14	1.60	0.68	Invalid	-57%
Chukar Partridge	1.29	1.28	1.41	Invalid	10%
Cottontail Rabbit	0.58	0.27	0.59	Invalid	115%
Duck	2.51	2.45	2.00	Invalid	-18%
Forest Grouse	0.36	0.35	0.25	Invalid	-30%
Gray Partridge	0.46	0.80	0.46	Invalid	-43%
Mourning Dove	3.07	2.22	2.11	Invalid	-5%
Pheasant	0.62	0.59	0.74	Invalid	25%
Quail	0.69	0.72	1.02	Invalid	41%
Snowshoe Hare	0.11	0.20	0.80	Invalid	308%

Elk



Bull Elk at Dawn in Foothills of the Blue Mountains. Photo by Paul Wik.

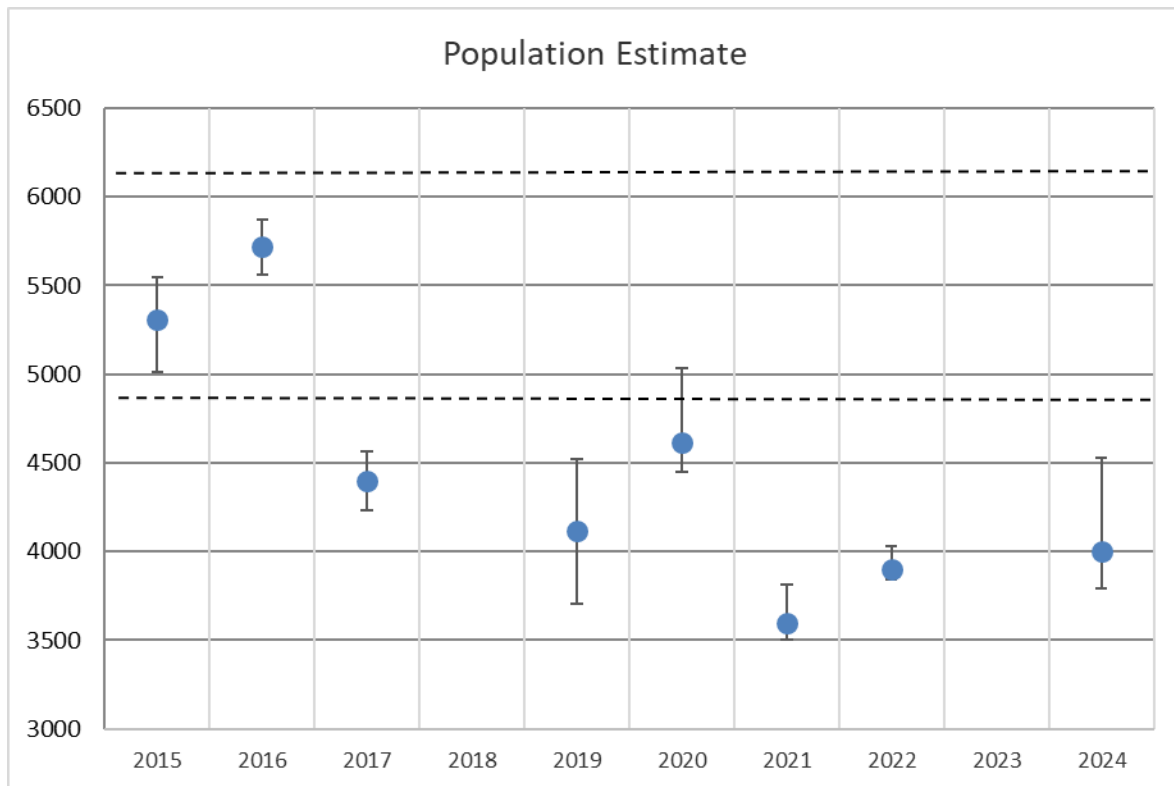
General information, management goals, and population status

In Washington, elk are managed at the herd level, while harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. 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), although portions of this herd are shared with Oregon.

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 most of 181 are managed to limit elk numbers, although some level of 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, ideally through non-lethal hazing. 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 as the management target. This target ratio, along with limited harvest of mature bulls, supports healthy reproductive attributes (bull breeding competition, cow pregnancy rates, single pulse of calf births and timing) within the elk herd.

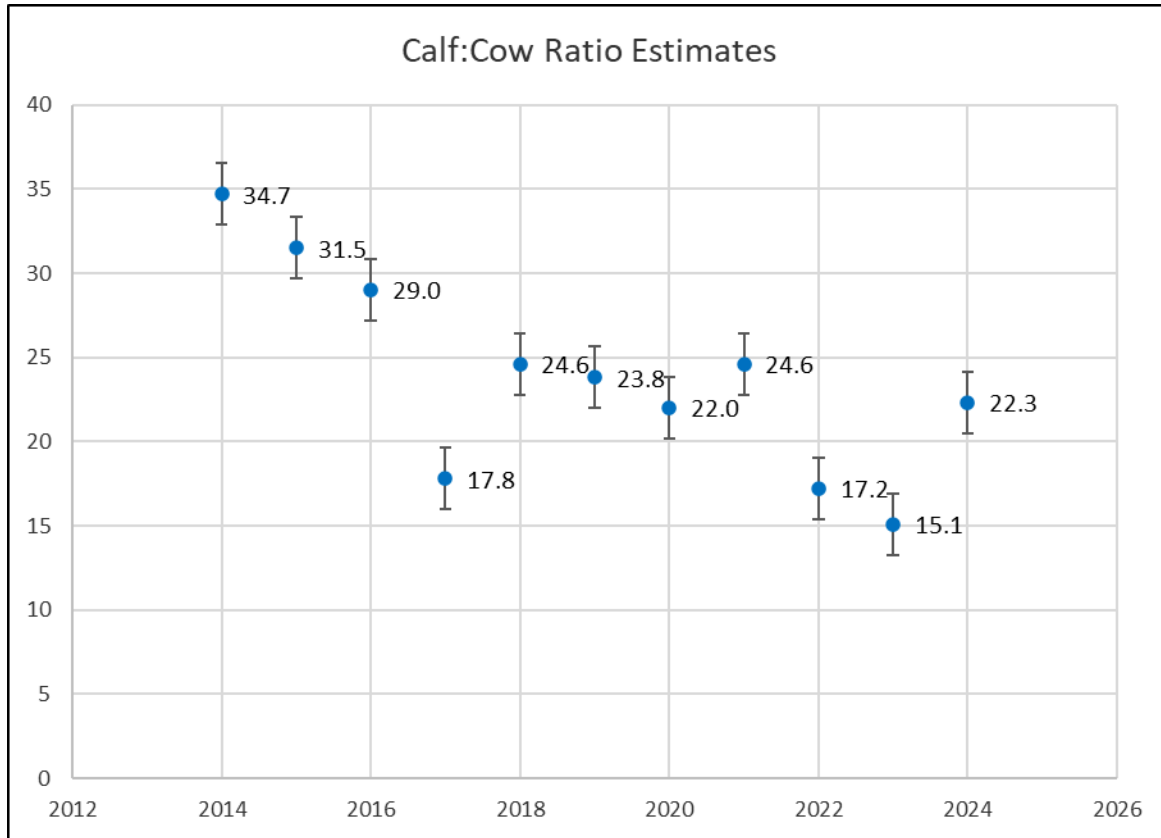
Biologists in District 3 conduct aerial surveys by helicopter within the core elk areas to estimate the post-winter population size. In the spring of 2024, survey efforts resulted in a population estimate of 3,999 (90% Confidence Interval of 3,790-4,526) elk. The southern extent of the aerial survey runs along the Grande Ronde, Wenaha, and Mill Creek watershed, which all extend into Oregon, resulting in approximately 500-600 elk being classified on shared winter range that likely remain in Oregon during the fall. Another 500 elk winter along the Oregon border in part of the Blue Creek GMU. These elk were not included in the survey totals this year. The average five-year population estimate prior to 2024 was 4,058 elk, which is about the same as the 2024 estimate, but showing no recovery to pre-2017 levels. The 2024 surveys documented a calf ratio of 22.3 calves per 100 cows and a bull ratio of 21.1 bulls per 100 cows.

Figure 2: Abundance estimates for the Blue Mountains elk population. Dashed lines represent the minimum and maximum herd objectives based on social tolerance (carrying-capacity is estimated to be much higher). Vertical bars represent the 90% Confidence Intervals for the estimates.



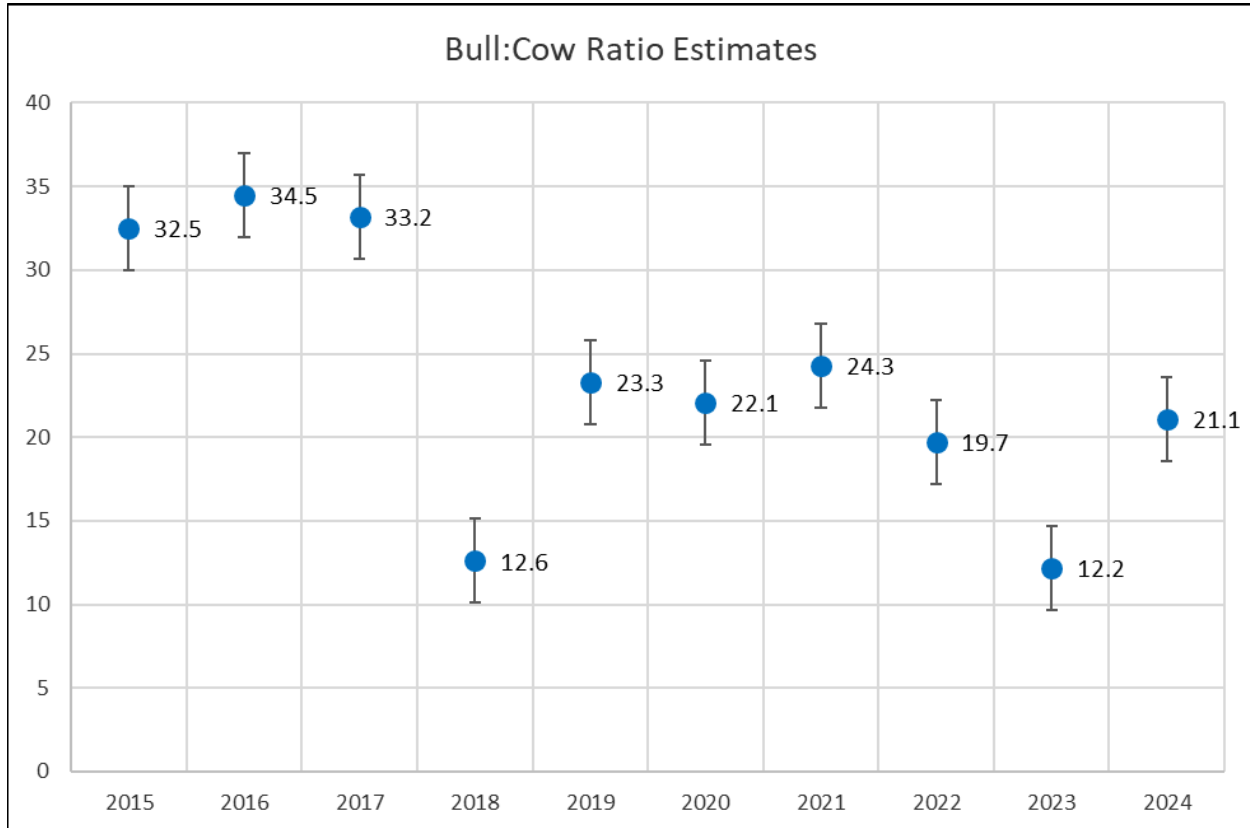
A Calf ratio in 2024 of 22.3 (90% CI +/- 0.5) is slightly above the 5-year average of 20.3; however, calf recruitment is still below the desired minimum level of 25 calves per 100 cows. This low level of recruitment is attributed to high predation by cougars and climatic extremes (WDFW 2022). Starting in May 2021, WDFW staff captured 125 neonate (newborn) elk calves annually and fitted them with GPS/satellite collars. The final results from that work will be published in the summer of 2024.

Figure 3: Calf ratios for the Blue Mountains elk herd, generated from helicopter surveys conducted in March. Vertical bars depict the 90% Confidence Intervals for the estimates.



Bull ratios and total bull numbers remained lower than the 5-year average (27.5 bulls per 100 cows) in 2024, which will be reflected in a continuing decline in permit numbers in future years. The recent decline in the number of elk in the Blue Mountains is likely a result of multiple factors, such as the severe winters observed in 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, summer droughts, and similar levels of predation over the past 5 to 10 years, all of which cumulatively reduced survival of adults and negatively impacted recruitment. The low number of calves being recruited into the population in 2023 will result in a low number of yearling bulls (spikes) available for harvest this fall. This fall will be another below-average year for yearling bull harvest. With some recovery of calf ratios in 2024, we might see an uptick in the 2025 harvest.

Figure 4: Estimated bull ratio (bulls per 100 cows) from helicopter-based surveys. Vertical bars represent 90% confidence intervals. The bull ratio in 2018 is low due to the survey being ground-based instead of by helicopter. Finding bulls from the ground is more difficult and reflects a minimum estimate not reflective of the total population.



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. New hunters to this area will have to consider several options, such as weapon type, private land versus public land, the difficulty of hunt desired (wilderness versus landscapes with roads), and, as archery hunters, whether the availability of antlerless opportunity is important. As in most years, wildfire activity could be an important consideration on where to hunt. While wildfire activity in 2023 was below average, the Cougar Creek wildfire started July 15, 2024 and spread quickly through WDFW’s [4-0 Ranch unit](#) and the [Grouse Flat unit](#) of the [Chief Joseph Wildlife Area](#) in Asotin County.

Throughout District 3, the harvest of branched bulls is regulated through the permit system. All GMUs in District 3 are managed for quality hunting, except GMUs 145, 186, and some hunts in 149. The drawing of these tags can be difficult, and many hunters wait years before obtaining a permit. Once a permit is

obtained, district biologists are available to provide information on where to possibly hunt within a GMU.

A Brief Description of Each GMU

GMU 145

This is a private land unit not managed for elk. Very few elk reside in this unit. Their movements are unpredictable and make them difficult to locate, and knowledge of their locations is often not readily 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 have historically inhabited the southwest corner of the GMU and crossed back and forth between Oregon and Washington. The Boise Cascade poplar tree farm has recently been transitioned to row crops, which has changed the pattern and occupancy of elk in this GMU. Another group of elk exists in the northern portion of the unit on the breaks of the Snake River. This can be a very difficult GMU 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% private land but does include numerous landowners in the WDFW hunting access program. The elk are heavily hunted in this GMU due to conflicts with agricultural activities. Access has historically been available to branched-antlered-bull (branched-bull) tag holders and general season hunters. Most of the antlerless opportunity is being shifted south of Mill Creek where elk are concentrating along the state line. This GMU is rapidly being subdivided into small parcels where gaining access to elk is becoming more difficult.

GMU 157

This GMU is 99% public land but closed to the public to any entry other than branched-bull 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 or overnight camping inside the watershed boundaries is permitted. Only the perimeter roads and trails can be accessed for scouting.

GMU 162

The Dayton GMU is a mix of private and public lands and has historically supported about 1,000 elk. Currently, the number of elk in the Dayton GMU in March of 2024 was about 350. 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 mostly managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in addition to lands owned by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). Both of these ownerships 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 mostly 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. This can be a physically challenging unit to hunt. Elk densities have remained low in this unit for the past 35 years and do not show indications of improving. However, a large wildfire burned in this unit in 2015 and another in portions of the GMU in 2021, which is expected to have a positive effect on elk numbers and habitat quality for years to come.

GMU 172

Elk numbers appear to be stable in this GMU as of 2024. A calf ratio of 27:100 was observed in 2023, which should be a good indicator of the number of yearling bulls available in 2024, but still below the long-term average. Approximately 60% of this GMU is private and access can be challenging. The USFS lands within this GMU are physically challenging to hunt. The Cougar Creek fire is likely to have impacts on elk distribution and hunting access during the 2024 season.

GMU 175

This GMU is predominantly public land owned by WDFW, USFS, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Access is good throughout the unit. One major change as the result of declining elk numbers observed in this unit is the restriction of archery hunters to spike-only, with no antlerless opportunity available for any weapon type. In July 2021, 80% of this GMU burned in a wildfire, but the wet summer in 2022 helped the vegetation rebound. Habitat quality is relatively high, but calf recruitment is still below the level required to have a stable population.

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 a 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, and elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and do not offer a 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.

Summary of GMU Harvest Attributes

The information provided in Table 3 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 2022 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/mi² (bulls only), hunters/mi², 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.

Tables 3a, 3b, and 3c provide rank sum totals for 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 an antlerless opportunity as well (see hunting regulations for specific restrictions). Data presented are based on 2022 harvest reports.

Table 3a. Modern Firearm

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	10	0.01	10	64	0.05	1	15.6%	2	3	13
154	216	5	0.02	8	159	0.74	6	3.1%	9	3	23
162	210	5	0.02	4	379	1.80	8	1.3%	10	2	22
166	131	5	0.04	6	203	1.55	7	2.5%	8	1	21
169	161	4	0.02	6	92	0.57	5	4.3%	6	1	17
172	108	20	0.19	1	214	1.98	9	9.3%	1	2	11
175	158	24	0.15	2	284	1.80	10	8.5%	4	1	16
178	275	5	0.02	8	64	0.23	2	7.8%	5	3	15
181	262	4	0.02	6	88	0.34	3	4.5%	7	3	16
186	53	2	0.04	2	34	0.64	4	5.9%	3	2	9

Table 3b. Archery

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	0	0.00	4	4	0.00	1	0.0%	4	3	9
154	216	5	0.02	1	72	0.33	7	6.9%	5	3	13
162	210	0	0.00	4	53	0.25	8	0.0%	8	2	20
166	131	0	0.00	7	19	0.15	5	0.0%	8	1	20
169	161	0	0.00	7	23	0.14	6	0.0%	8	1	21
172	108	2	0.02	1	33	0.31	10	6.1%	3	2	14

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
175	158	2	0.01	7	59	0.37	9	3.4%	2	1	18
178	275	0	0.00	7	10	0.04	3	0.0%	1	3	11
181	262	4	0.02	7	22	0.08	4	18.2%	8	3	19
186	53	0	0.00	7	4	0.08	2	0.0%	8	2	17

Table 3c. Muzzleloader

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	3	0.00	1	10	0.01	1	30.0%	2	3	4
154	216	0	0.0	6	12	0.06	4	0.0%	1	3	11
162	210	0	0.0	6	19	0.09	5	0.0%	5	2	16
166	131	0	0.0	6	13	0.10	6	0.0%	3	1	15
172	108	3	0.0	2	53	0.49	8	5.7%	4	2	14
175	158	3	0.0	6	49	0.31	7	6.1%	7	1	20
178	275	0	0	6	2	0.01	2	0.0%	7	3	15
181	262	0	0	6	6	0.02	4	0.0%	7	3	17

What to expect during the 2024 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 winters of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019 were uncommonly severe, with intermixed droughts in 2015 and 2021, resulting in a significant decline in elk numbers. Calf recruitment since 2016 has remained below average, consequently, elk numbers available for harvest will remain lower than years prior to the 16/17 winter. The 2024 general season is expected to be similar to the average during the past 5 years, with low numbers of yearling bulls (spikes) available for harvest. Harvest since 2016 has been the lowest in

the past 20 years. Hunter numbers also typically do not change substantially from one year to the next, but a slow decline has been observed with the declining population. The weather during hunting season does change from year to year, which will influence success rates.

The spring and summer of 2021 was one of the driest and hottest since records have been kept, which resulted in greater than 130,000 acres burnt. The spring of 2022 was one of the wettest on record, resulting in great forage conditions for elk. In 2024, conditions started out to be between these two years climatically, but moderate drought conditions have occurred through mid-Summer ([NOAA Drought](#)). How this relates to elk hunting in the fall is unknown.

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 elk are going to be, especially after hunting pressure increases. The majority of hunters spend 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 in 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” 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 road closed to motorized vehicles 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.

Elk areas

There are six elk areas in District 3: Elk Area 1008 and 1009 (Wenaha Wilderness West and East), Elk Area 1013 (Mountain View Private), Elk Area 1016 (GMU 162 excluding the Rainwater Wildlife Area), Elk Area 1075 (Lick Creek Private Lands), and Elk Area 1081 (GMU 181 + extreme northeast corner of GMU172).

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 on the western corner of the unit where the road density was highest. By spreading out the hunting pressure, additional hunting opportunities were created.

Elk Area 1013 is 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 on public lands.

Elk Area 1075 was created to use hunters to alter the behavior of elk that leave the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area for private agricultural grounds during early winter. To minimize crop damage, hunters are being used to move elk off private lands in the Lick Creek GMU. The same is true for Elk Area 1081 in relation to the Mountain View GMU.

Notable issues and hunting changes

1. Calf recruitment has been at record low numbers for the past few years. This will result in low numbers of yearling bulls available for harvest in the general season. This also results in declining branched-bull permit numbers as recruitment into the older age classes has declined.
2. Antlerless elk opportunity has been eliminated in all of the core public land GMUs. Antlerless tags remaining in the Blue Mountains area are focused on private lands that experience agricultural damage. These hunts can be difficult to gain adequate access if the elk are moving across ownerships frequently.
3. In July and August of 2021, wildfires burned 80% of GMU 175, a large portion of GMU 166 and a small portion of GMU 169. Severe drought in 2021 reduced forage and water availability throughout the district. The following year (2022) had very wet conditions with above normal vegetation growth. 2023 was largely average climatically, and 2024 has started out drier than normal, with a predicted hot and dry summer.
4. During the summer of 2015, wildfire burned through a large portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, extending slightly into GMU 172 on Grouse Flats. A large portion of the fire that occurred in Washington burned later into September, creating desirable habitat conditions for elk with low intensity burning.
5. The Cougar Creek fire is likely to impact big game distributions and hunting opportunity in GMU 172 during the 2024 hunting season.
6. Severe winters occurred during 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, resulting in high mortality rates of elk. Severe droughts occurred in 2015 and 2021, influencing recruitment in the following years. Antlerless opportunity throughout the Blue Mountains has been severely reduced on public lands as a result. Calf recruitment has yet to rebound, and harvest will remain below average.

Deer



Blue Creek GMU White-tailed Deer Buck. Photo by Mark Vekasy.

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 the 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, a high percentage of legal bucks harvested, higher predator densities, and lower quality deer forage. 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 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), with GMU 186 (Grande Ronde) seeing a recent increase in success. Total general season harvest is highest in GMUs 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), and 162 (Dayton).

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 are used to monitor population status. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and are conducting annual road surveys to determine herd composition and periodic aerial sightability surveys to monitor deer populations that are independent of harvest data, in addition to using collared mule deer does to understand survival rates.

All available harvest data indicates deer populations are variable within a relatively narrow range in District 3; however, 2021 was an abnormal year, with extensive wildfires that closed access to the National Forest for parts of the September hunting season and a severe hemorrhagic disease outbreak across the lower elevations of the district. Harvest totals were significantly lower, but the change in HPUE was not as drastic, indicating the decline in harvest was due to both fewer deer being available but also heavily influenced by lower hunter numbers. HPUE was again influenced by hunter numbers in 2022, with record low hunter numbers and effort, but only a marginal decrease in percent success and harvest/day. We saw some recovery of harvest in the 2023 season but look for a return to long-term averages in the 2024 season as yearling and 2-year-old bucks reach legal antler point numbers. For more detailed information related to the status of mule deer and white-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

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 type of hunting experience desired. Some hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature buck, while others just want to harvest any legal deer, and still, others prefer to hunt an area with few other 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 and provide a backcountry experience.

The information provided in Table 4 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare regarding 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 per hunter and the number of 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 number of deer harvested over the past five years during the modern firearm general season in GMUs 149 (Prescott) and 154 (Blue Creek) has been 457 and 212 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/mi², the result is an estimate of 0.33 in GMU 149 and 0.98 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 in total acreage but is comprised primarily of tilled croplands, and deer are concentrated in fields, rangelands, and along the breaks of the Snake River, so densities in a portion of the GMU are probably higher than the harvest/mi² indicates.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 12 (except for ties) for deer harvested/mi² (deer harvest density), hunters/mi² (hunter density), hunter success rates, and public land access. The ranking values were then summed (public land access excluded) to produce a final rank sum, lower totals being more desirable. 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 (you will definitely see more hunters in GMU 149 than GMU 169 although those GMUs have similar hunter densities).

Tables 4a, 4b, and 4c provide rank sum totals for a quick and general comparison of how total general harvest, hunter numbers, hunter success rates, and access to public land compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. GMUs in bold type are open during early and late seasons for the respective weapon type. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2019-2023).

Table 4a. Modern Firearm

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
145	355	184	0.52	6	563	1.59	4	32%	1	3	11 (1)
149	1409	446	0.32	9	1489	1.06	2	30%	3	3	14 (4)
154	216	195	0.90	2	825	3.82	11	24%	6	3	19 (6)
162	210	215	1.02	1	1339	6.37	12	16%	9	2	22 (9)

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
163	149	90	0.61	3	364	2.45	8	25%	5	3	16 (5)
166	131	33	0.25	10	391	2.99	10	9%	11	1	31 (12)
169	161	12	0.07	12	151	0.94	1	8%	12	1	25 (10)
172	108	35	0.33	8	181	1.69	5	19%	8	2	21 (8)
175	158	26	0.17	11	283	1.79	7	10%	10	1	28 (11)
178	275	155	0.56	5	483	1.76	6	32%	1	3	12 (2)
181	262	103	0.39	7	341	1.30	3	30%	3	3	13 (3)
186	53	32	0.61	3	142	2.68	9	23%	7	2	19 (6)

Table 4b. Archery

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
145	355	11	0.03	7	41	0.12	4	32%	2	3	13 (2)
149	1409	39	0.03	7	152	0.11	2	25%	5	3	14 (3)
154	216	39	0.18	2	175	0.81	11	22%	7	3	20 (7)
162	210	23	0.11	3	160	0.76	10	14%	9	2	22 (9)
163	149	30	0.20	1	150	1.01	12	19%	8	3	21 (8)
166	131	3	0.02	9	59	0.45	9	5%	11	1	29 (11)
169	161	2	0.01	11	17	0.11	2	14%	9	1	22 (9)
172	108	8	0.07	4	25	0.23	7	34%	1	2	12 (1)

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
175	158	1	0.00	12	32	0.21	5	1%	12	1	29 (11)
178	275	19	0.07	4	71	0.26	8	27%	3	3	15 (4)
181	262	4	0.02	9	22	0.08	1	23%	6	3	16 (6)
186	53	3	0.06	6	11	0.21	5	26%	4	2	15 (4)

Table 4c. Muzzleloader

GMU	Size (mi ²)	Total Harvest	Harvest per mi ²	Harvest Rank	Total Hunters	Hunters per mi ²	Hunter Density Rank	Hunter Success	Hunter Success Rank	Public Access Rank	Rank Sum
145	355	18	0.05	4	46	0.13	2	37%	1	3	7 (1)
149	1409	52	0.04	5	175	0.04	1	30%	5	3	11 (4)
154	216	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
162	210	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
163	149	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
166	131	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
169	161	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
172	108	16	0.15	1	47	0.44	6	33%	3	2	10 (3)
175	158	5	0.3	6	33	0.21	3	14%	6	1	15 (6)
178	275	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
181	262	33	0.13	3	106	0.40	4	32%	4	3	11 (4)
186	53	8	0.15	1	22	0.42	5	37%	1	2	7 (1)

What to expect during the 2024 season

Wildfires are always a possibility that may affect hunter access to some hunting areas, and fires in the Lick Creek GMU three summers ago likely impacted an already declining harvest trend for deer in that GMU. This trend is most evident in success rates in the GMU, not overall harvest, and has been driven by the increase in hunters in GMU 175, which have doubled since 2001. With another wet spring promoting understory growth and projected hot and dry conditions through the summer, wildfire danger is likely to be high and hunters are **strongly encouraged** to [check the status of wildfires](#) as well as public land access restrictions ([USFS](#)) before planning for the fall hunting season.

It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where winter and weather conditions are generally mild and do not result in large winter die-offs. With back-to-back-to-back average to mild winters over 2019-2023, we have been expecting to see improvements in deer populations across the district; however, drought conditions and hemorrhagic disease in 2021 took a toll on some portions of the deer herd and we did not see much evidence of recovery in 2022. The district saw increases in the number of days it took hunters to harvest a deer in almost all GMUs, with only the mountain GMUs showing stable or modest HPUE decreases, but this is likely due to lower hunter numbers. The 2023 season showed a modest increase in harvest rates in most GMUS, but still below long-term averages. With good growing conditions last spring and an average winter, we expect overwinter survival was good, and are expecting deer harvest to marginally improve again through the 2024 hunting season.

In order to promote our deer herd, particularly the white-tailed deer segment that has been unusually slow to recover since the 2021 hemorrhagic disease outbreak, we have reduced general season antlerless opportunity for the most recent 3-year hunting package (2024-2026). We hope to see white-tailed deer recovery over the next 3 years and a re-institution at that time of general season white-tailed deer antlerless opportunity for youth, senior, and disabled hunters.

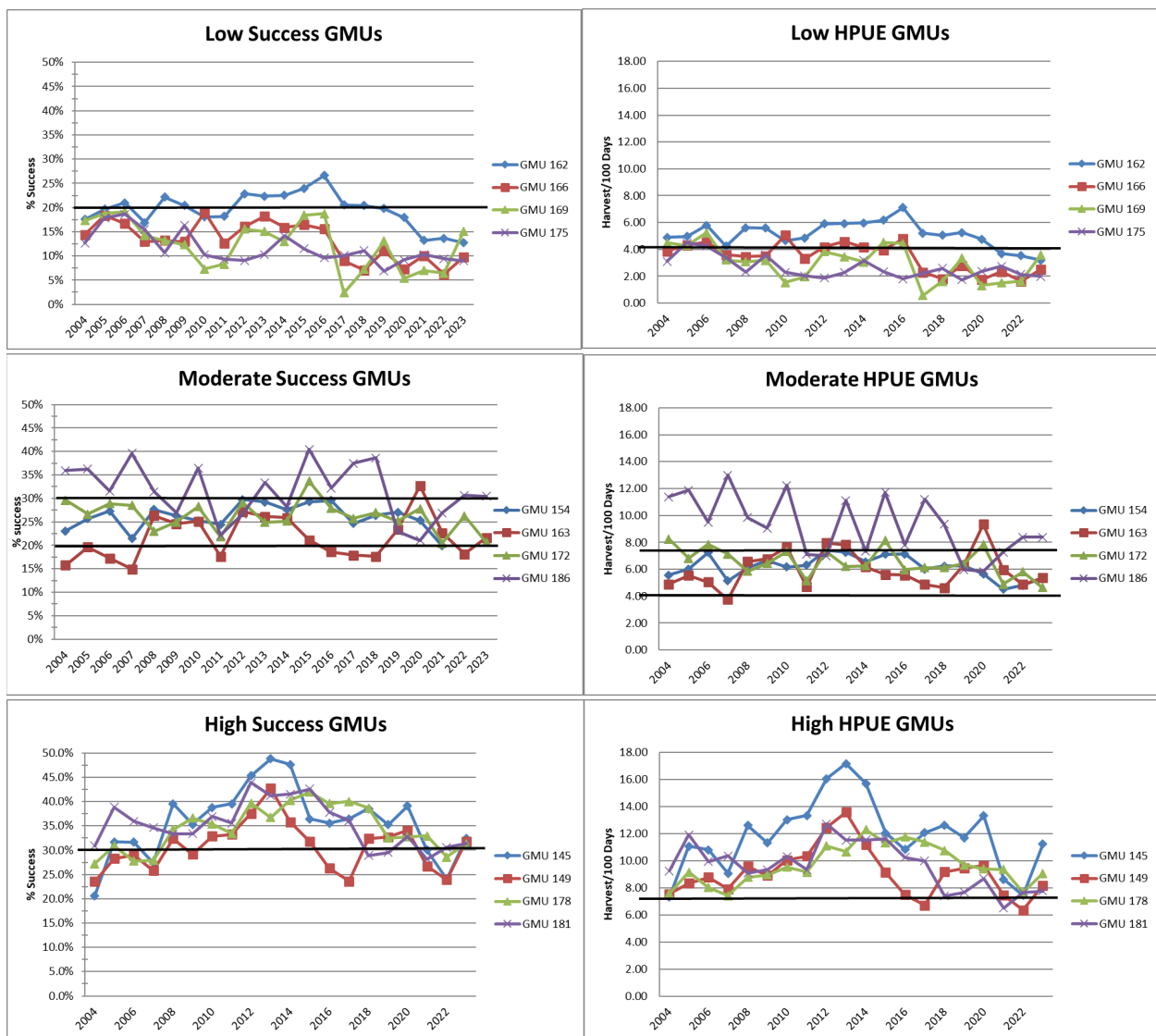
Periodic die-offs have occurred due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and bluetongue, both viral conditions transmitted by a biting midge, a small fly often found near water or marshy areas, which mainly affect white-tailed deer. The 2021 drought resulted in disease outbreaks across eastern Washington, affecting even portions of the mule deer herd, generally less susceptible than white-tails to hemorrhagic disease die-offs. While the sample size is small, approximately 15% of 40 radio-collared mule deer does were lost to either bluetongue or EHD. Although disease outbreaks are monitored annually, there is nothing feasible to be done to prevent outbreaks of hemorrhagic diseases. Research projects using relatively localized trapping of adult midges and spraying insecticides for emerging larvae have shown these methods are not effective in curtailing disease outbreaks in the wild.

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 the loss of winter range. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has probably helped maintain winter range in District 3, and mule deer populations outside of the mountains appear to be stable. However, decreases in available CRP contracts over the last few years have resulted in more land going into agricultural production and

will likely have long-term negative impacts on mule deer populations in the district. In addition, alternative energy projects involving solar panel and wind turbine installations have reduced available habitat with construction of new roads, pads, and fencing. Mountain populations of mule deer continue to show poor harvest metrics. Recent wildfires in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness should have improved habitat conditions for deer, and 2021 fires in GMU 166 and 175 should provide future benefits.

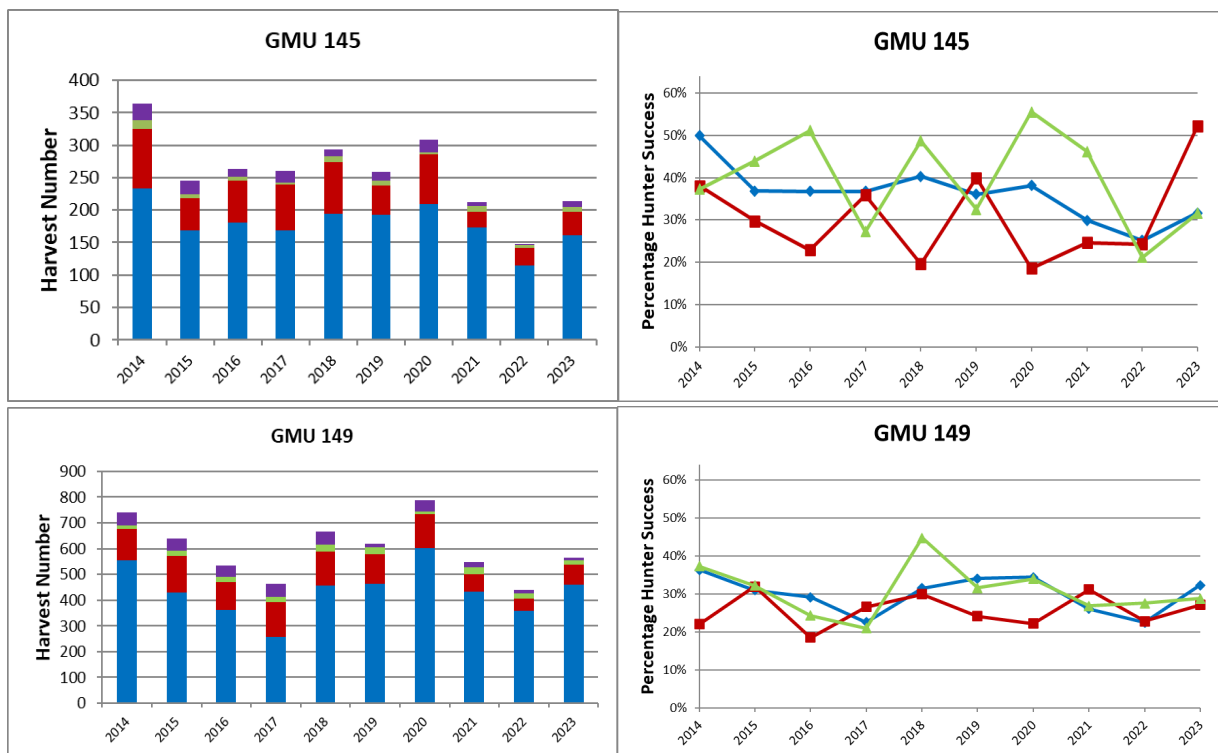
One reference WDFW currently has for future potential harvest during general seasons are recent trends in hunter harvest success and harvest/unit effort. Figures 5 and 6 provide trend data for general season hunter harvest metrics.

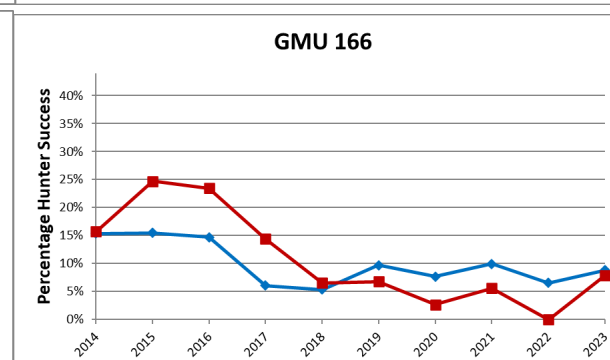
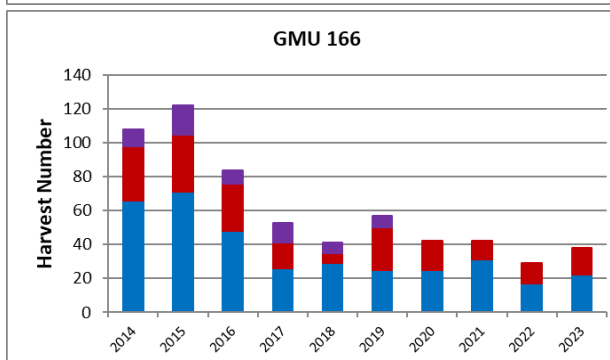
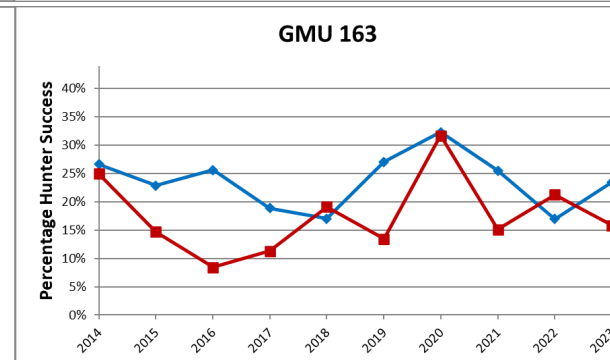
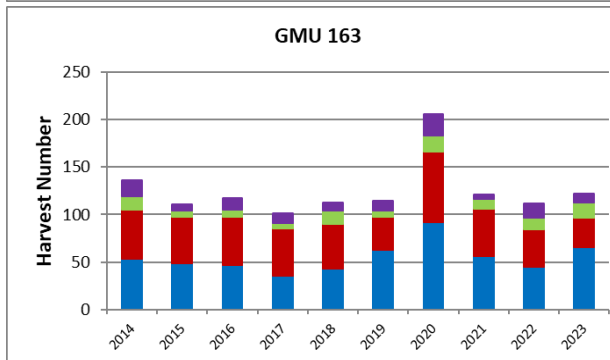
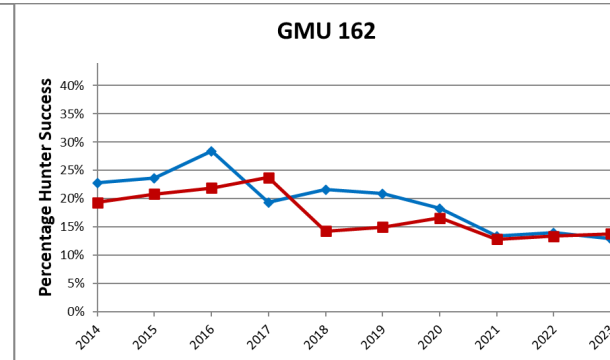
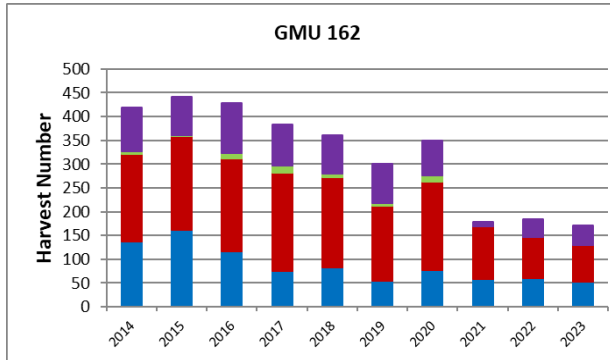
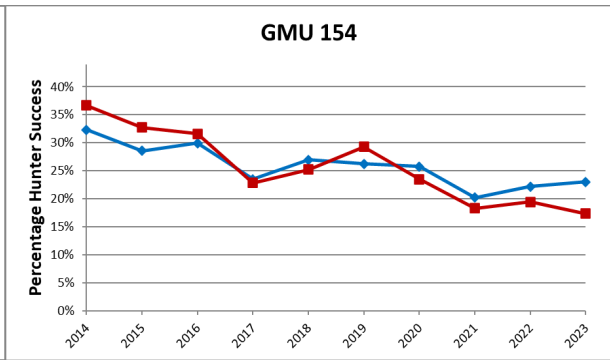
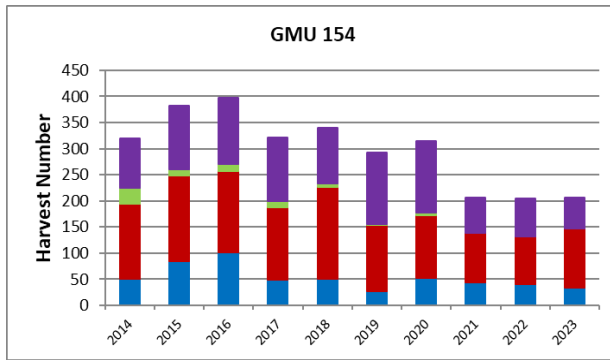
Figure 5. Twenty-year trends in hunter harvest metrics grouped by low, moderate, and high categories. Left column: hunter harvest success by GMU. Right column: hunter harvest per unit effort by GMU.

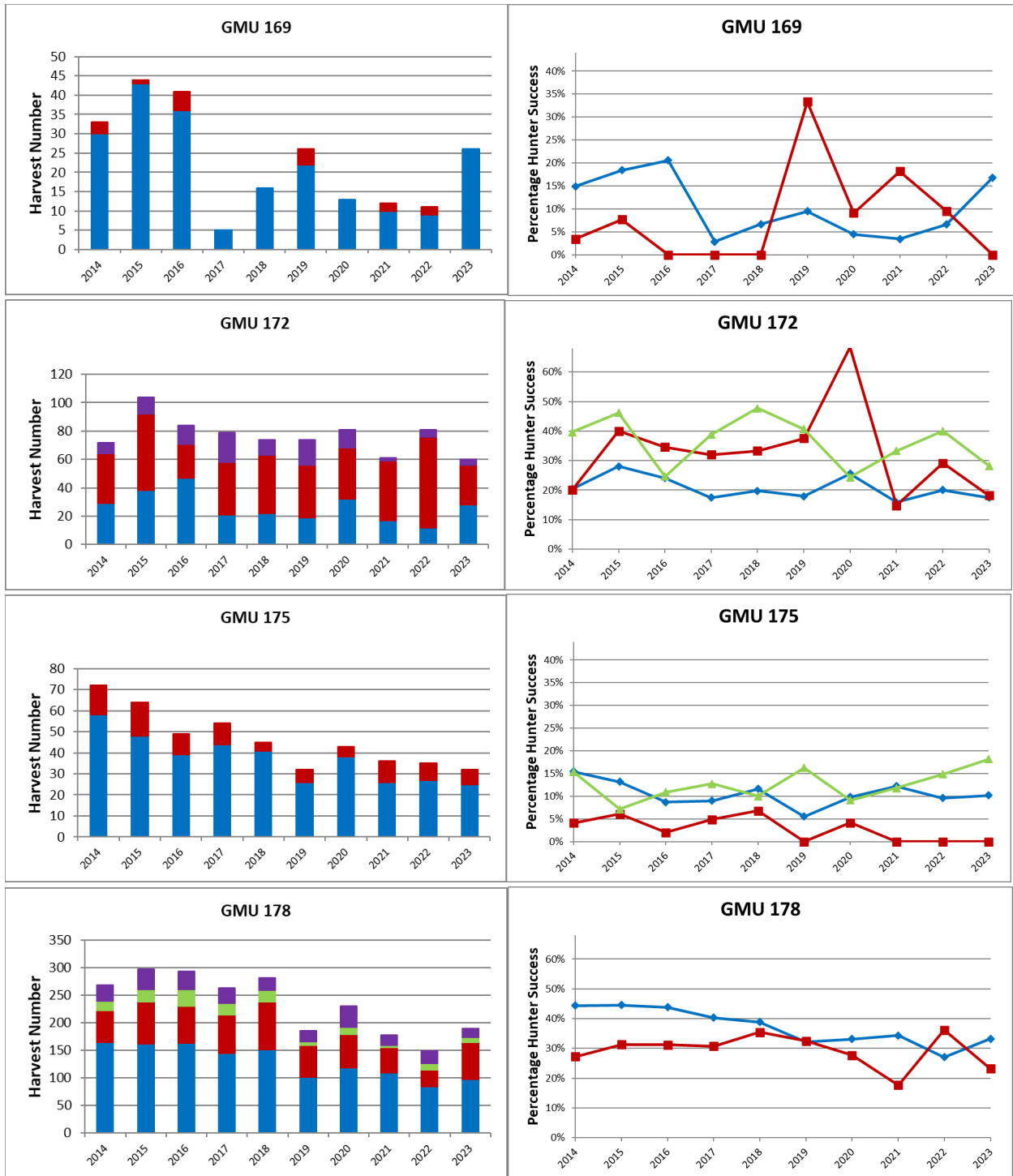


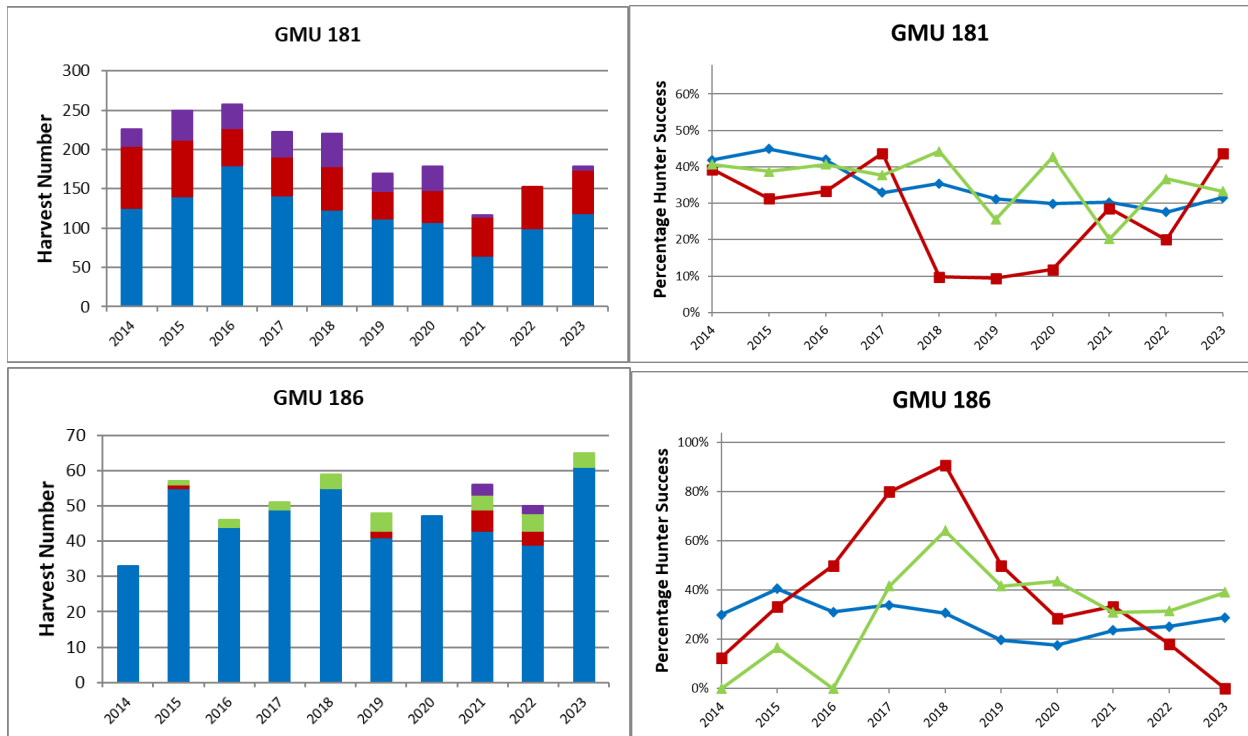
Overall, the recent trends in total harvest have been disappointing. With poor overwinter survival in 2017 and 2019, and drought conditions in 2021, environmental conditions have not been conducive to stable populations or herd recovery. Some of the decline is due to lower hunter numbers and recent restrictions on antlerless harvest, but even with that, buck harvest numbers have been declining. Harvest success has not declined by the same percentage due to the effect of declining hunter numbers, but the trend is still not positive. We have addressed the harvest declines by limiting antlerless opportunity both during the general weapon seasons and with lower permit numbers, and we anticipate seeing some recovery now that we are 3-years post-hemorrhagic disease outbreak that impacted both our white-tailed and mule deer herds, and successive mild winters promoting good over-winter survival.

Figure 5: Left column: 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 2014-2023. Totals do not include permit harvest (note the different scales, from maximums of 50 - 900). Right column: 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 2014-2023.









Deer areas

There are three deer areas in District 3 that were created for several 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 into east and west areas and help to manage deer by distributing hunters and harvest opportunity across the wilderness area.

Notable hunting alerts

1. For the new 3-year season-setting process, general season antlerless opportunity was withdrawn from all GMUs for all hunter groups.
2. The 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area is open to general season deer and elk hunting under the same regulations as GMU 172.
3. "Any Deer" permits were added or maintained for youth in selected GMUs.
4. The Cougar Creek fire is likely to impact big game distributions and hunting opportunity in GMU 172 during the 2024 hunting season.

Black bear



Cinnamon black bear typical of the Blue Mountains. Photo by WDFW.

General information, management goals, and population status

Black bears occur mainly in the foothills and forested areas of District 3, but sub-population densities vary among GMUs. The highest harvest 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, WDFW regulates for only a general fall bear season, with the elimination three years ago by the WDFW Commission of the permit-controlled spring bear hunt. With harvest metrics that fall within healthy population parameters identified by WDFW and a recent robust population index modeled through DNA sampling, both indicate a thriving bear population in the Blue Mountains. The current metrics used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of female bears in the harvest (no more than 35-39% 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); however, WDFW is investigating the use of a density-based model derived from DNA identification of individual bears to guide harvest guidelines.

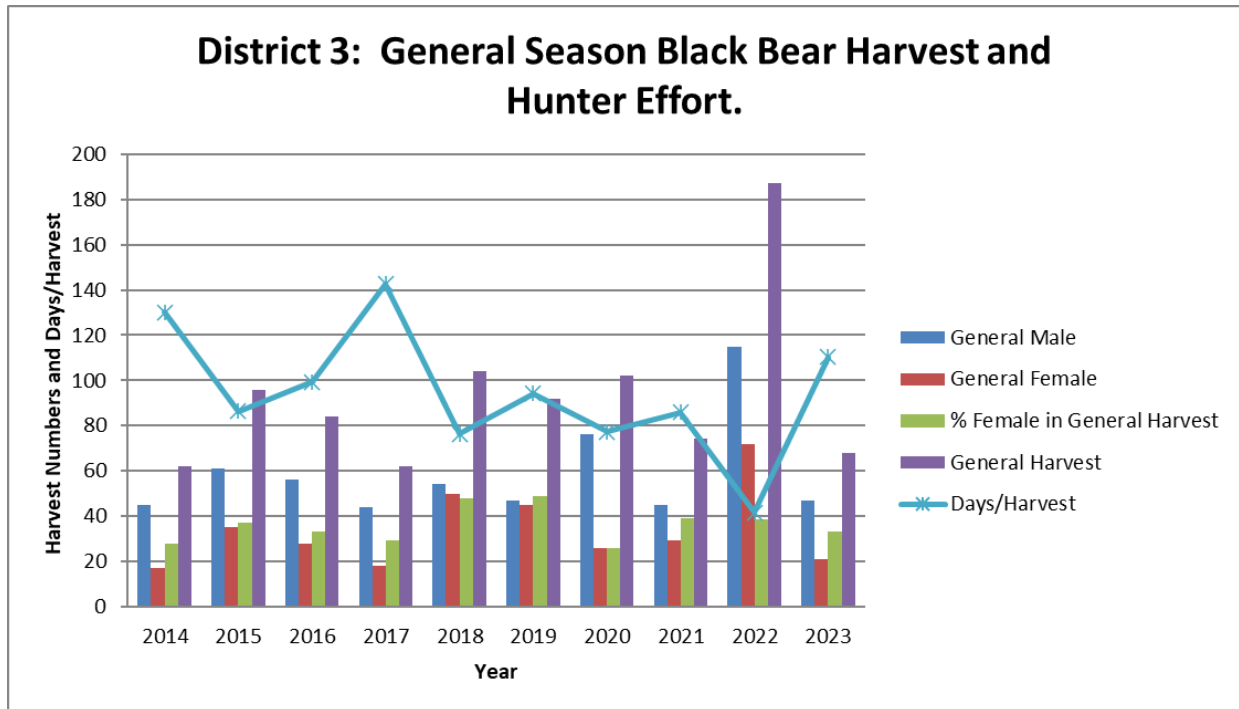
WDFW completed a DNA mark-recapture density estimate in 2021 to establish a baseline for monitoring trends in black bear population size. Results of this effort generated an estimate of 32.4 bears (95% CI 31.1-52.9) greater than 1 year-old per 100km², among the highest densities in the state. Black bear populations have been demonstrated to be robust and stable in District 3. Because the age of harvest is used as a management metric, hunters are reminded that **it is required that a premolar tooth be submitted** (lack of hunter compliance with this regulation is one of multiple reasons the Spring Bear hunt has been “paused”). Tooth envelopes can be obtained by calling a regional office or stopping in at one of the district offices (call ahead as these offices do not have dedicated customer service staff), which may be available to help with tooth extraction as well.

What to expect during the 2024 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. However, hunter success is likely higher for those who specifically target bears versus those who buy a tag just in case they see a bear while deer or elk hunting. Since 2001, hunter success in District 3 has averaged only 6% and has never been higher than 9%, until 2022. Hunters averaged 16% success in 2022 and had the lowest number of days in the field per harvest in over 20 years at 41.6 days, compared to the previous 5-year average of 96 days. The 2023 harvest showed a return to average with a 6% success rate and 110 hunter days/harvested bear.

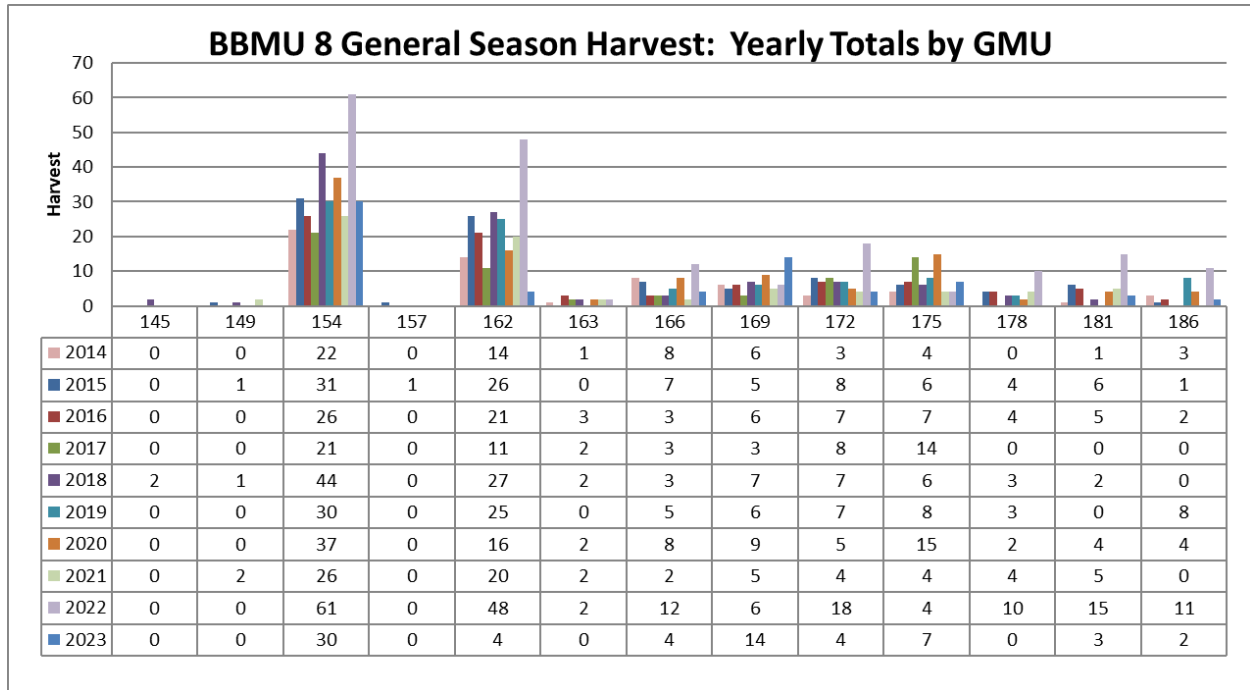
Overall, if there is any trend in bear harvest during the general bear season in District 3, it has been one of long-term stability, until 2022, when the harvest showed a substantial increase to 187 bears. Harvest has generally fluctuated between 75 and 100 bears, excluding a few outliers: 2011 was a 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 7). Not unexpectedly, after last year’s record harvest, harvest declined in 2023 to only 68 bears. This was the lowest harvest since 2017. Assuming we follow the pattern seen over the last 20 years, we would expect the 2024 harvest to rebound closer to the long-term average of nearly 90 bears. If hunter numbers continue their downward trend, we would expect hunter success to increase.

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, 2014–2023.



At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) (Figure 8). Harvest numbers during 2014, 2017, and 2021 seasons compared to long-term (10-year), and short-term (5-year) averages were lower in both GMUs 154 and 162 during those years, but the yearly District harvest does not show any identifiable trends (Figure 7) 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, and again in 2018 after the low 2017 harvest, and last year as well with a record 2022 harvest after the low 2021 harvest. Based on general long-term stability in District 3 bear harvest, hunters should expect harvest and success rates similar to the long-term averages during the 2024 season. We may see some change in the harvest dynamic over time with the new regulation of a two-bear limit and Aug. 1 opener (compared to a past September opener), but in the short term this will likely be offset by the lack of any harvest during a spring season. We did experience the two highest total harvests in 2020 (140 bears) and 2022 (187) since the 2002 harvest (165 bears), with the 2002 and 2020 harvest totals being bolstered by spring bear harvest, while 2022 harvest was only from the fall general season but supported by a limited harvest from second bear tag hunters.

Figure 7: Number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2014-2023 general black bear seasons in District 3.



How to locate and harvest a black bear

Scouting is an 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 generally limit their time in the open to cooler times very early and late in the day, before moving 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 and late in the day in areas with good food sources. In September, bears can spend a considerable amount of time in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountain foothills in search of fruit that has ripened in the riparian areas and around old homesteads.

Many hunters have found success using a predator call to attract a bear into shooting range. Again, scouting an area for fresh sign will help to increase the chance of success. Patience is the key, tempered with covering several strategic spots, and staying alert. Remember, using a predator call is attracting a bear, or cougar for that matter, that is expecting an easy meal. Choose areas where you have good visibility and plenty of distance from thick cover to give time to observe approaching bears.

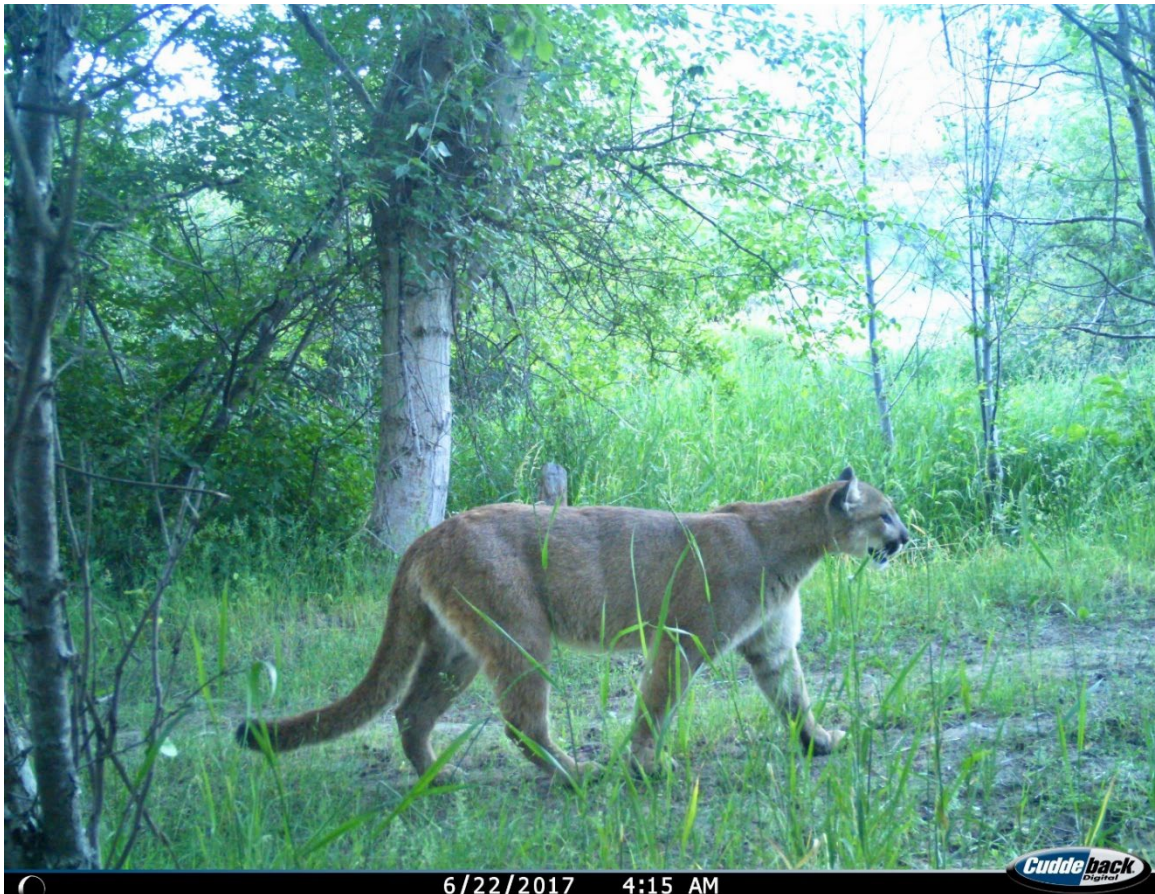
Bears can often be located along riparian corridors that contain many berry-producing shrubs, including blackberries and elderberries, or along north-facing slopes with salmonberries, huckleberries, and blackberries. During the fall, hunters will generally find bears foraging across open slopes bisected 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 a bear is 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

Beginning in 2019, bear hunting season dates in District 3 were standardized to an Aug. 1 opener running until Nov. 15 to conform to new statewide standard opening and closing dates. In addition, the two-bear harvest limit was standardized and applied statewide. Both season opening date and harvest limits are being reviewed by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and changes are likely to occur for the 2025 season, but the Aug. 1 opener and 2-bear limit remain in effect for 2024.

Cougar



Trail camera photo of adult cougar in the Blue Mountains. Photo by Randy Mann.

General information, management goals, and population status

Cougars occur throughout District 3, but densities likely vary among GMUs, with higher densities where shrub and forest cover make up a larger portion of the unit, corresponding to good deer and elk foraging

habitat. Cougar populations in District 3 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining stable adult territories and population by limiting the harvest of adult cougars to approximately 12% to 16% of the cougar population. WDFW continues to refine cougar harvest management, and the 2024 harvest regulations will revert to using a state-wide derived mean density to inform harvest limits. In addition, a harvest cap will include depredation removals and cougars 18-months or older (kittens will still be excluded from all types of mortality). This differs from the previous season where only cougars at least 24-months old were counted towards the guideline, depredation removals were not counted, and a local harvest-based density was used.

Table 5. Harvest guidelines and 2023-2024 harvest for the three cougar PMUs located in District 3. Harvest before the 2020 season was managed under a lower harvest guideline than first applied in 2021-2022; only cougars >24 months old were counted towards the guideline. Total harvest including cougars <24 months is shown in parenthesis. Other mortalities (public safety removal, depredations) were not counted towards the harvest guideline but are generally low in District 3. These guidelines will shift to the lower harvest cap (shown in bold parenthesis) for the 2024-2025 season.

Hunt Area (PMU)	2023-2024 Harvest Guideline (2024-2025 Cap)	2023-2024 Adult Harvest (Total)
145, 166, 175, 178 (PMU 9)	6-7 adult, (4)	3 (3)- No Closure
149, 154, 162, 163 (PMU 10)	7-9 adult, (5)	9 (14)- Closed Mar. 28
169, 172, 181, 186 (PMU 11)	5-6 adult, (3)	6 (8)- Closed Jan. 02
Bag Limit	2 per season, (1)	NO LONGER VALID

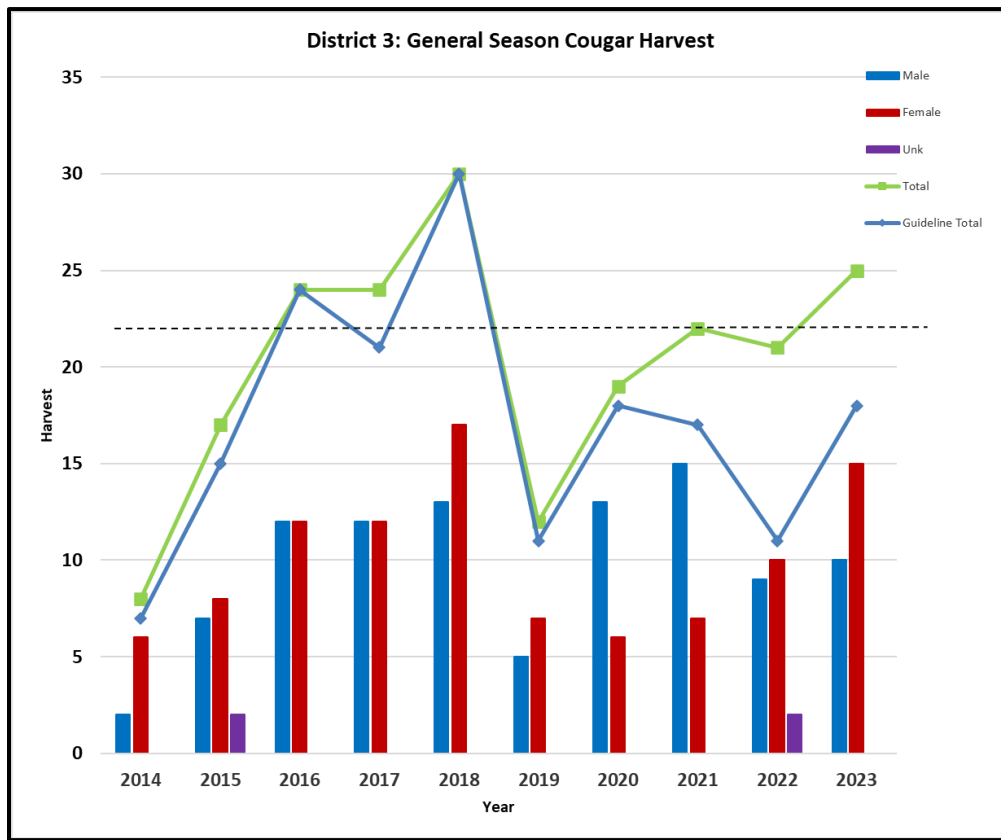
For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit [WDFW's website](#).

What to expect during the 2024 season

Cougar harvest in District 3 has been variable over the years, with the average since 1990 of 17 cougars and a range between a low of 5 and a high of 33; however, long-term comparisons should be made with caution due to the evolution of cougar regulations, beginning with a limited –permit-only hunt, prohibition on use of hounds, and a guideline restricted harvest structure. Despite all the changes, in 14 out of the last 25 years, the range in harvest has been between 12 and 20 cougars. Since 2013, the number of cougars harvested in District 3 has averaged 20 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 common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the number of

cougars available on the landscape for harvest; however, new regulations will impact the number of cougars allowed to be harvested, which will decrease the total harvest.

Figure 8: The reported number of cougars harvested in District 3, 2014–2023, including subadults (which have not been applied to the guideline). The dashed line represents the upper harvest guideline for the three cougar hunt areas combined, which is likely to shift lower for the 2024-2025 season.



Notable hunting alerts

1. Harvest regulations were just recently approved by the Commission and will revert to using a statewide density to calculate a mortality cap, and a season closure as soon as the cap is reached, resulting in a single season structure rather than an early open season prior to Jan. 1 and late season when harvest was still below guidelines. If the cap is not reached, the season has been shortened to March 31st, instead of the April 30th closure.
2. In addition, the mortality cap will be composed of harvest, but also include public safety and depredation removals of cougars, in addition to counting any independent cougar (18 months or older). It will be important for hunters to check as frequently as possible during deer and elk season to ensure cougar season is still open in their hunting area.
3. A second cougar tag will no longer be available in the Blue Mountain GMUs.

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, canvasback, scaup, 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 about 50%). Mid-winter surveys in the South Columbia Basin segment of District 3 typically yield more than 50% of mallards in the dabbling duck count, with goldeneye and canvasback making up 80% 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 daily but begins to decline sharply as ducks continue their southward migration and 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 daily. 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 to obtain or expensive for a private guide.

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, with the caveat that local weather conditions (winter temperatures, ice and open water levels, etc.) impact the hunting success as well. The following are the trends from U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFW)/Canadian Wildlife Service monitoring data over the ten-year period from 2013-2022: the 2014 breeding survey estimated the breeding population in Alaska

at 3.5 million ducks, a 6% 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% 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% decrease from 2014 estimates, and 8% below the long-term average. The mallard breeding population estimate was 471,000, a decrease of 6% from 2014 levels, but still 24% above the long-term average. In 2016, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats area was 4.3 million, a 28% increase over 2015 estimates, and 17% above the long-term trends. The mallard breeding population estimate was 584,000, 24% above the 2015 estimates, and 54% above the long-term trend.

In 2017, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 3.99 million, an 8% decline from the previous year, but 8% higher than the long-term average. The 2017 estimate for mallards was 538,000, an 8% decline from the 2016 estimate but 40% above the long-term average. In 2018, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 3.38 million, 15% below 2017 estimates, and 9% below the long-term average. In 2018, the mallard population estimate was 451,000, a 16% decline over 2017 estimates but still 17% above the long-term average. In 2019, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon area was 2.61 million, a 23% decline over 2018 estimates, and the third year in a row of population declines. 2019 also saw a continued decline in mallard breeding population numbers, with an estimate of 361,000, 20% below 2018 and 7% below the long-term average.

There are no reports for the 2020 and 2021 years due to Covid restrictions, but surveys resumed for 2022. The total duck breeding estimate for 2022 was 3.8 million, a 47% increase over 2019 values and 4% above the long-term average. This reverses a 5-year declining trend. The mallard portion of the breeding duck estimate was particularly robust, with an estimate of 614,000 being 70% above the 2019 estimate and 59% above the long-term average.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Historically, harvest estimates have mirrored breeding duck estimates in the Alaska Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats survey area. We do not have the harvest results for 2023 to confirm the trend, where breeding conditions were only fair due to drought conditions across Canada, and the 2023 season saw hindered brood production with total ducks counts down to 1.9 million. Mallard breeding population estimates were down as well, with an estimate of only 381,000. The 2024 Waterfowl Population Status Report was not available at the time of this writing, but hunters should check the report at [USFWS](https://www.usfws.gov/) for insight into the 2024 population estimates for waterfowl hunting prospects.

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), 2014–2023.

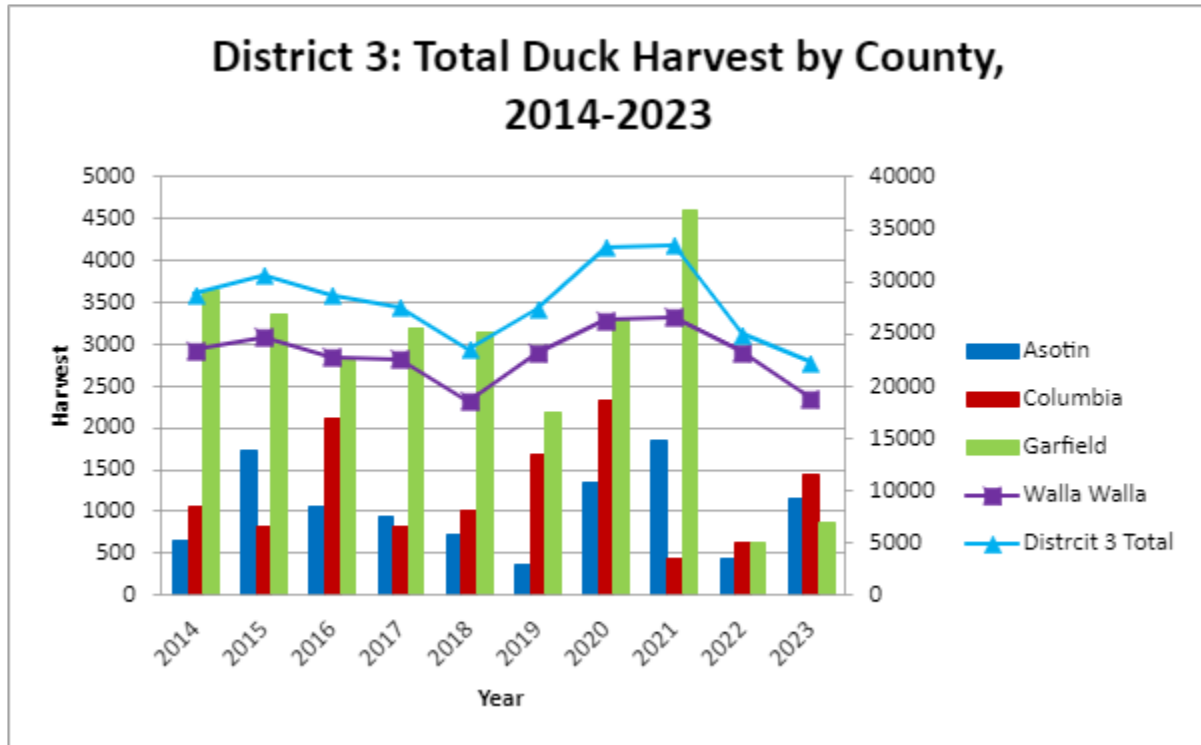
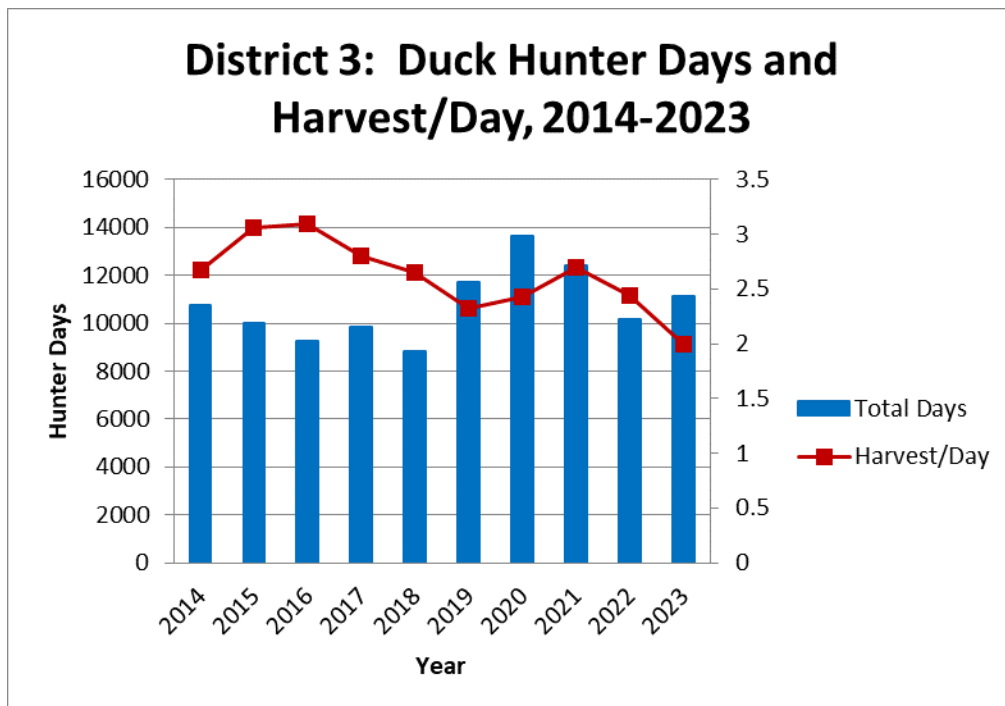


Figure 10: Trends in the total duck hunter days (left axis), and ducks harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2014-2023.



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. Where there is access, some of the smaller rivers and creeks with incised banks can be successfully hunted by walking the banks and jump shooting. See the [WDFW waterfowl page](#) for more information on hunting ducks.

Public land opportunities

There are several 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. WDFW 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.

Geese

Common species

Canada geese are the only goose species available for harvest in District 3 during the early September season, while Canada, snow and Ross (collectively “white geese” and includes “blue” phases), and white-fronted geese may all be taken during the late season. Both Canada geese and white-fronted geese are available during the 1-day Youth Season on Sept. 28 in 2024. Be sure to confirm the Goose Management Area you intend to hunt. Walla Walla County is in Goose Management Area 4, while the rest of the counties in District 3 are in Goose Management Area 5 ([Eastern Washington Goose Management Areas](#)).

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

Breeding Canada geese appear to be increasing in District 3, with many local lakes, ponds, and rivers hosting multiple breeding pairs. WDFW does not currently conduct breeding goose surveys in this part

of the state. Locally breeding geese may help supplement migratory numbers and add localized hunting opportunity to the main goose concentrations in western Walla Walla County. Urban goose populations can be problematic at times but offer limited/no hunting opportunities.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Goose hunting opportunities in District 3 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons, although the 2023 harvest was notably decreased from the average. Much of the decrease can be attributed to unusually low number of hunter days, but harvest/day was still below the long-term average. 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 and volunteer wheat.

Figure 11: Trends in the total number of geese harvested (pale blue line), and totals by county in Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Walla Walla counties, 2014–2023.

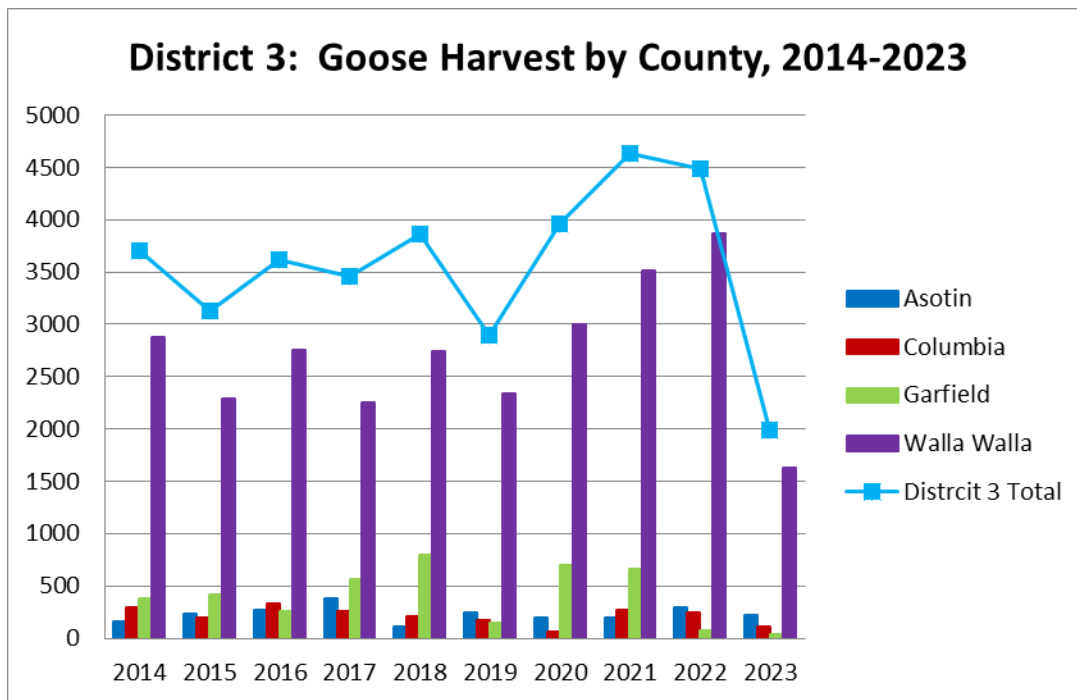
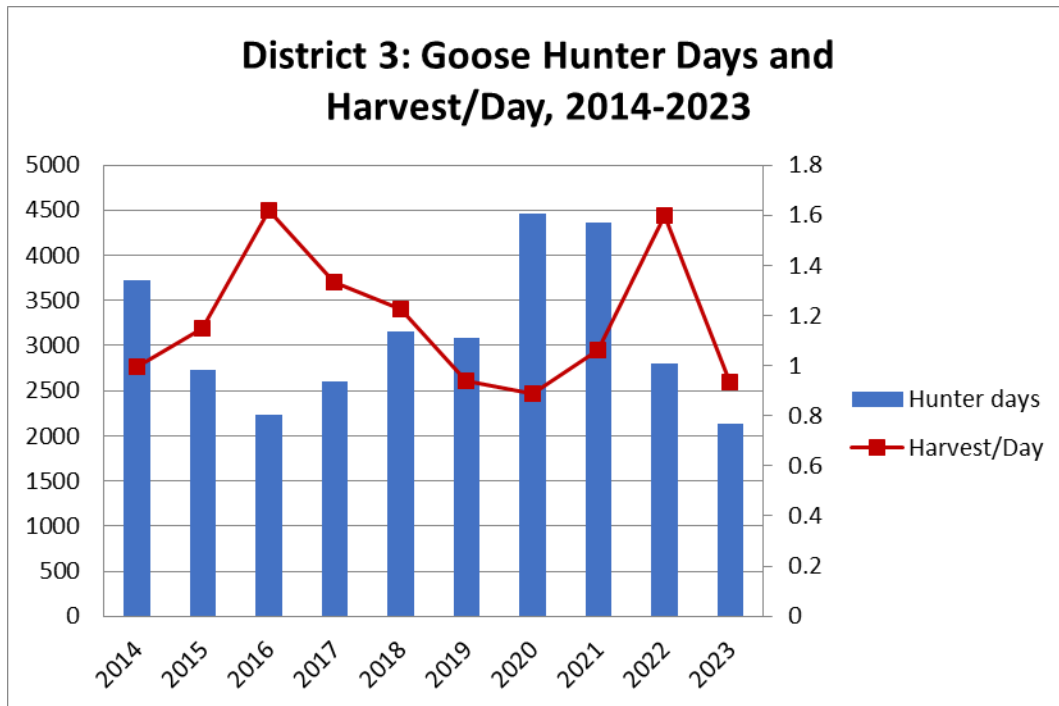


Figure 12: Trends in the total goose hunter days (left axis), and geese harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2013–2022.



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 Seasons pamphlet to ensure they comply, as there are specific daily regulations.

[Pamphlets](#) are also available at any retailer that sells hunting licenses.

Forest grouse

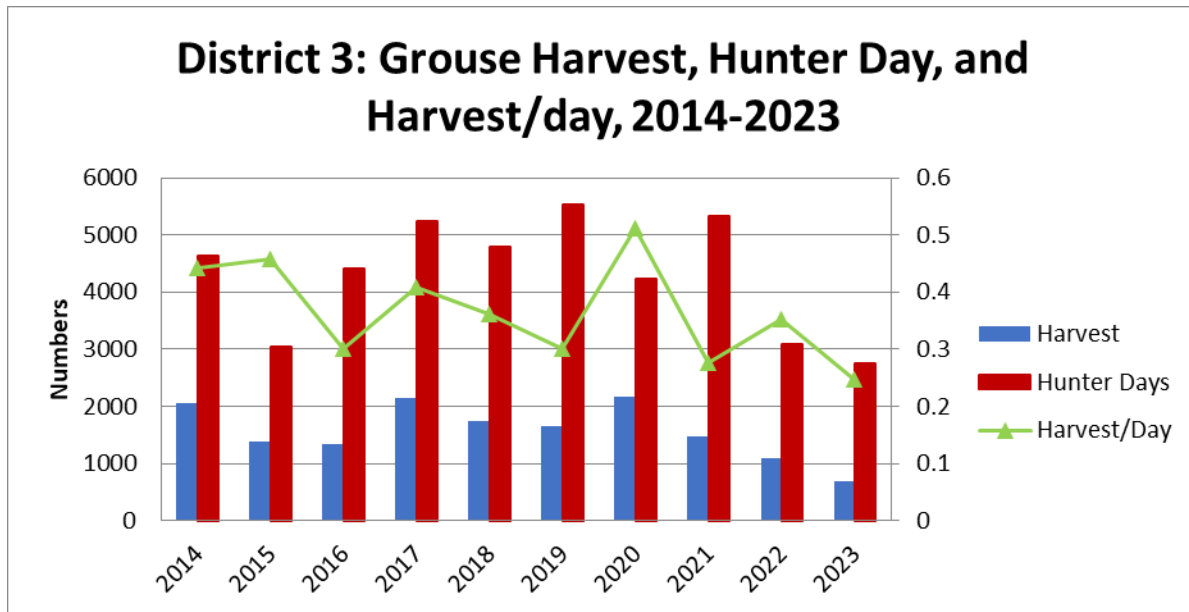
Species and general habitat characteristics

Two species of grouse occur in District 3; ruffed grouse and dusky grouse (formerly 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, currant, 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 (expanded wing and tail collection using “wing barrels” at major public land entry points is underway in an effort to identify age and sex of harvested birds. See information here: [Forest Grouse](#)). Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor the general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), 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 if not increasing until the 2016 season, as HPUE has slowly increased from a low in 2011 until a drop in 2016. While both harvest numbers and hunter days have been decreasing, the increase in HPUE suggests grouse populations have been stable (Figure 11) but were likely impacted by difficult winters in 2016/17 and 2018/19. Harvest is also highly dependent on weather during brood rearing. Harvest is dominated by young-of-the-year birds, so poor hatching or brood rearing conditions greatly influence the harvest.

Figure 13: Number of grouse harvested, number of hunter days (right axis), and grouse harvested per hunter day (left axis), 2014-2023.



Harvest trends and 2024 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 2,143 in 2017 and around 1,700 in both 2018 and 2019. Harvest in 2020 rebounded to 2,200 birds but was still well below the 2009 levels. The 2021 harvest was the lowest in over 20 years at 1,469 birds despite a large increase in hunter days afield. The 2022 and 2023 harvests continued that declining trend, but with very low hunter days, the harvest/day was little changed from 2021. There had been expectations of seeing some recovery in grouse harvest numbers, with mild winters and favorable spring conditions for brood-rearing, but grouse harvest continues to be disappointing. Normally, there would be reason for some optimism going into the 2024 hunting season, with another mild winter and favorable spring conditions, but the hot, dry summer is fueling conditions for forest fires likely to limit hunting opportunities and impact survival of grouse.

New in 2021, forest grouse hunting season was changed to a later opener to avoid some harvest of adult females with broods. Season now opens September 15, 2024, extending through January 15, 2025.

Hunting techniques and where to hunt

In general, the most effective way to hunt grouse in District 3 is by walking closed roads and trails and shooting them as they flush or flushing after they roost in a nearby tree. Dusky 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 many 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 Wildlife Area and the Hartsock Unit of the Wooten Wildlife Area) 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. **Be aware that only non-toxic shot is allowed at any pheasant release site, regardless of public or private land ownership.** Hunters should be mindful of the regulation, and if they are using lead shot at other hunting sites but hunting multiple sites, be careful to leave lead shot in their vehicles and **not in their coat pockets** when visiting a WDFW pheasant release site.

Species and general habitat characteristics

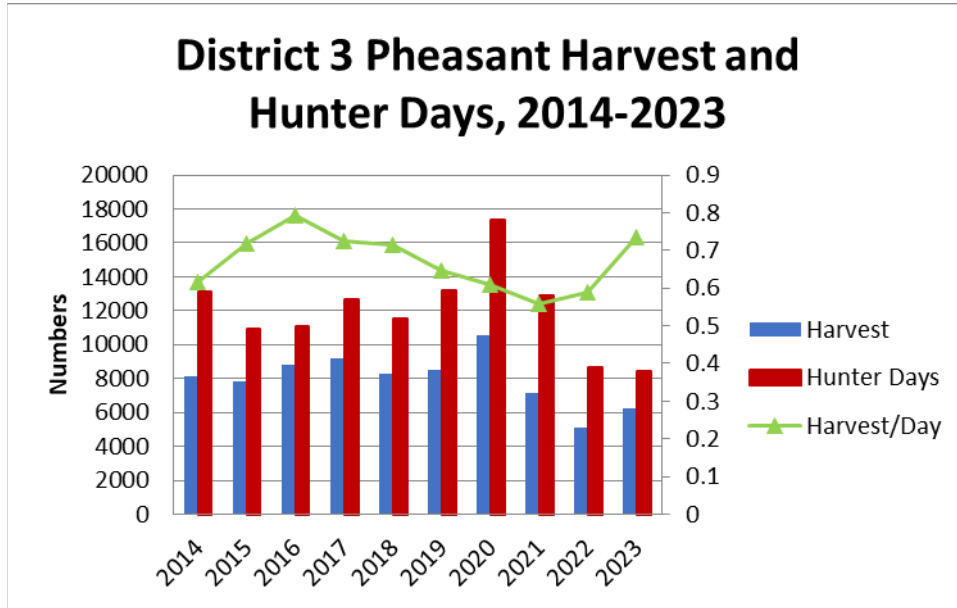
Pheasants are closely associated with agricultural and grassland habitats throughout the northern and western portions of the district. The best pheasant hunting is located in areas of permanent cover, usually associated with riparian or shrubby habitats. There is no question that the district has lost pheasants and pheasant habitat over the past 30 to 40 years, due in part to changes in farming practices, increase in invasive weed species, and potentially due to long-term changes in precipitation across the region. However, the district still offers many good hunting opportunities for both wild and planted birds.

Population status

WDFW does not generate population estimates for pheasants. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor the general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, pheasant HPUE has shown minor increasing and decreasing trends over the past decade. HPUE in 2018 was 0.73 birds harvested per hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 0.69. The 2019 and 2020 seasons both saw decreases in HPUE, with much of that being attributed to increases in hunter days despite some uptick in hunter harvest. Other WDFW information implies that populations have declined during the past few decades but appear to have recently stabilized. For the period from 2006-2018, there is a correlation between the number of pheasants harvested and the number of hunter days, which also suggests a stable population over the same

period. A small but significant portion of this harvest is likely supported by the pheasant release program and private release efforts, so harvest is likely not an adequate indication of wild pheasant populations.

Figure 14: Total pheasant harvest, hunter days, and harvest per day in District 3, 2014-2023.



Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

The total number of pheasants harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season and is also buffered by the pheasant release program. With a mild winter/early spring in 2024, we should have had good adult bird survival, and the relatively warm spring/summer with adequate moisture should promote ideal conditions for nesting birds and brood rearing. Both seed crop and insect resources on which pheasants rely should be abundant and support good brood survival for those birds that do nest successfully. Overall, wild pheasant numbers are likely to be average this coming hunting season and with continued WDFW pheasant releases supporting a put-and-take hunt of pheasants, we expect to see harvest in the range of 0.7 birds/day.

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 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 nontoxic shot. 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

Species and general habitat characteristics

California quail are common in the lower elevation draws and drainages across the foothills of the Blue Mountains, and 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 and Joseph Creek drainages 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 harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, recent quail HPUE has improved significantly from low levels in 2013, likely due to weather during the nesting period. HPUE in 2014 was 1.23 birds harvested per hunter day and remained stable through the 2016 season at 1.38 birds harvested per hunter day but dropped drastically in 2017 to 0.64 birds/hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 1.14 birds/day. An expected improvement in quail harvest did not materialize in 2018, with another low harvest of only 0.62 birds/hunter day. Harvest in 2019 and 2020 did see improvement to ~0.7 birds/day, but still well below the 5-year average. Conditions in 2021 were not as favorable as 2019 or 2020, with drought conditions not conducive to successful brood rearing, but HPUE was stable at 0.7 birds/day. 2022 showed another stable harvest at 0.72 birds/day. This may be the new normal, with the last five years all hitting the 0.7 birds/day mark. 2023 harvest results are not available yet, but with the opposite case of a cool wet spring likely inhibiting nest success, a lower harvest was expected than in 2022. To date, 2024 conditions have been generally favorable for brood production, and some increase in harvest is expected for the coming fall season.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

The total number of quail harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. Harvest has been stable to very slightly increasing over the last five years, and the breeding conditions during spring and early summer of 2024 have been good for nesting success and should also support good survival of any late nesting birds. Biologists predict that 2024 quail harvest numbers will maintain the current streak of hitting the 0.7 birds/day mark, perhaps moving into the historic range of +1 bird/day.

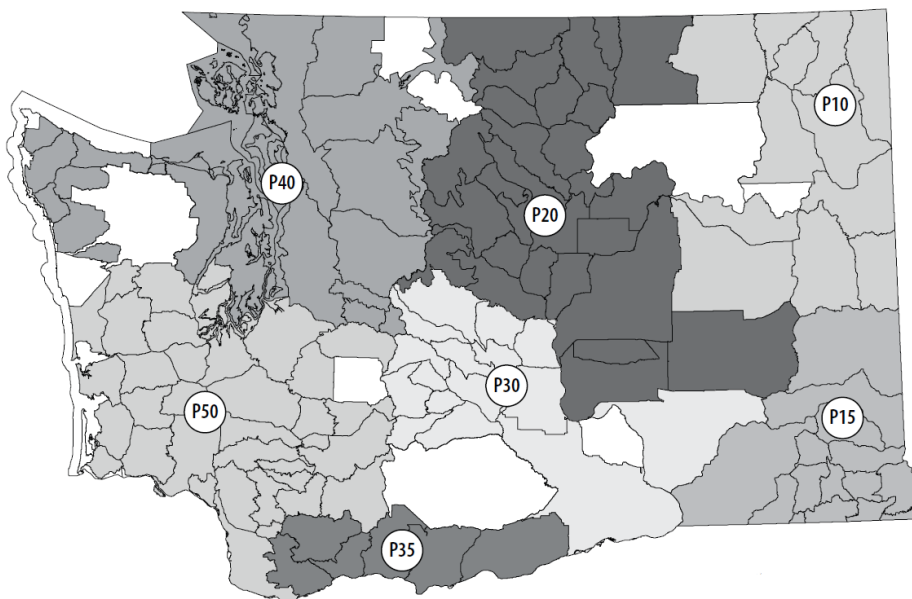
Hunting techniques and where to hunt

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 are 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 15: Map depicting WDFW's seven wild turkey population management units.

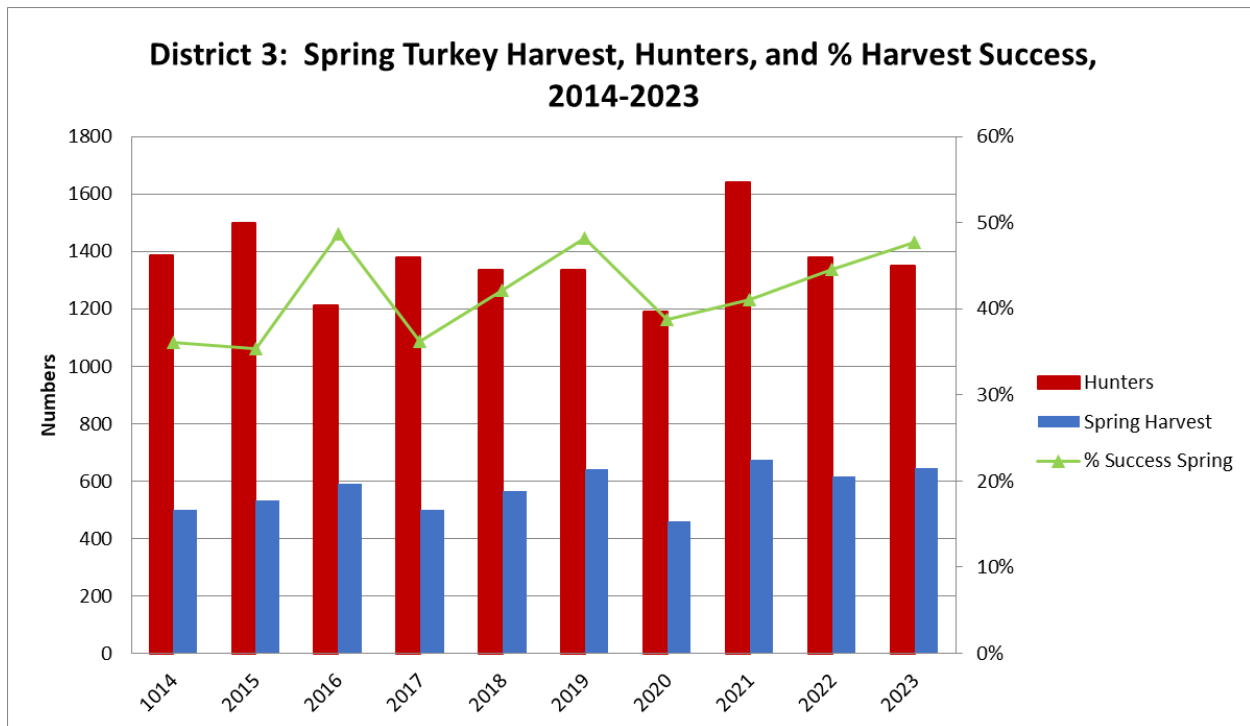


Population status

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 harvest-per-unit-effort (HPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. The 2019 harvest continued the improving trend from 2018, with a HPUE of 0.11 during the spring season, dropping a bit at 0.09 for the fall. However, the last 3 years of HPUE have seen a steady decline during the spring season, which may be an indication that recent increases in harvest limits are affecting the

population. That said, the 2020 fall harvest was the second highest in the last 10 years, both in total harvest and HPUE. The last three years have all seen declines in HPUE, but for the past five years, total harvest has been relatively stable at ~1,000 birds harvested, regardless of hunter numbers and effort. This may be a case where the trend in HPUE is no longer tracking the population.

Figure 16: Spring turkey harvest numbers and numbers of hunters (left axis), and hunter success (right axis), 2014-2023.



Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

The total number of turkeys harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season and overwinter survival. The total harvest of 742 in 2014 was nearly average, followed by harvests of 770 in 2015, 773 in 2016, and 769 in 2017. With more liberal bag limits, 2018 saw a jump in harvest to 1,053 birds combined for spring and fall seasons, with a similar harvest of 1,048 in 2019, both years being well above the five-year average of 821 birds. Although harvest dropped during the 2020 through 2022 seasons, we still saw total harvest in the 940-990 bird range, continuing to be above the 5-year average which has climbed to about 1,000 birds. All the 2021, 2022, and 2023 harvests were bolstered by healthy spring harvests of over 600 birds. The spring season limit remains at two bearded turkeys in Eastern Washington. 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 and the occasional hard winter impacting all age classes. Prospects for this season are very promising; the average winter should support good survival and possibility for higher nesting success, especially for yearling hens most impacted by winter severity, and the warm spring with adequate moisture should not have hampered

poult production. Successfully nesting hens will find good poult rearing conditions with ample seed and insect food resources. All told, biologists are optimistic that we will see support of the new higher average harvest for the coming fall season.

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.

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 in order 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). Don't overlook the hidden gem of the George Creek Unit (GMU 181) of the Asotin Wildlife Area.

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, bobcats, beaver, red fox, 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.

Notable hunting alerts

Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2) is a fatal disease in rabbits affecting both domestic and wild populations. To date, the disease has been detected across the Southwest in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. Although RHDV2 **does not impact human health**, the disease is highly contagious among rabbits and can easily be spread by rabbit hunters who contact infected rabbits. Rabbit hunters should be cautious with all harvested rabbits to avoid the possible

spread of the virus by keeping carcasses contained in an area that can easily be disinfected with a 10% bleach solution. It is also a good practice to disinfect boots and wash all clothing before hunting in a new area or visiting anywhere that has domestic rabbits. Hunters should report any incidence of multiple dead wild rabbits they encounter to federal or [state](#) officials.

Major public lands

District 3 does offer considerable public land and Feel Free to Hunt access opportunities. Public land opportunities within the district are comprised of U.S. Forest Service (Umatilla National Forest), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Bureau of Land Management, and WDFW, while the Rainwater Wildlife Area of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is in the Feel Free to Hunt Access Program.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include GMU 157 (Mill Creek Watershed, closed to all 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 lands, visit WDFW's [hunting regulations web map](#).

General overview of hunting access in each GMU

One of the most common questions from hunters is, "What is hunter access like in particular GMUs?" Generally, this question refers 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.

The 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, 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 in 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/good

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although several 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 before applying.

GMU 157 – Mill Creek Watershed

Access rating – No entry without permit

Although this GMU is 99% 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 only elk permit opportunities within this GMU.

GMU 162 - Dayton

Access rating – Good/poor

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/fair

A majority of this GMU is in private ownership. This GMU has a large percentage of the land developed for wind power. Special rules are in place to ensure the safety of hunters, residents, wind project workers, and equipment. More information is available through the wind project [hunting video](#). Remember, hunting on private lands is a privilege and, as with all hunting activities, rules and prohibitions, is 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, WA 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
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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% public lands, with 95% of it 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/fair

Approximately 50% of this GMU is in public ownership. Access to private lands can be difficult to obtain.

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/fair

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

GMU 181 - Couse

Access rating – Good/poor

This GMU is mostly private land, but WDFW does own a considerable amount of land. See the WDFW wildlife area webpage ([George Creek Unit of the Asotin Creek WLA](#)).

GMU 186 – Grande Ronde

Access rating – Good/poor

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

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. 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 **2020**. There have been a number of land ownership changes and withdrawals from the Access Program, so hunters should be sure to check current conditions before heading out to their usual hunting spots. There are some **Feel Free to Hunt** properties that may **not** appear on under Private Lands Hunting Opportunities due to contracts that haven’t been signed. Be sure to ask your local Private Lands Biologist about other opportunities that may be available.

Table 6. District 3 Private Land Access Acreage, 2020.

GMU	Hunting Only by Written Permission (HOBWP)		Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH)		Resister to Hunt (RTH)		Hunt by Reservation (HBR)		Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP)	
	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres
145	3	5,697	8	5,781	1	1,837	1	480		
149	11	28,407	17	40,065			4	11,563		
154	9	4,615	21	22,636						
162	1	620	4	16,272						
163	7	8,946	9	10,050						
166			1	368						
172										
175	2	2,525								
178	11	13,503	4	3,604	1	2,602	2	940		

GMU	Hunting Only by Written Permission (HOBWP)		Feel Free to Hunt (FFTH)		Resister to Hunt (RTH)		Hunt by Reservation (HBR)		Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP)	
	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres	Coop-erators	Acres
181	6	7,235	2	3,420	1	1,617				
186										
Total	50	71,548	66	102,196	3	6,056	7	12,983	0	0

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 some hunters may 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.

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 following counties can be accessed online.

- [Asotin County GIS](#)
- [Columbia County GIS](#)
- [Garfield County GIS](#)

- [Walla Walla GIS](#)

WDFW's mapping tool

WDFW's mapping tools have been updated as the new [WDFW Hunt Planner map](#) and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU. The web map can be accessed by clicking the above link or going to WDFW's hunting website.

2024 District 5 Hunting Prospects

Grant and Adams counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

September 2024

2024 District 5 Hunting Prospects

Grant and Adams counties

Author

Sean Dougherty, District Wildlife Biologist

Paula Clements, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

Cover photo by Paula Clements.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 5 general overview

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)'s District 5 encompassing Grant and Adams Counties, provides abundant opportunities to hunt waterfowl, upland bird, and mule deer. Ring-necked pheasants and California quail continue to be the most abundant and popular upland game birds in District 5, and Grant County is one of the top-producing counties for both species. Elsewhere in the district, hunters can find mourning doves, bobcats, cougars, chukar, gray partridge, cottontail rabbits, coyotes, and both general season and permit opportunities for mule deer. Hunters can harvest elk in Game Management Units (GMUs) 272, 278 and 284, but elk populations are small and dispersed.

WDFW manages the [Columbia Basin Wildlife Area](#) that boasts approximately 190,000 acres of public land (Figure 5). There are additional public lands in District 5 managed by the [Washington Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\)](#), [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#), Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Habitat in District 5 consists primarily of agricultural fields, shrubsteppe, and wetlands in Grant County and dryland crop fields, rangelands, and shrubsteppe in Adams County. The district's shrubsteppe habitat is dominated by native upland vegetation like big sagebrush, bitterbrush, rabbitbrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg's bluegrass, great basin wildrye, needle-and-thread, and Indian ricegrass. Cheatgrass is the most common non-native species in District 5 habitats.

Riparian areas and wetlands are abundant in Grant County and mostly associated with the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project (CBIP). Coyote willow, golden currant, and Woods' rose are the dominant native shrubs associated with riparian habitats. Non-native riparian species include Russian olive, which is found throughout CBIP. There are many important crops for wildlife within the CBIP, including corn, wheat, hay, and orchards. Within the CBIP, hunters can expect to find abundant waterfowl as well as pheasants, quail, and mourning doves.

Fragmented shrubsteppe, dryland wheat, coulees, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands surround the CBIP. In these areas, hunters can expect to find gray partridge, mule deer, and chukar in the steepest portions of the district (Sun Lakes, Quincy Lakes, and Banks Lake units). Learn more about [WDFW wildlife area units](#).

Public Lands in District 5 GMUs

Figure 1. Public Lands in GMU 272.

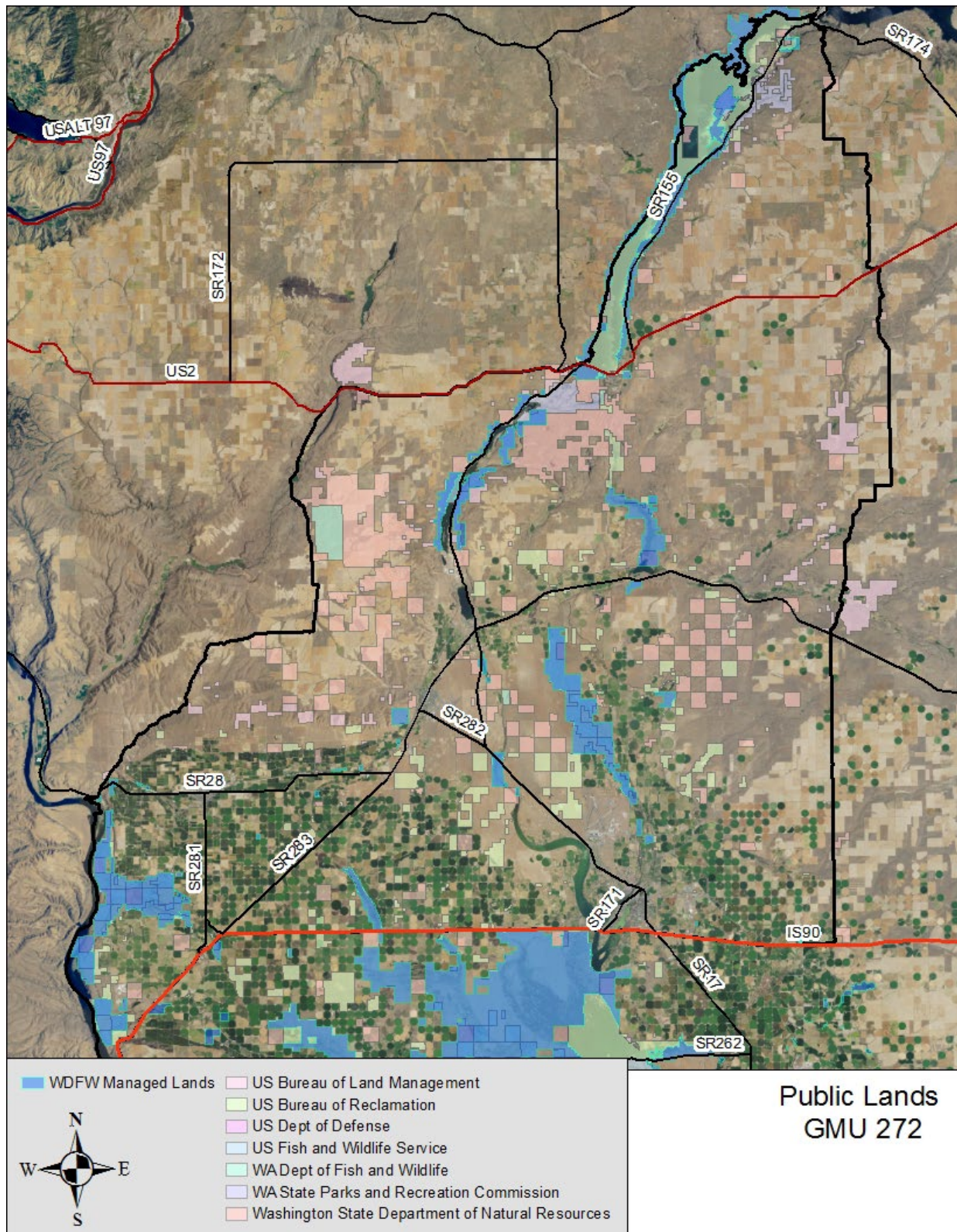


Figure 2. Public Lands in GMU 278.

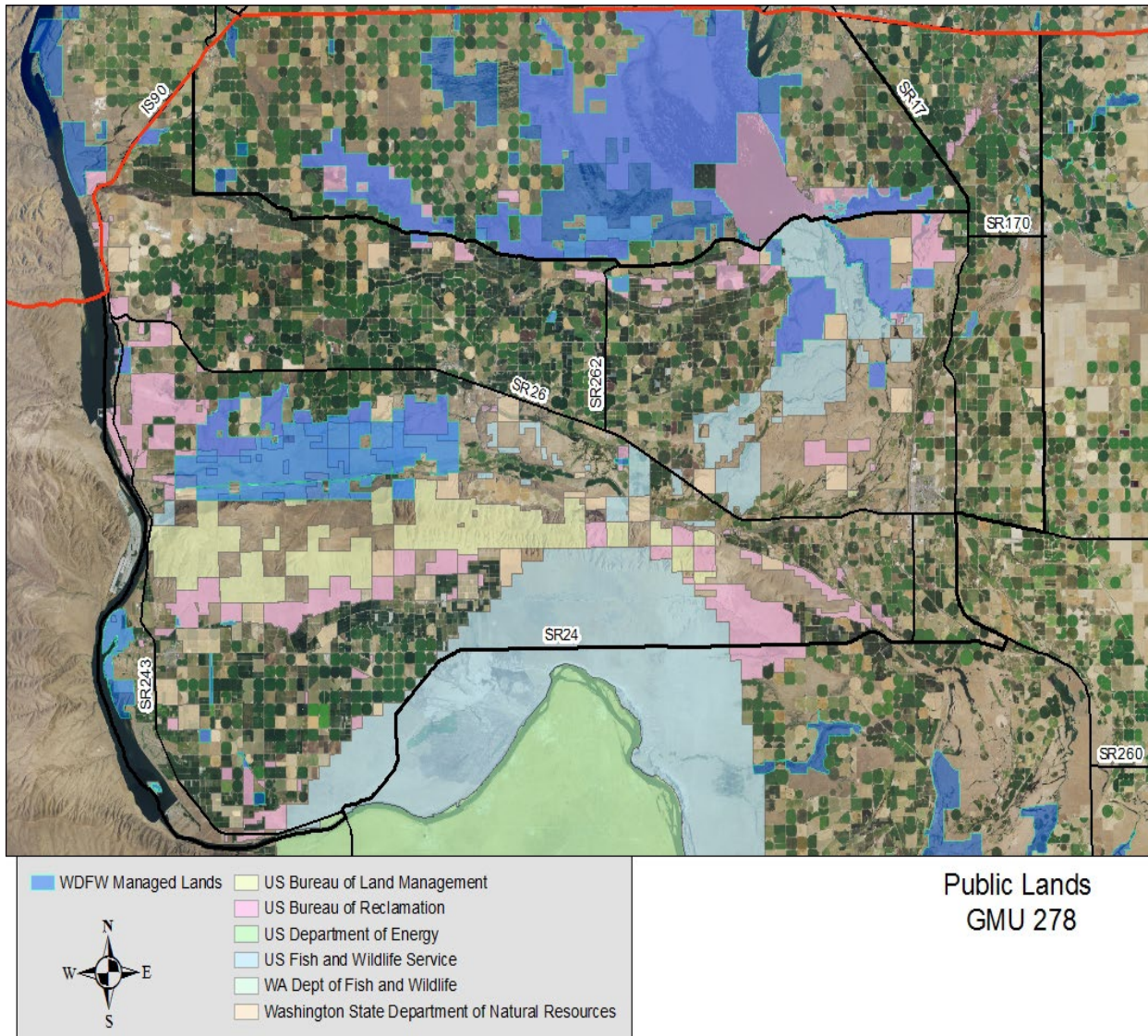


Figure 3. Public Lands in GMU 284.

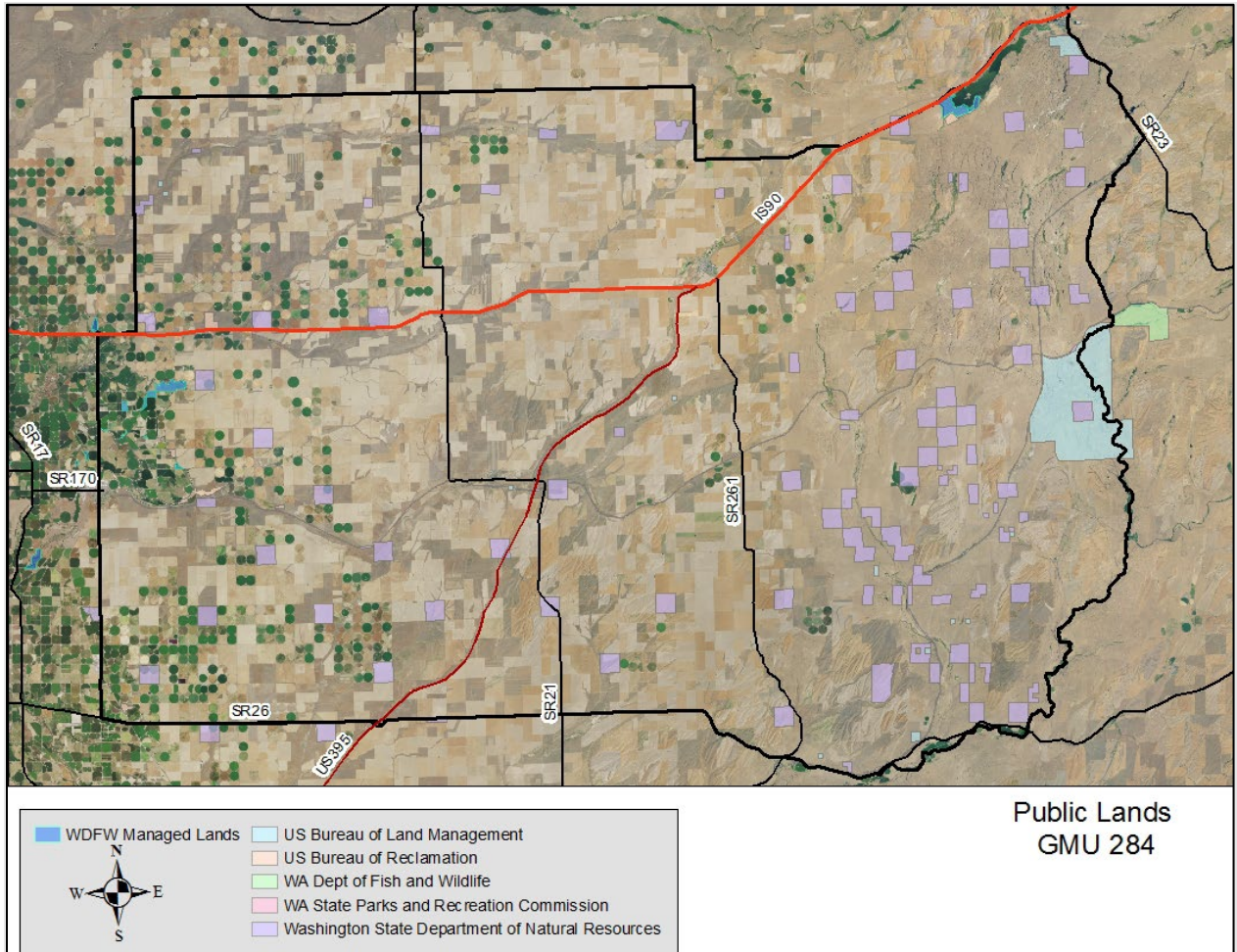


Figure 4. Public Lands in GMU 290.

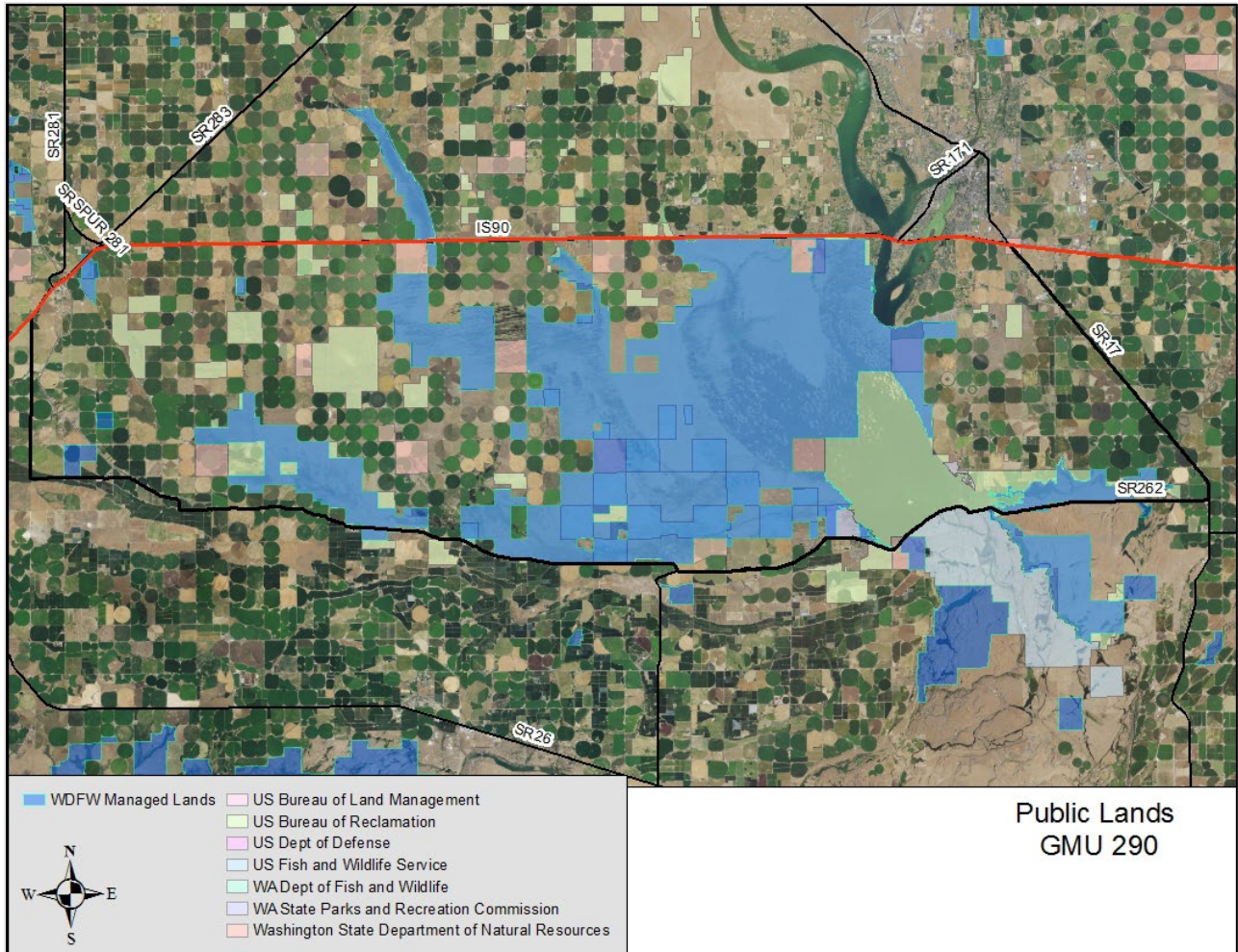


Figure 5. WDFW Columbia Basin Wildlife Area units available for hunting highlighted green.



Table 1. Chance of locating species of interest.

Species	Banks Lake	Sun Lakes	Gloyd Seeps	Quincey Lakes	Winchester Lake	Desert	Potholes Reservoir	Seep Lakes	Goose Lakes	Lower Crab Cr.	Priest Rapids	Billy Clapp	Sprague Lake
Mule deer	G	F	L	VL	N	VG*	VG*	L	L	F	L	N	N
Bear	VL	VL	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Elk	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	VL	N	N	N
Cougar	VL	VL	N	VL	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Coyote	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	F	L	F
Bobcat	L	L	VL	VL	N	N	N	N	N	VL	N	N	N
Rabbit	L	L	F	F	L	VL	VL	L	L	F	L	L	L
Chukar	G	F	N	L	N	N	N	N	N	F	L	F	N
Gray Partridge	F	L	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	N	N	VL	L
Pheasant (Wild)	L	VL	G	L	F	G	G	VL	VL	G	VL	VL	L
Pheasant (Released)	G	N	VG**	N	N	N	N	N	N	G	G	N	N
California Quail	G	G	G	F	F	VG	VG	F	F	VG	L	F	L
Ducks	G	F	F	F	VG	VG	VG	F	F	G	F	N	N
Geese	F	F	L	L	L	F	F	F	F	F	L	N	N
Mourning Dove	F	L	G	F	F	G	G	F	F	F	L	L	L
Bullfrog	L	VL	F	L	F	VG	VG	F	F	F	L	VL	L

VG = Very good; G = Good; F = Fair; L = Limited; VL = Very limited; N = none.

Game reserves

Hunting, trapping, and wildlife disturbance is prohibited within game reserve boundaries. These reserves provide undisturbed areas for waterfowl and improve hunting opportunities in other nearby locations during hunting season. Hunters can find game reserve boundaries in the [WDFW Hunt Planner](#).

Figure 6. Location of game reserves and closed federal refuge units (in red) throughout and adjacent to District 5.

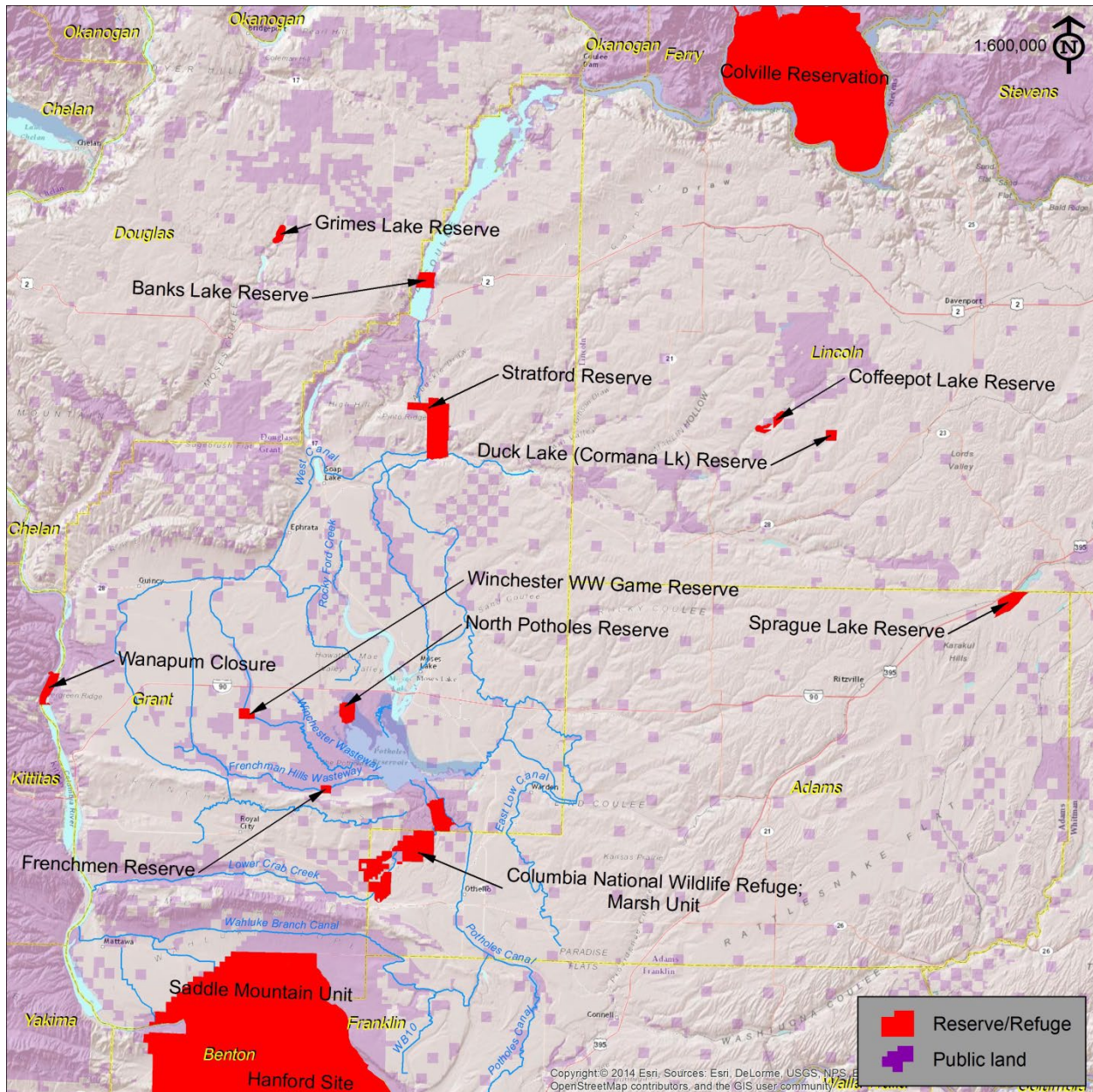


Figure 7. Stratford Game Reserve (Billy Clapp Lake Unit).

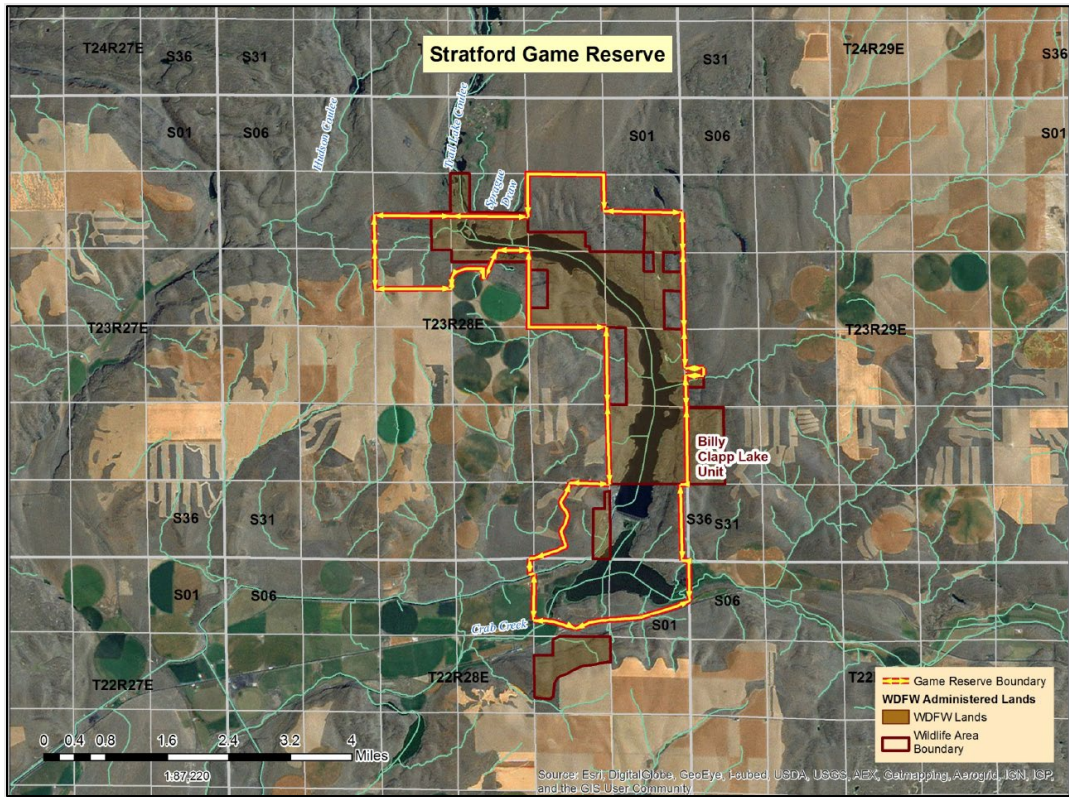


Figure 8. Banks Lake Game Reserve (Banks Lake Unit).

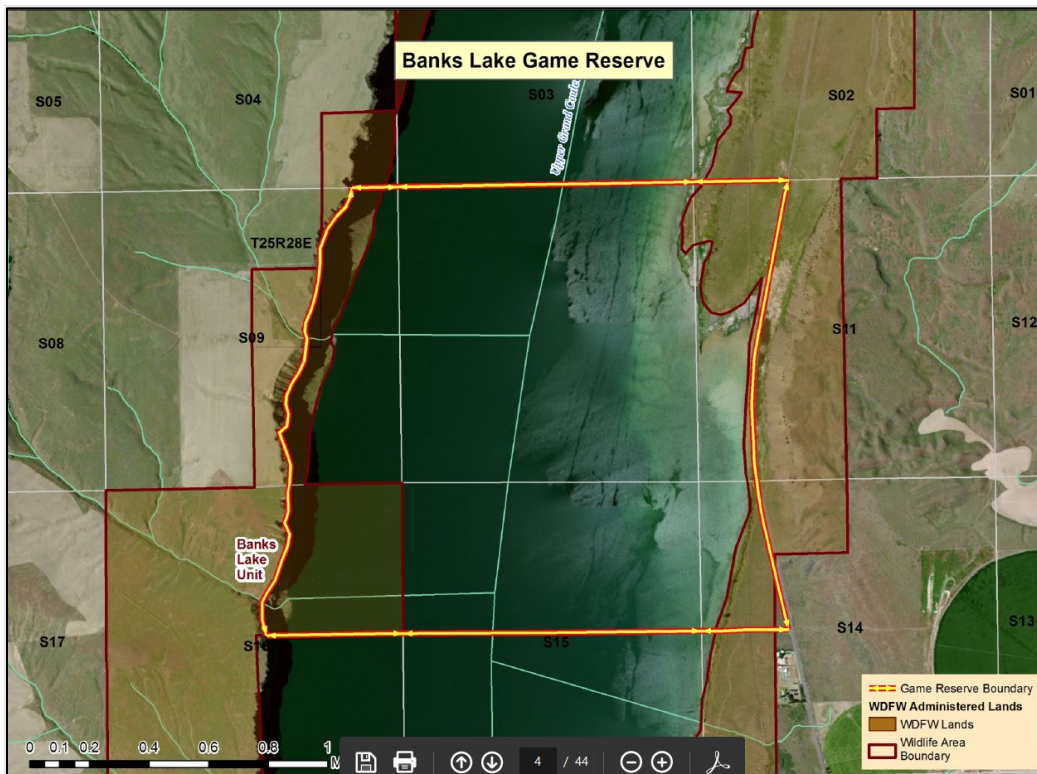


Figure 9. North Potholes Game Reserve (Potholes Reservoir Unit).

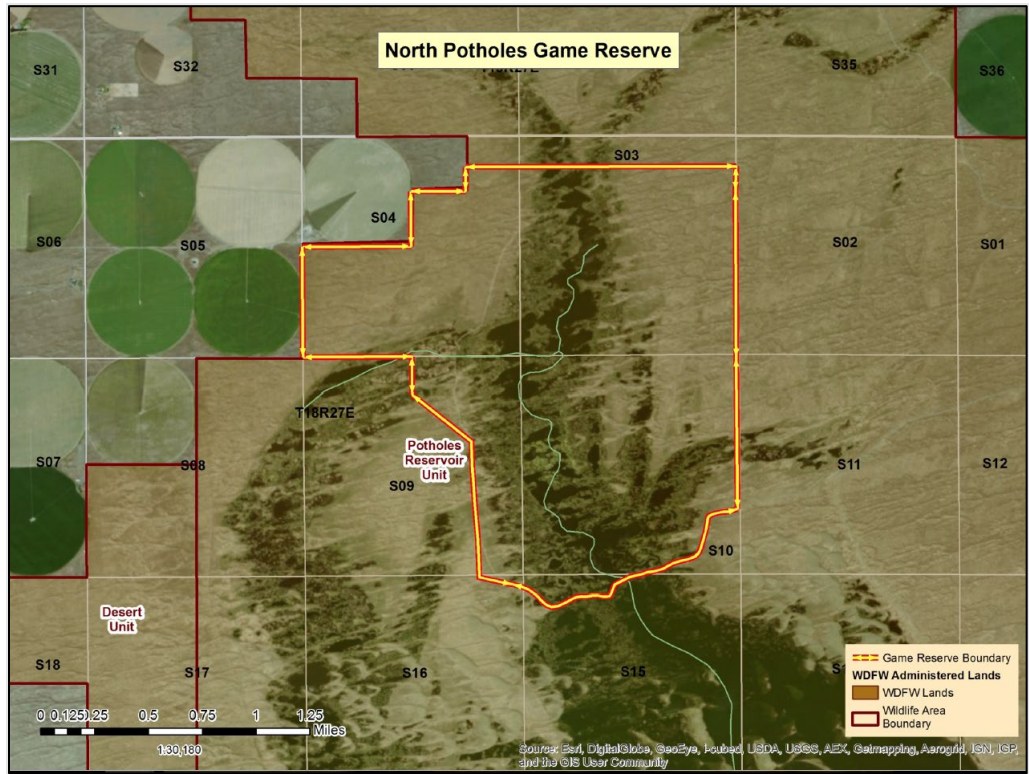


Figure 10. Frenchman Game Reserve (Desert Unit).



Figure 11. Winchester Game Reserve (Desert Unit).

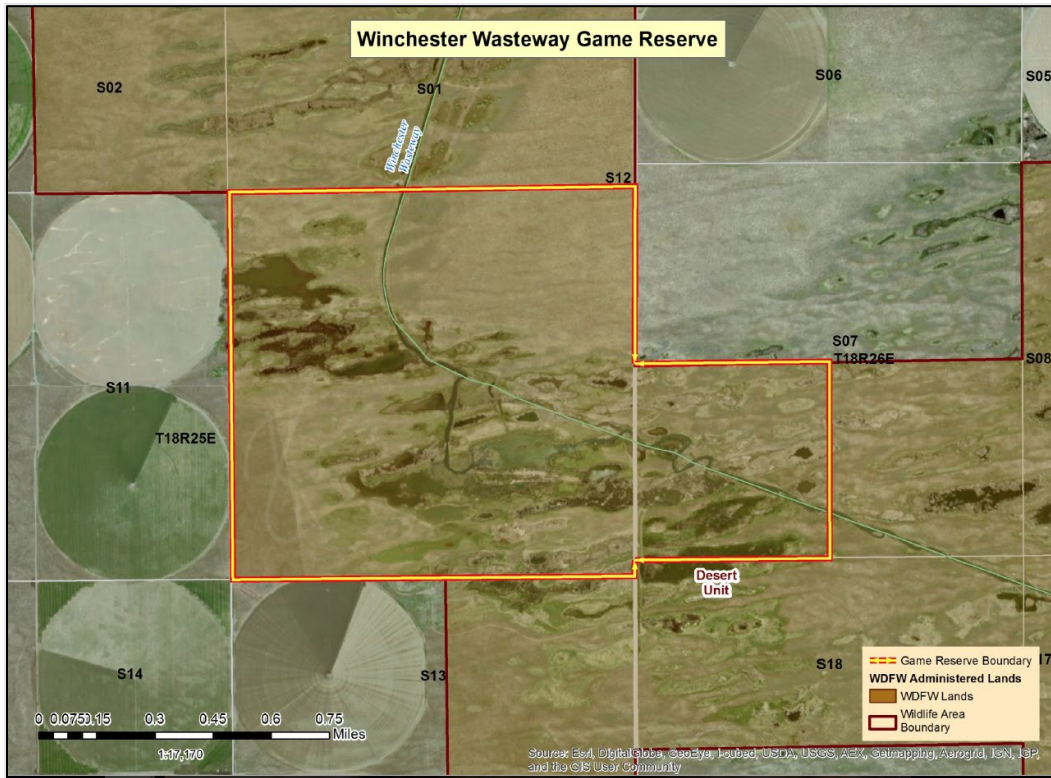
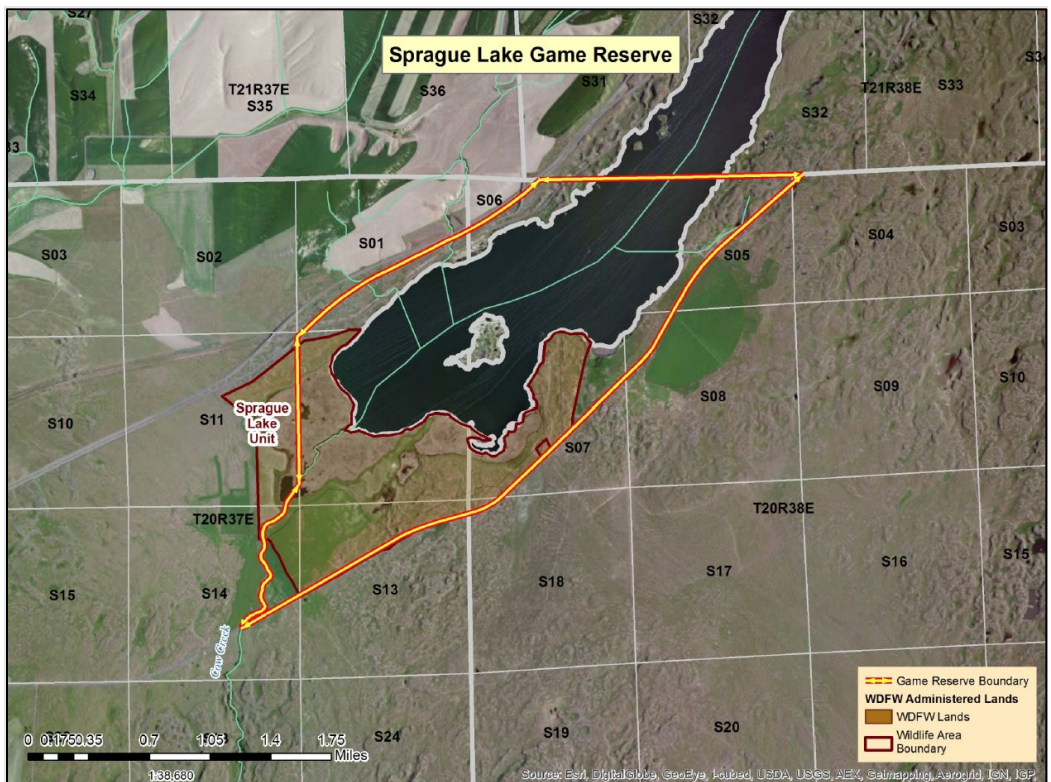


Figure 12. Sprague Game Reserve (Sprague Lake Unit).



Elk

General information, management goals, and population status

Elk are rare in District 5. There are no resident elk herds in game management unit (GMU) 272, 278, or 290. WDFW provides *any elk* hunting opportunities during the general archery, modern firearm, and muzzleloader seasons.

GMU 284 is near the Hangman Creek sub-herd of the Selkirk elk herd. This herd of approximately 300-500 elk is typically found approximately 16 miles northeast at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge (GMU 130). These elk enter GMU 284, where hunters may harvest them.

Hunters harvested 39 elk in District 5 in 2023. There were 23 elk harvested in GMU 284, 6 elk in GMU 278, and 10 in GMU 272.

What to expect during the 2024 season

If hunters wish to hunt elk in District 5 during the 2024 season, they should seek access on private lands in the eastern portions of GMU 284. Public land opportunities for elk hunting are very limited in District 5.

Deer



Bachelor group of mule deer bucks. Photo by Eric Braaten.

General information, management goals, and population status

GMU 272

GMU 272 includes approximately 53,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Gloyd Seeps, Banks Lake, Sun Lakes, Billy Clapp, and Quincy Lakes units), most of which is open to hunting. The number of deer hunters that hunt general seasons (including multi-weapon permits) within GMU 272 ranges from about 1,000 to 1,700. The reported success rate of antlerless permits for disabled hunters was 50% in 2023. The success rates for youth permits was 59% in 2023.

GMU 278

GMU 278 includes approximately 36,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Lower Crab Creek Unit), which is predominantly shrubsteppe habitat with some interspersed wetlands along Crab Creek. Numerous parcels within DNR and federal ownership also exist in this GMU. The number of general season deer hunters within GMU 278, including multi-weapon permits, ranges from about 100-310 and harvest ranges between 20 – 90 deer. WDFW does not perform formal surveys in GMU 278, but harvest data indicates a stable deer population.

GMU 284

GMU 284 is predominately private property, so hunters should plan to get permission to access private lands and/or plan on hunting lands enrolled in the WDFW Access Program. There are some small parcels (<640 acres) of public lands scattered throughout this GMU. The number of deer general season hunters within GMU 284 ranges from 650-1,100.

GMU 290

GMU 290 is a special-permit Quality Deer Hunt Unit, with restrictions that reduce hunter density and encourages older deer. The unit is also open for various upland hunting and contains three Regulated Access Areas for waterfowl. Buck-doe ratios have remained consistent at approximately 50 bucks:100 does, with most bucks classified as greater than 2.5 years old during aerial surveys.

Harvest success for bucks varies greatly by hunt choice. Hunts listed in order from highest to lowest success rates are: late modern, early modern, muzzleloader, late archery, and early archery. This GMU contains very few access roads, and scouting is **strongly recommended** to increase success. 41% of the land in GMU 290 is part of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and managed by WDFW, so public opportunity is widely available. Public land in this unit consists of riparian and wetland areas associated with the Winchester and Frenchman waste ways and is surrounded by sandy dunes with varying densities of shrub cover. Most of the private agricultural land in this unit is in the western half. Hunters with permits will experience much greater success by hiking further away from access roads and scouting the area. Other hunting takes place on this unit during almost all permit hunts, with waterfowl and upland birds being the most popular.

Table 2. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 272 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Archery	35	17	52	281	19%
Modern Firearm	0	186	186	947	20%
Multi-season	6	32	38	161	24%
Muzzleloader	0	13	13	75	17%
TOTALS:	41	248	289	1464	n/a

Table 3. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 278 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Archery	2	16	18	85	21%
Modern Firearm	0	40	40	178	22%
Multi-season	2	21	23	51	45%
Muzzleloader	0	0	0	22	0%
TOTALS:	4	77	81	336	n/a

Table 4. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 284 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Archery	6	14	20	84	24%
Modern Firearm	0	229	229	739	31%
Multi-season	5	35	50	94	43%
Muzzleloader	0	26	26	91	29%
TOTALS:	11	304	325	1008	n/a

Table 5. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 290 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Modern – Early	n/a	14	14	16	88%
Modern – Late	n/a	5	5	5	100%
Archery – Early	n/a	3	3	7	43%
Archery – Late	n/a	1	1	6	17%
Muzzleloader	n/a	1	1	2	50%

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Second Deer	16	n/a	16	19	84%
Youth	7	n/a	7	8	88%
Totals	23	24	47	63	n/a

Data are based only on hunter reports; not all hunters reported effort or harvest.

For additional information, please refer to the [Adams and Grant counties Deer Harvest Statistics](#).

What to expect during the 2024 season

Most deer harvest occurs in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284 (Ritzville). In both GMUs, post-hunt buck:doe ratios from ground surveys in 2022 were within advised management objectives (20:100 bucks:does). Fawns were abundant during the surveys, implying that the deer numbers are stable. Hunters should expect another good year for mule deer hunting throughout the district. Hunters should note that the during the Archery general seasons for both GMUs 272 and 278 antlerless deer opportunities have been removed and have been included in the Antlerless permit category.

Deer areas

There are localized deer concentration areas in District 5 where deer have the potential to cause crop damage during harsh or prolonged winters. WDFW provides limited, permit-only opportunities to harvest antlerless deer near these areas to discourage congregations of mule deer that can cause crop damage. District 5 Deer Areas include Deer Area 2010 (Lakeview) in GMU 272 and Deer Area 2011 (Benge) in GMU 284. Refer to the most recent [Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions.

Figure 13. Lakeview Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow).

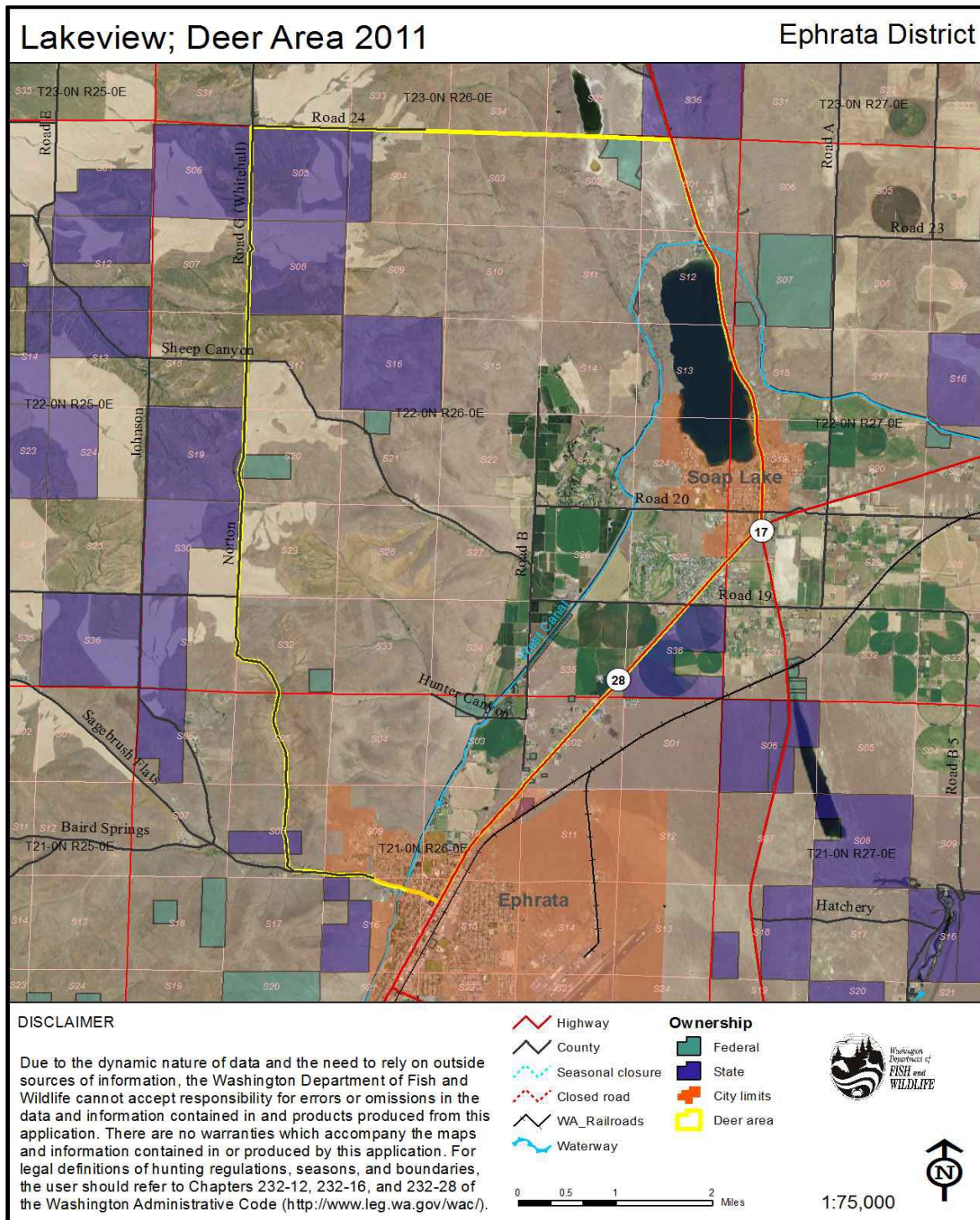
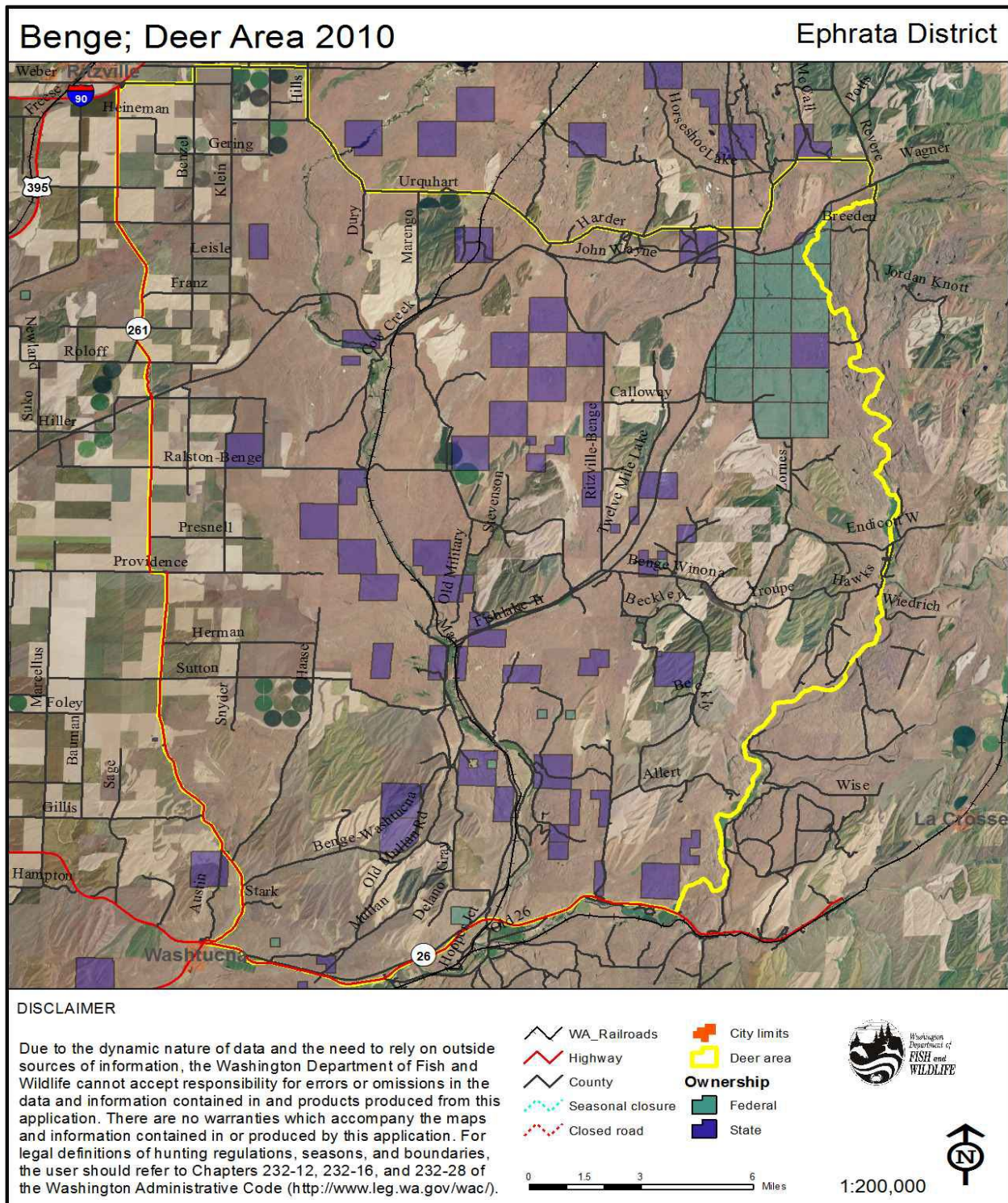


Figure 14. Benge Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow).



Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

District 5 does not have a resident black bear population and it is unlikely that one would become established.

What to expect during the 2024 season

District 5 is not an optimal area to target black bears. Occasionally, bears may disperse through this district, especially near the Beezley Hills and areas surrounding Banks Lake.

Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status

There is a small population of adult cougars in District 5, and the annual harvest is very low (typically fewer than 10 per year). Cougar harvest comes mostly from GMU 272 (Beezley Hills). Populations are expected to remain small but stable in this area.

What to expect during the 2024 season

District 5 is not an optimal area to target cougars. However, the most likely places to encounter cougars are Beezley Hills, Moses Coulee, and along the Crab Creek drainage upstream from the town of Stratford.

Pheasant

Since 2006, the highest number of pheasants in Washington have been harvested annually from Grant County. In 2023, hunters harvested 5,527 birds in Grant County and 1,171 in Adams County for a total harvest of 6,698 pheasants in District 5. Refer to [Adams and Grant counties Pheasant Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information and the most recent harvest information.

The largest concentrations of wild pheasants on WDFW lands in District 5 are found within GMU 290 (Desert Unit) between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George, although private lands can host good populations. Both wild and released birds can be found in the Lower Crab Creek and Gloyd Seeps units, whereas hunters will likely only find released birds in the Dry Falls, Steamboat Rock, Quincy, and Buckshot sites. Hunters can find directions to pheasant release sites in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) pamphlet.

Nontoxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites. Please note that pheasant release dates are not made public to reduce overcrowding at release sites and ensure the safety of WDFW staff members during releases. Hunters can count on pheasants being released before the youth upland season (Sept. 14-15) and before the general season opening day (Oct. 21), with two additional releases taking place before the end of November.

Hunters looking for wild birds should focus their efforts on areas of dense cover. Thickets of Russian olive, cattail, roses are preferred by pheasants, as well as weedy areas associated with irrigation ditches, canals, and ponds. Hunters should be prepared to do some walking when pursuing wild pheasants, as they tend to flush well in advance of hunters and are just about as likely to run as flush. Hunters can increase their odds of both finding and retrieving the birds in dense cover by hunting with a dog. Be aware - porcupines are often seen in many of these areas.

Hunters can anticipate seeing many pheasants in District 5. Most hunters who invest effort and cover ground will find wild birds. Hunters can increase their chances for a productive hunt by selecting nontoxic shot and diversifying the game bag with waterfowl and other upland birds.

Quail

Grant County is typically one of the best producers for quail. In 2023, hunters in Grant County harvested 4,520 birds and hunters in Adams County harvested 1,118 birds. Refer to [Adams and Grant counties Quail Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information.

In Grant County, there are many opportunities to hunt quail on public lands (Figure 6). Hunters focusing on Adams County should seek permission on private lands to improve the chances of finding birds. Private lands access can be granted through the WDFW Private Lands Access Program or by simply knocking on a few doors. Hunters will improve their odds of finding and retrieving birds by hunting with a trained dog.

Large coveys (flocks of quail) are difficult to find on public lands come mid-season. Successful hunters will benefit by identifying multiple coveys to pursue throughout the season. Riparian areas will offer the best hunting, and hunters can increase their chances by securing access to private lands where hunting pressure can be much lower. If pressure is high, some coveys can be found in shrub cover away from heavily hunted areas. Hunters willing to do more hiking will likely find more birds.

Quail hunting is expected to be good again this year with reports from the field painting an optimistic picture. Hunters can increase their chance of a successful hunting trip by using nontoxic shot and targeting multiple species.

Chukar and partridge

During the 2023 season, hunters harvested 48 Hungarian partridges and 82 chukars in Grant County. In Adams County hunters, harvested 12 Hungarian partridges and 113 chukars. The harvest success rates for both species in District 5 fluctuates dramatically from year to year, in part because both species are widely dispersed. Refer to [Adams and Grant counties Chukar Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information.

District 5 is not a popular destination for chukar or gray partridge hunters due to relatively small populations, but hunters can still find birds throughout much of the district. Most chukar hunting in the district occurs in the Coulee Corridor areas around Banks and Lenore lakes and along the Columbia River breaks north of Vantage. Gray partridges occur in low densities throughout the Columbia Basin. Hunters rarely target them, but they are harvested opportunistically by those hunting chukars, quail, or pheasants. Most gray partridges occur in private agricultural fields, particularly in the dryland wheat portions of Adams County and, to a lesser degree, Grant County. Reports from the field paint a very good picture for both chukars and gray partridge.



Chukar brood. Photo by Eric Braaten.

Dove



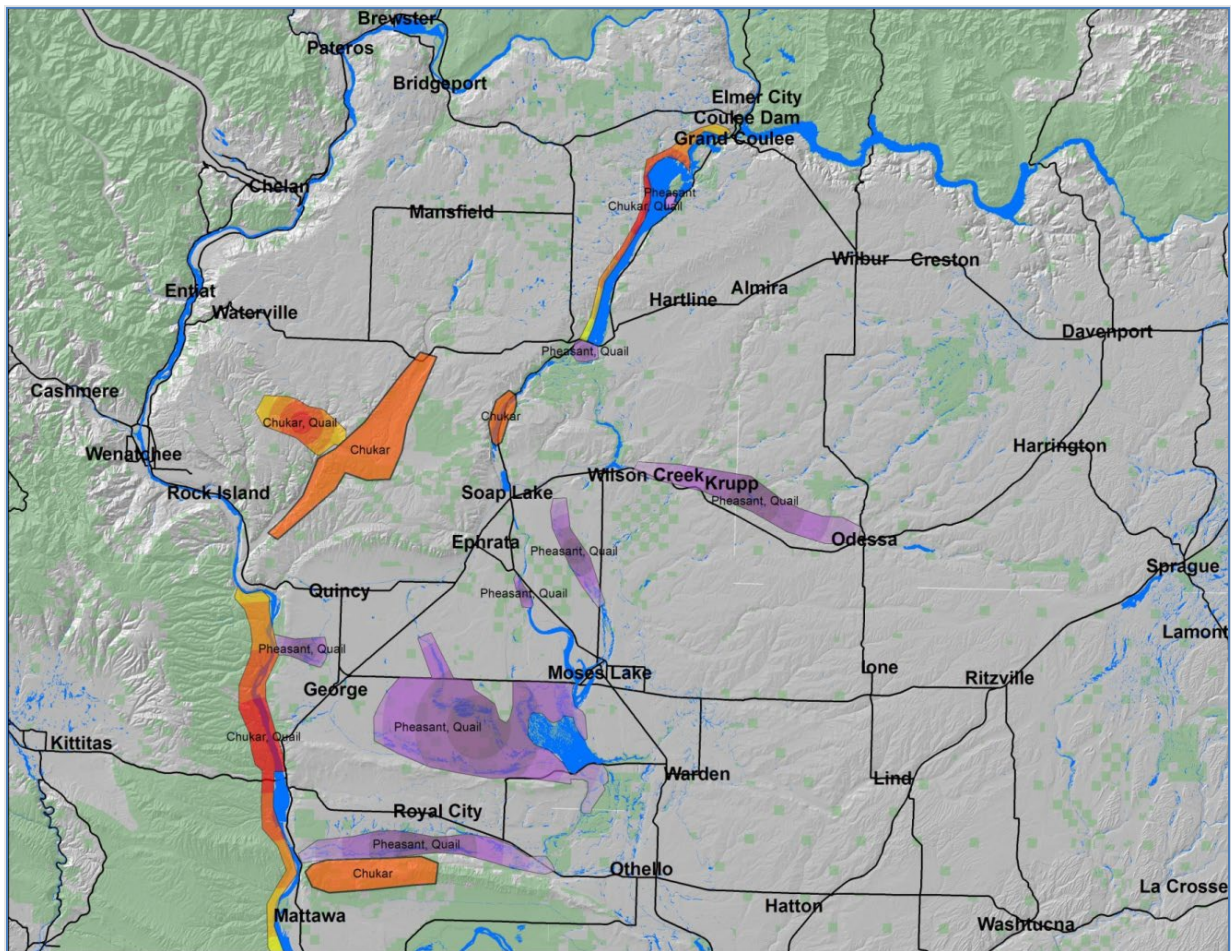
Banded mourning dove. Photo by Paula Clements.

Grant County is consistently one of the Washington's top destinations for mourning dove hunting, with hunters harvesting 8,938 birds in 2023. Hunters harvested 1,078 doves in Adams County in 2023. Dove hunting has been extended through Oct. 30, and dove hunting is expected to be similar to last year. If weather remains stable through the season, the birds found during scouting trips will likely be there during the hunting season, but unstable weather conditions often redistribute birds. Hunters may improve their success by securing access to agricultural fields. Evening hunts can be productive in wheat fields or traditional roosting areas. Look for large stands of trees (ideally with dead limbs) near water and surrounded by agriculture for the best roost hunt results. Hunters can find roost site hunting along the north and west sides of Potholes Reservoir, east side of Winchester Lake, and throughout the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

Hunters should remember that Eurasian collared doves can be found in the same areas as mourning doves and **do not** count towards daily bag limits. Eurasian collared doves are classified as a *Deleterious Species* in Washington and have few regulations governing harvest, so be sure to take a few when the opportunity arises.

Upland bird management

Figure 15. Generalized upland bird concentrations (pheasant, quail, and chukar) throughout the Ephrata District.



Waterfowl

Grant County is typically one of Washington’s top destinations for duck and goose hunting. In 2023, hunters harvested 64,364 ducks in Grant County and 7,707 in Adams County. Hunters can find additional information at [WDFW’s game harvest statistics webpage](#).

In 2023, hunters harvested 16,428 geese in Grant County, and Adams County hunters added 2,857. Hunters can find additional information at [WDFW’s game harvest statistics webpage](#).



A breeding pair of cinnamon teal. Photo by Paula Clements.

Hunting tips

Scouting

Scouting is the key to success when waterfowl hunting. There are many places in District 5 where the public can go waterfowl hunting, but hunters should first identify general flight paths to determine feeding and roosting locations. Duck feeding flights usually occur early in the morning and near dusk - outside legal shooting hours.

Select areas to hunt based on the species you want to target. Dabbling ducks are more common on the Columbia Plateau, where grain corn and wheat fields attract mallards and pintails and shallow wetlands attract teal, American wigeon, and gadwall. Canada geese feed primarily in wheat and alfalfa fields, so requesting permission from private landowners is often necessary to secure field goose hunting.

Diving ducks are typically hunted along the Columbia River, particularly at Wells Pool, Wanapum Pool, and Priest Rapids Pool. They forage over beds of submerged aquatic vegetation such as pondweeds and milfoil. Knowing when and where ducks are feeding will help hunters determine the best locations to intercept the ducks with decoy spreads. Setting up a decoy spread on waters between the feeding and roosting sites will generally yield good hunting opportunities, particularly during periods of wind, snow, or fog. Typically, the larger roosting sites will be the Wanapum Closure (Columbia River), Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, and Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Marsh units.

Hunters should be mindful that water (and muck) depths are highly variable, and it takes a lot of trial and error to learn where you can and cannot set decoys. For some areas, boat access may be the best or only option. Winchester and Frenchman waste ways (the two major drainages entering the west side of Potholes Reservoir) are crossable in some areas with chest waders, but use caution, as there are deep holes and it can be difficult to navigate patches of muck, particularly when packing decoys.

Early and late season goose hunting

Goose bag limits are still separated by species, giving hunters the potential to harvest more birds. The changes will not affect where to go, but goose hunters in mid-October could increase their focus on white-fronted geese around Moses Lake, Winchester Lake, and along the Winchester Wasteway. There is no guarantee that those birds will be around during hunting season, but in typical years, there are 500 - 1,000 white-fronted geese for the first few weeks of the waterfowl season.

During the later parts of the waterfowl season, there have been increasing numbers of snow geese observed around Potholes Reservoir, Moses Lake, and even Othello area. Hunters pursuing those birds should focus efforts on the grain fields surrounding reservoirs south of Interstate 90. In recent years, the number of snow geese that have been observed wintering in the area have been upwards of 20,000.

Where to hunt

Regulated Access Areas

Dogs are often necessary for retrieving throughout most of District 5, but Regulated Access Areas (RAAs) have some shallow ponds that can be effectively hunted with only chest waders. Hunters can find time restrictions and the number of vehicles allowed for the RAA in the hunting pamphlet and Table 3 (below). These sites are *Register to Hunt*, so be sure to register at the box provided in the parking areas. WDFW collects hunter information from these sites to inform management decisions and justify further habitat improvements. Each RAA is discussed in more detail below.

Figure 16. Regulated Access Area locations adjacent to game reserves closed to hunting.

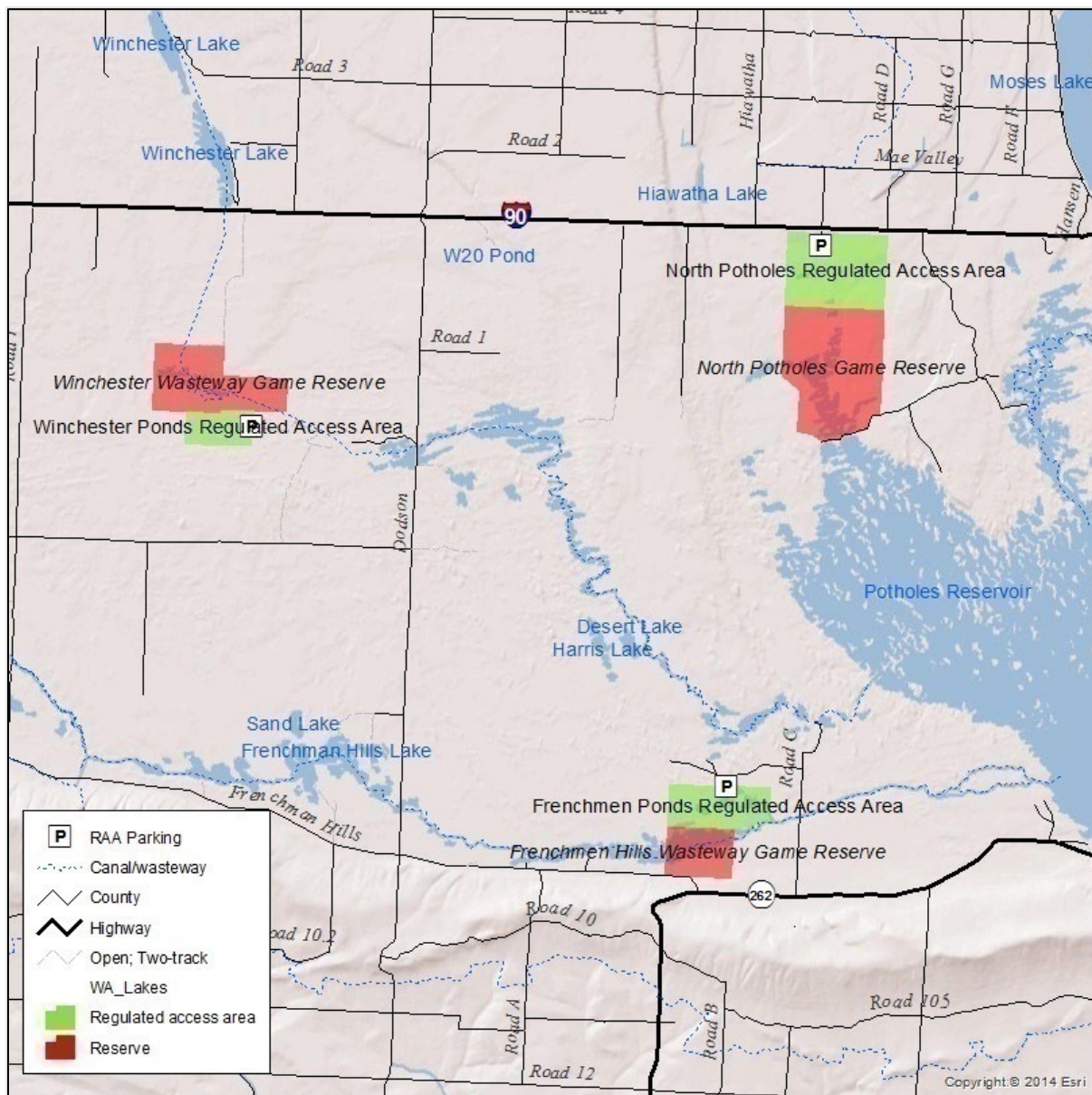
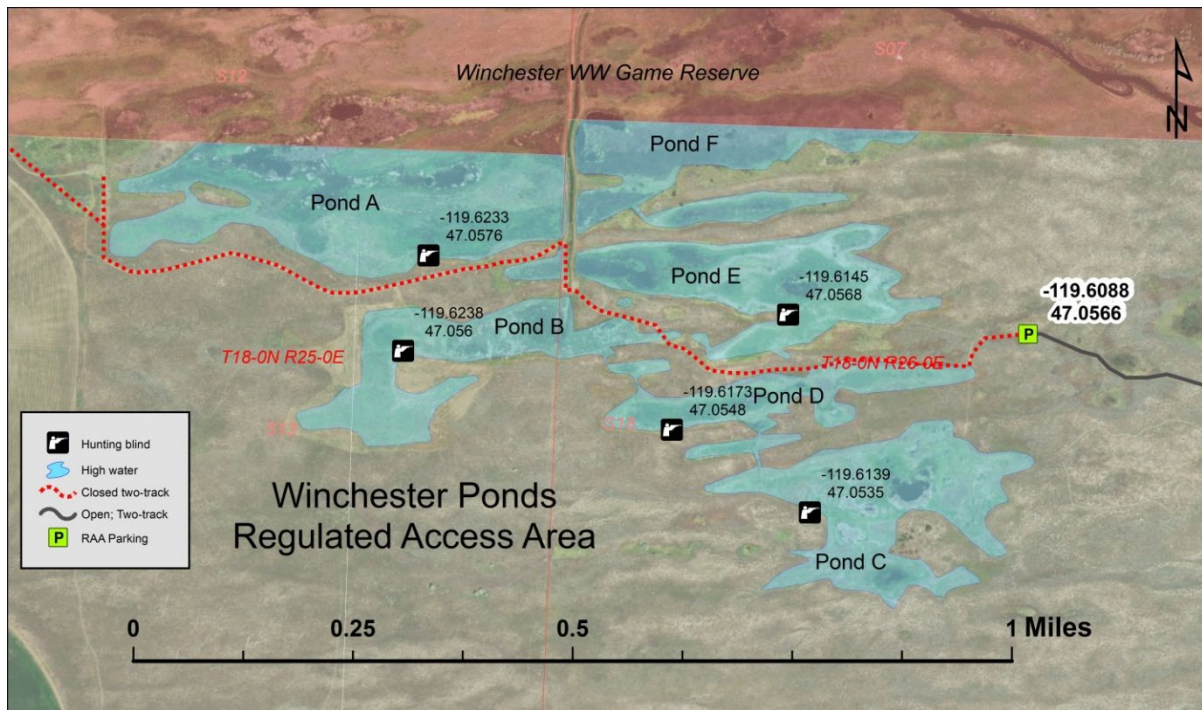


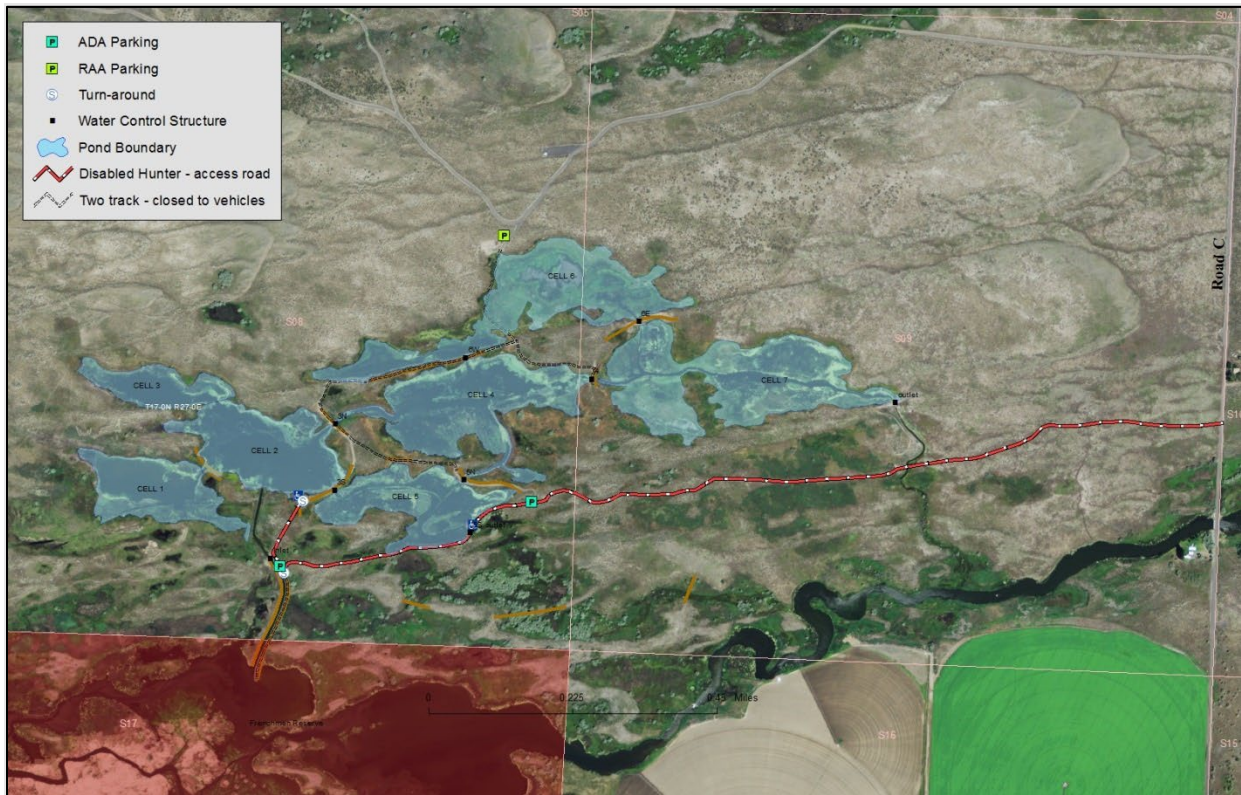
Figure 17. Winchester Ponds Regulated Access Area.



Winchester Ponds RAA

Winchester Ponds is the most popular RAA in the district and consistently has birds. Five blinds are distributed throughout the access area and are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters are not required to hunt from blinds, as the area is open to free-roam. Typically all five parking spots are filled once access opens at 4 a.m. This RAA is only open during Goose Management Area 4 Goose Days.

Figure 18. Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area.

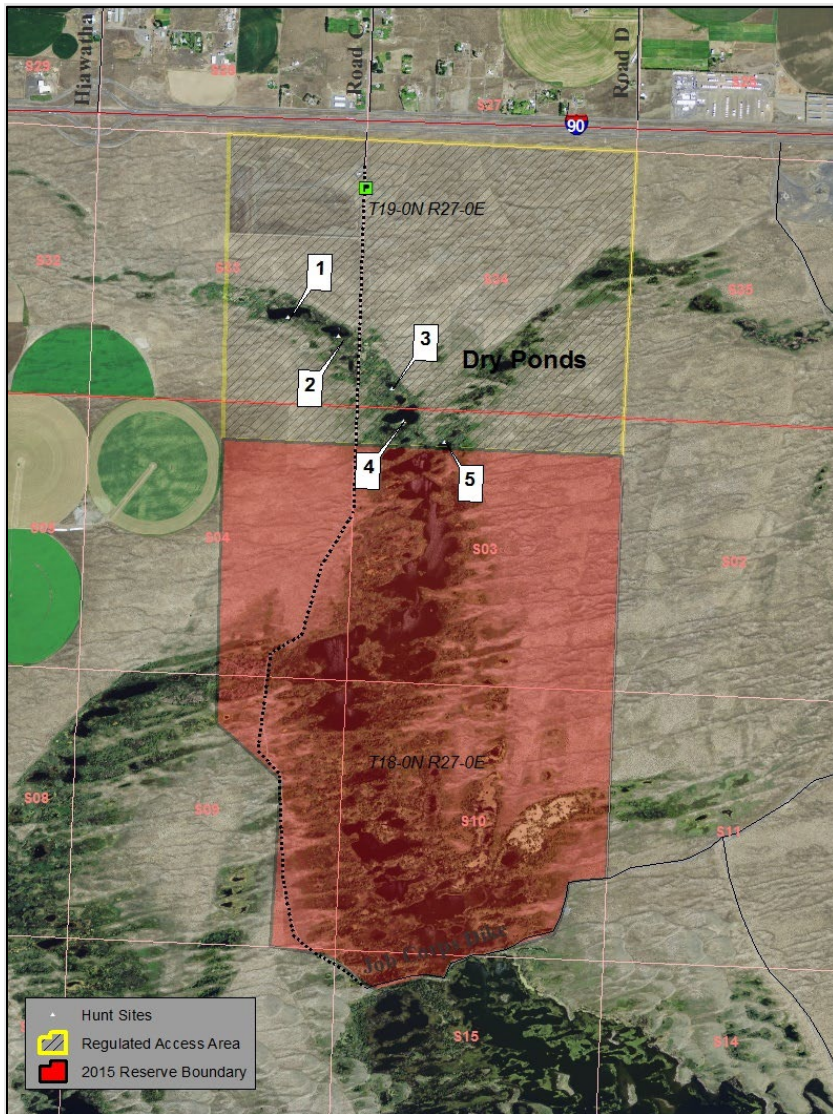


Frenchman Ponds RAA

Frenchman Ponds had extensive restoration work performed in the past few years and will hold good numbers of waterfowl throughout the hunting season. The area is open to free-roam and allows for both upland and waterfowl hunting. Two wheelchair-accessible hunting blinds are open to all hunters but must be forfeited by non-disabled hunters if a disabled hunter requests the site. Disabled hunters will be able to drive to the blinds and park relatively close, but those hunters will need to contact the regional office at 509-754-4624 for details.

This area is open seven days a week throughout all hunting seasons.

Figure 19. North Potholes Regulated Access Area.



North Potholes RAA

North Potholes RAA has unique hunting conditions because the Potholes Reservoir determines water levels within these ponds. Some identified hunt sites, like Ponds 3 and 5, could be dry, particularly from October through November during the hunting season. The lowest water levels probably occur during the first half of November. Because the deepest portions of these ponds do not dry out, early season hunting can be extremely mucky. Parking spots correspond to specific hunt sites. Hunters will be required to hunt within eyesight of identified sites in the field. Hunters must not hunt waterfowl away from their designated hunt site but may pursue other game, such as upland birds, mule deer, coyote, and cottontail rabbits, on a free-roam basis. Hunters pursuing species other than waterfowl are strongly encouraged to stay at least 400 meters (1/4 mile) from designated waterfowl hunt sites.

This area is open seven days a week throughout all hunting seasons.

Table 6. Details about three Regulated Access Areas in District 5.

Regulated Access Area	Parking Spots	Register to Hunt	Hunt days	Other
Winchester	5	On site	Wed., Sat., Sun.; Management Area 4 goose hunting days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.
Frenchman	5, plus 2 ADA	On site	All huntable days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.
North Potholes	5	On site	All huntable days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.

Table 7. Data collected from hunters in the Winchester Ponds RAA in District 5.

Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2013-2014	507	26
2014-2015	1067	34
2015-2016	597	12
2016-2017	249	27
2017-2018	165	5
2018-2019	454	17
2019-2020	890	33
2020-2021	602	5
2021-2022	390	12
2022-2023	599	22
2023-2024	846	6
Average	637	20

Table 8. Data collected from hunters in the Frenchman Ponds RAA in District 5.

Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2013-2014	149	3
2014-2015	281	4
2015-2016	461	9
2016-2017	368	7

Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2017-2018	394	25
2018-2019	336	7
2019-2020	382	9
2020-2021	407	4
2021-2022	387	1
2022-2023	614	11
2023-2024	684	4
Average	446	8

Table 9. Data collected from hunters in the North Potholes RAA in District 5.

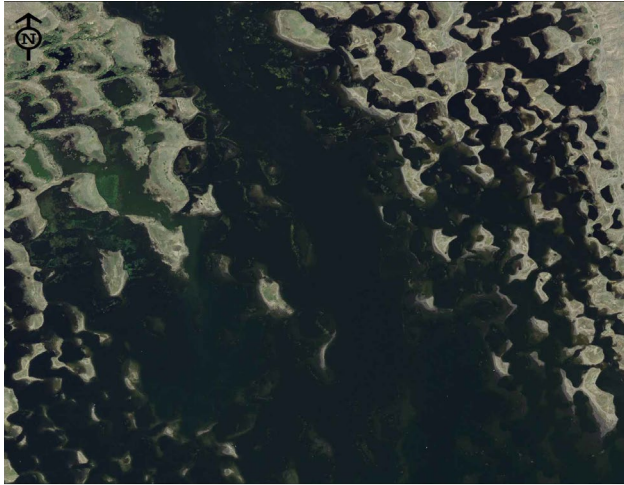
Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2015-2016	110	11
2016-2017	268	35
2017-2018	297	25
2018-2019	108	9
2019-2020	94	14
2020-2021	24	5
2021-2022	94	7
2022-2023	4	8
2023-2024	285	6
Average	143	13

Other public lands

Many hunters consider the previously discussed RAAs to be the best option in District 5 for public waterfowl hunting. While this may be true under the right circumstances, it is not always the case. When migrant waterfowl are in the area, just about any suitable site can be productive. Many places throughout the Columbia Basin provide excellent hunting opportunities.

One of the more popular waterfowl hunting areas is Potholes Reservoir. The abundance of small dune islands provides excellent cover for hunters, making this an attractive area. Most hunters use the northern portion of the reservoir, where they find shallow water and numerous islands. New hunters should be aware that Potholes Reservoir water levels do increase dramatically through the hunting season. Hunters looking for less hunting pressure should choose weekdays.

Figure 20. Aerial imagery showing difference between high water (June) and low water (September) levels on Potholes Reservoir.

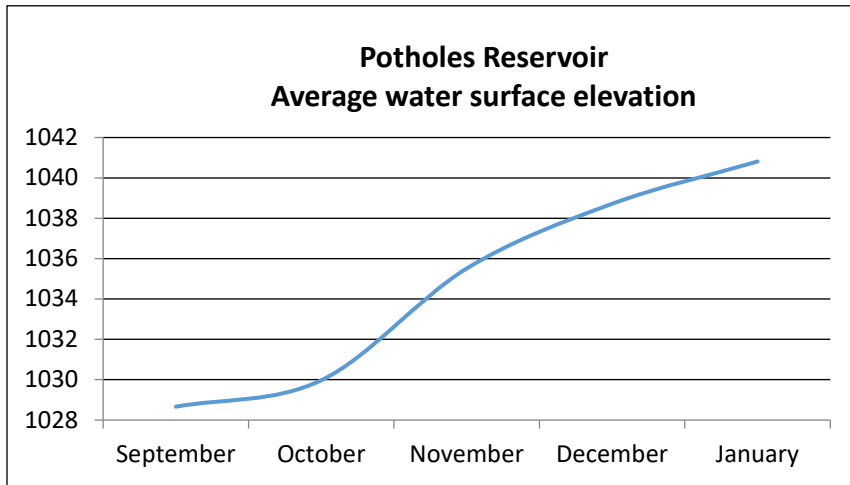


High water (June)



Low water (September)

Figure 21. Potholes Reservoir water surface elevation (in feet) during waterfowl season.



Note that water surface elevation is measured at the O’Sullivan dam and some lag in flooding will occur in the upper portions of the reservoir.

Winchester Lake is another location where hunters can expect to see good numbers of ducks, but hunting pressure can be relatively high there, too. Winchester Lake sits in a prime location, getting traffic from mallards that feed on grain corn in the surrounding area. Ducks typically come from Winchester Game Reserve, Potholes Game Reserve, Moses Lake, and/or the Wanapum Closure to feed in fields, and they occasionally attempt to shorten their commute to the roost by stopping at Winchester Lake.

Realistically, there are very few “secret spots” within the Columbia Basin - just places that are hunted less frequently. Hunters willing to put some time into exploring new areas will likely discover a few gems. Walk-in areas that hold waterfowl include Desert Unit, Lower Crab Creek, and Royal Lakes. Most of these areas are predominantly public land.

Small game

Distribution and population status

The most common small game species targeted in District 5 is bobcats, raccoons, foxes, crows, coyotes, and cottontail rabbits. There are no sizeable populations of forest grouse, but there is a small population of turkeys in the northern portions of GMU 272. WDFW does not conduct formal surveys to assess the population status of small game species.

Bobcats occur in small numbers, and harvest is relatively low.

Raccoons occur in fair numbers in association with wetlands and residential developments when adequate habitat exists.

Fox farms occurred adjacent to the Columbia Plateau during the early 1900s but declines in fur prices during the 1950s resulted in foxes being released into the wild. Descendants of these individuals can still be found in the area; however, these introduced foxes are still considered relatively uncommon.

Crows are typically hunted in areas where damage occurs on private property. Local hunting opportunities for crows are limited.

Coyotes are a common and wide-spread small game species within the district. Hunters interested in pursuing coyotes should be sure to spend time refining their tactics and be patient when making calling sets. There are many resources available to interested hunters, and many landowners are willing to allow access for hunters who ask permission.

Cottontail rabbits are widespread and common throughout District 5 in areas of optimal habitat. In native landscapes, hunters should look for rock outcrops, greasewood patches, or other brushy thickets where suitable escape cover occurs. These rabbits are often found along habitat edges. Therefore, focusing efforts in areas near two or more of their preferred habitats will produce the best results, particularly if green forage is nearby. On private lands, cottontails can be found within and around equipment storage areas or rock piles. To be successful hunting rabbits, hunters should cover lots of ground while “kicking” brush. Stopping periodically will cause nearby rabbits to become nervous, and they will oftentimes flee when you resume walking, providing a brief shooting window. Another popular way to hunt rabbits is using trained beagles. Hunters targeting cottontails must be able to differentiate between cottontails and pygmy rabbits, which are a federally endangered species. Pygmy rabbits look like cottontails but have a brown tail. Pygmy rabbits are found in small pockets of shrubsteppe and CRP habitat. Hunters would likely only encounter pygmy rabbits north and northwest of Ephrata.

Public lands

WDFW-managed land

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (approximately 190,000 acres) provides essential or critical habitat for hundreds of species. These lands exist to allow for sustainable wildlife populations while providing compatible recreational opportunities. For more information on this wildlife area, please visit the WDFW [Wildlife Areas webpage](#). A Discover Pass or Vehicle Access Pass is required to access all WDFW lands.

Department of Natural Resources

The Washington Department of Natural Resources maintains lands that are open to the public for compatible recreational purposes. A Discover Pass is required for access. More information is available on [DNR's website](#).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages land to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Columbia and Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuges, Hanford Reach National Monument, and lands owned by the Department of Energy are managed by the USFWS in District 5. Hunting regulations for these lands can be found on the [USFWS website](#).

National Forest

There are no National Forest System lands in District 5.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management manages land to sustain its health, diversity, and productivity for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Some BLM land is found in District 5 and is open to public hunting and other compatible uses. For more information regarding BLM property, please visit the [BLM website](#).

Bureau of Reclamation

The Bureau of Reclamation manages, develops, and protects water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public. Their land is open to public use for compatible recreational purposes. Much, but not all, of the Reclamation property in District 5 is managed by WDFW. More information about recreational opportunities on Reclamation lands can be found on the [Reclamation website](#).

Private lands

Land ownership

Whether hunting, hiking, or wildlife viewing, it is important to respect private property rights and always ask permission before entering private lands. Fortunately, technology has made it easy to determine land ownership. Simply log on to the [Adams County parcel map](#) or the [Grant County parcel map](#) and use the interactive map program to zoom in on your area of interest. Clicking on the parcels will reveal landowner information. The disadvantage of these resources is the lack of portability and difficulty scanning a large area for the availability of public land. However, these are by far the best available resources for identifying ownership of specific locations. The best resource available for identifying public land is the [Department of Natural Resources public lands quadrangles](#) (1:100k), available for a fee at the DNR website. Other mobile applications are now readily available and can be purchased through various sources.

Private Lands Program

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners statewide to provide public access through negotiated agreements. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection under [RCW 4.24.210](#). Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases monetary compensation. Lands under the agreement are well-known by WDFW Enforcement.

Currently, the Private Lands Access Program includes four basic access agreement types: Feel Free to Hunt, Register to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, and Hunt by Reservation. For more information, visit [WDFW's private lands webpage](#). There are approximately 179,000 acres of private property in District 5 that are accessible to hunters through these agreements. When accessing these lands, hunters should obey all posted rules and respect the property. Most complaints received from hunting access cooperators concern hunters not following rules and being disrespectful. Many hunters are not aware of the tremendous opportunities that are available on these private properties. With a little scouting and planning, hunters could improve their odds of success. To learn more about these opportunities, use [WDFW's private lands search](#) online or the [Mobile Hunting Regulations](#) mapping feature.

Table 10. Approximate acreage of access available by access type.

Private Lands Access Program	Grant County	Adams County
Feel Free to Hunt	10,511	5,085
Hunt by Written Permission	46,618	84,604
Hunt by Reservation (Online)	18,877	2,034
Total Acres	76,006	91,723

ADA access

The Ephrata District maintains sites accessible to people with disabilities at Rocky Ford Creek (Drumheller Pond), Buckshot Ranch, and the Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area. Hunters must have a Disabled Hunter Permit to access hunting areas behind locked gates.

Additional opportunities may be available to those seeking accommodations. Please contact WDFW's Civil Rights Team at 833-885-1012 or email CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

Directions

Rocky Ford Creek: Travel south from Ephrata on SR 282 for 7.2 miles. Turn right onto Neppel Road (Old Moses Lake Highway). Go 0.1 miles and turn right at the public fishing sign. Continue 0.5 miles to the access site. The access duck blind is on a small pond off the creek. A vehicle can be used to drop off a

disabled hunter next to the blind. The ground around the blind is rough and access into the water is best with a small hand launch boat or raft. An accessible vault toilet is in the parking lot located nearby for walk-in anglers. The use of the blind is by reservation only. Hunters can obtain a key from the Ephrata Regional Office by calling 509-754-4624.

Buckshot Ranch: Drive south on SR 243 along the Columbia River from Vantage toward Mattawa. Turn right (west) onto Road 26 SW and go about one mile to the Priest Rapids/Buckshot Wildlife Area. Follow the gravel road into a parking area and turn right between two fence posts. Follow the dirt road north 0.25 miles to a locked gate on the left. **A ground-level roll-in goose pit blind is available with seasonal success dependent on weather. Call the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 to reserve the blind and obtain a key.**

Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area: From Moses Lake, travel south on Highway 17 to Road M SE and turn right (south). Continue on Road M for about six miles and turn right (west) onto Highway 262 (O'Sullivan Dam Road). Continue on Highway 262 across O'Sullivan Dam and past Potholes State Park and turn right (north) onto Road C SE. Proceed north on Road C SE for 1.4 miles and look for the disabled access gate on the left-hand side of the road. For further detail, refer to the map in the Regulated Access Area section of this document. Call the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 to reserve the blind and obtain a combination to the lock.

Additional Information

Youth waterfowl hunting opportunities

There are youth hunts scheduled for Sept. 28, 2024 and Feb. 1, 2025. Both dates will provide tremendous opportunities to get kids out hunting. Additionally, the Feb. 1 hunt day is **after** the general waterfowl season, meaning there will likely be more ducks in the area. Those ducks will be widely distributed and will have become habituated with no hunting pressure.

Bird dog training

District 5 does not currently have any areas designated for bird dog training, although work is underway to develop a dog training area. Any training on WDFW land must be within the established bird dog training season, which runs from August 1 – March 31. Please refer to the [website and regulations booklet](#) for more details.

Target shooting

Per [WAC 220-500-140](#), target shooting is allowed on WDFW-managed lands. Shooters should review regulations and other information available on the [WDFW website](#).

Table 11. information for shooting range facilities.

County	Facility	Contact
Adams	Lind Golf & Gun Club	509-671-3314
Adams	Othello Gun Club	509-488-3768
Adams	Ritzville Gun Club	Gub Club Road, Ritzville
Adams	Washtucna Gun Club	509-646-3263
Grant	Boyd Mordhorst Memorial Range, Ephrata	509-345-2550
Grant	Coulee City Sportsmen	509-632-5137
Grant	Marlin Trap Club	509-982-2445
Grant	Moses Lake Gun Club	509-765-1382
Grant	Quincy Gun Club	509-787-5506

Tools and technology

Numerous resources are available to help hunters find hunting opportunities and improve their experiences. WDFW has created numerous mapping tools that identify public and private lands and their associated regulations. WDFW also provides the public with access to our Status and Trends Reports, Management Plans for species, and harvest statistics. These can all be found on the [WDFW website](#).

Handheld GPS units can help identify your location in remote places, but even smartphones can work in areas with and without cellular reception. Numerous resources are available through retailers to assist with mapping and personal comfort, but scouting, improving shooting proficiency, and learning wildlife habits will provide the best chances of hunting success.

Be a wildlife steward - get involved

WDFW and other agencies are always looking for good volunteers to improve habitat for wildlife. Find time to help with wildlife-related projects and encourage kids to learn about nature and our wildlife heritage through our [WDFW Volunteer Program](#).

Hunter tutorials and resources

If pages won't open on your browser, try a different browser (e.g., Google Chrome rather than Internet Explorer)

Share the Land and Clean Up After Yourself: Healthy, connected habitat is necessary to ensure the persistence of wildlife species with healthy and sustainable populations. Respect and share the land -

clean up after yourself and reduce your impact on the environment. Pick up your shotgun shells, carry out your garbage, and tread lightly.

Hunting ethics and fair chase:

- [Pope & Youth](#)
- [Boone & Crockett](#)
- [WDFW Ethics and Safety](#)

How to hunt

Hunter Education: Many links to resources about specific topics.

- [WDFW Hunting Requirements](#)

Hunting Clinics and Publications: Thorough explanations about the basics of hunting, from wildlife behavior to hunting tips and tactics.

- [WDFW Hunting Clinics](#)

How to Prepare for the Season:

- [WDFW Preparing to Hunt](#)

First Hunt Foundation (mentored hunt):

- [Mentored Hunt](#)

Many Additional Resources: WDFW's website has many documents and plans that give details on the history of wildlife, management harvest statistics, and other items of interest. They can be found here:

- [WDFW Hunting Resources](#)

Where to hunt

WDFW maintains a web map tool that allows you to zoom into different areas and indicate the hunt-type of interest. You can view different land ownerships and regulations on different parcels:

- [WDFW Hunt Planner Map](#)

WDFW Public Lands: Be aware there are some closed areas and Game Reserves where hunting and trapping are prohibited. Read the Regulations Pamphlet and read and obey signs.

- [WDFW Hunting Locations](#)
- [About WDFW Lands](#)
- [WDFW Pheasant Enhancement Program](#)

Other Government Lands: Washington Department of Natural Resources and federal public lands are generally available for hunting. Read the agency's regulations, read and obey signs, and do not cross fences without permission.

- [DNR](#)
- [Bureau of Reclamation](#)
- [USFWS Refuges](#)

Private Lands: Many private landowners allow hunting on their property, although permission requirements vary. Each landowner's parcel indicates the permission type required, species that can be found there, and specifics about the parcel.

- [WDFW Private Lands](#)

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2024 District 6 Hunting Prospects

Okanogan County



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

July 16, 2024

2024 District 6 Hunting Prospects

Okanogan County

Author

Scott Fitkin, District Wildlife Biologist



Cover photo: Crater Lake. Photo by WDFW.

Title page photo: Mule deer. Photo by WDFW.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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Fire and road conditions update

As of August 19, 2024, no major fires are burning in District 6; however, the Pioneer Fire on the east side of Lake Chelan and the Easy Fire in far eastern Skagit County Have burned to the western borders of GMU 242 and GMU 218 respectively. Access closures are currently in place for both fires including a periodic closure of State Hwy 20 north of Rainy Pass. Continued activity on both fires is expected and additional expansion is possible. Access closures in some form are likely to continue into the fall. Always check with fire information sites for an update on current conditions. Good sites for current status information include [InciWeb](#), [NASA | LANCE | FIRMS US/Canada](#), and [Watch Duty](#). Perimeter maps of past fires can be found at [CalTopo](#) and [Washington Large Fires 1973-2023 | WADNR](#).

For updated information on access and road closure status visit:

- [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest - Home \(usda.gov\)](#)
- [Colville National Forest - Home \(usda.gov\)](#)



Mule deer in a burned area. Photo by WDFW.

District 6 general overview

District 6 is located along the Canadian border in north central Washington and encompasses 10 game management units (GMUs): 203 (Pasayten), 204 (Okanogan East), 209 (Wannacut), 215 (Sinlahekin), 218 (Chewuch), 224 (Perrygin), 231 (Gardner), 233 (Pogue), 239 (Chiliwist), and 242 (Alta).

The western two-thirds of the district, stretching from the Okanogan River to the Pacific Crest, lies on the east slope of the Cascade Range and is dominated by mountainous terrain that gets more rugged as you move from east to west. Vegetation in this portion of the district ranges from desert/shrubsteppe at the lowest elevations to various types of conifer forests, culminating in alpine tundra on the higher peaks, which top out at almost 9,000 feet. More than three-quarters of the land base in this portion of the county is in public ownership, offering extensive hunting access. Game is plentiful and dispersed throughout the area for most of the year, concentrating in the lower elevations in winter when deep snow covers much of the landscape.

GMU 204 includes the eastern third of the district, from the Okanogan River east to the Okanogan County boundary, and features moderately rolling terrain, generally rising in elevation as you move east. The vegetation changes from shrubsteppe near the Okanogan River to a mix of tall grass and conifer forest throughout the remainder of the unit. This portion of the district is a near-equal patchwork of

public and private land, with the public lands generally being higher in elevation. Again, game is plentiful and dispersed throughout.

Weather in the Okanogan District can be quite variable and capable of changing quickly in the fall. Be prepared for everything from warm, sunny days to the possibility of winter temperatures and significant snow at higher elevations by the second week of October.

Agency biologists are no longer running the biological check and information station at the Red Barn in Winthrop. Instead, efforts will be focused on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) monitoring farther east in the state following recent positive detections in northwest Idaho. Hunters bringing cervid carcasses from other states are required to comply with current CWD restrictions. Information on CWD including state regulations is at WDFW's [CWD webpage](#).

Customizable map products are available on the [WDFW Hunt Planner webpage](#).

Please be respectful of private land and treat landowners and their property the way you would want to be treated.



Methow Wildlife Area. Photo by WDFW.



Pasayten Wilderness. Photo by WDFW.

Elk

General information, management goals, and population status

Overall, elk numbers are low in District 6. However, conditions vary noticeably between the east and west portions of Okanogan County.

The western two-thirds of the district are not currently covered under a WDFW elk herd management plan, and the existing harvest strategy (any elk general season) is designed to minimize elk numbers to prevent agricultural damage. As such, elk west of the Okanogan River are very difficult to find without extensive local knowledge. Hunters harvested six elk in the nine western Okanogan County GMUs combined in 2023.

The eastern portion of the district (GMU 204) is covered by the Selkirk Elk Herd Plan and supports part of the Pend Oreille subherd population. The area's current management objective is to gradually increase elk numbers, as a result, general season antlerless opportunity is only available during the early archery season. Elk are not currently abundant enough to warrant a survey effort in District 6, but observations suggest numbers continue to increase in GMU 204 and improve harvest opportunity accordingly. Even so, harvest remains modest with 27 animals taken in 2023.

For specific harvest information see the [District 6 General Season Elk Harvest - 2023](#).

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

GMU 204 is the only GMU in District 6 with a significant number of elk. Within this unit, elk tend to be most numerous in the area from Havillah north through the Molson and east to the Chesaw Wildlife Area; the Waconda Summit/Mount Annie area, and USFS lands bordering the Colville Reservation. In the rest of the district, finding elk is extremely difficult unless you have up-to-date knowledge on one of the few small bands of elk that travel in and out of the western portion of the county.

Deer

General information, management goals, and population status

District 6 supports one of the largest migratory mule deer herds in the state, and Okanogan County has long been prized by hunters for its mule deer hunting opportunity. The district also supports significant numbers of white-tailed deer, particularly in GMUs 204 and 215. The current District 6 deer management objective is to grow deer herds following recent declines due to drought, fire, disease, and harsh winter weather.



Mule deer. Photo by WDFW.

Observed post-season fawn:doe ratios (productivity) this past fall of 77:100 increased significantly from the previous season, climbing above the ten-year average of 72:100. In addition, overwinter fawn survivorship (recruitment) this spring was the best it's been in 10 years. These survey results indicate the herd has likely grown over the past year. Fortunately, the winter range has recovered significantly since the 2014-15 fires and all wildfire scars on the district are producing good summer forage. As a result, the population is poised to recover nicely; however, this summer's extreme temperatures and dryness will likely hamper growth in the short-term. Blue tongue and epizootic hemorrhagic disease were not documented in 2023 and have not been documented in 2024 as of mid-summer, but the extreme conditions are increasing the chances of an outbreak later in the season.

What to expect during the 2024 season

Slightly lower-than-average estimated fawn recruitment in 2023 likely means a modest decrease in the 2.5-year-old buck cohort in 2024. Similarly, last December's observed post-season mule deer buck:doe ratio of 17:100 is below the 10-year average of 21:100. Overall, total general season harvest and success rates are anticipated to be a little below the five-year averages.

Despite a cool damp start to summer, temperatures have flipped to record setting levels in July with little relief in sight, and in addition, the landscape is extremely dry at all elevations. If this pattern continues into the fall, record dryness could result in nontypical movements of animals searching for water and palatable forage. How that may affect deer distribution on the landscape is unknown.

Which GMU should deer hunters hunt?

All units in District 6 support significant numbers of deer and large blocks of accessible public land, typically offering good to excellent deer hunting opportunity. Mule deer are distributed throughout the county, with the highest densities in the western two-thirds of the district.

Overall, white-tailed deer are less numerous than mule deer in Okanogan County, and in contrast to mule deer, white-tailed deer abundance generally increases as you move east in the district. The largest population is in GMU 204, where white-tailed deer comprise about half of the overall deer population. Although white-tailed deer numbers are less abundant in the western portion of the district, you can still find them in most drainages up to mid-elevations, particularly those with significant riparian vegetation. The highest concentrations in this area are in the Sinlahekin Valley and surrounding drainages. In many areas west of GMU 204 and outside of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, white-tailed deer frequent private lands. Prospective hunters wishing to target white-tailed deer may want to seek permission before hunting season to access private land.

Hunters harvested 1,926 deer (1,763 bucks, 163 antlerless) in District 6 during the 2023 general seasons. This total is up a bit from last year but still a little below the five-year average of 2,106. Similarly, general season success rates dipped noticeably across all weapon types. The success breakdown across all GMUs by weapon is as follows: Modern 13 %, Muzzleloader 17 %, Archery 23 %, and Multiple 22%. As

expected, GMU 204 (the district’s largest unit) yielded the greatest overall general season harvest of 627 deer. In the western portion of District 6, GMU 215 produced the most harvest with 271 deer.

For specific harvest information, please visit [District 6 2023 General Season Deer Harvest](#) and [District 6 2023 Special Permit Harvest](#).

Maps for specific GMUs can be found on WDFW’s [Game Management Units \(GMUs\) webpage](#) The [WDFW Hunt Planner](#) is an interactive tool that allows hunters to create a customize map.

Figure 1. District 6 2023 general season hunter success by weapon type and GMU.

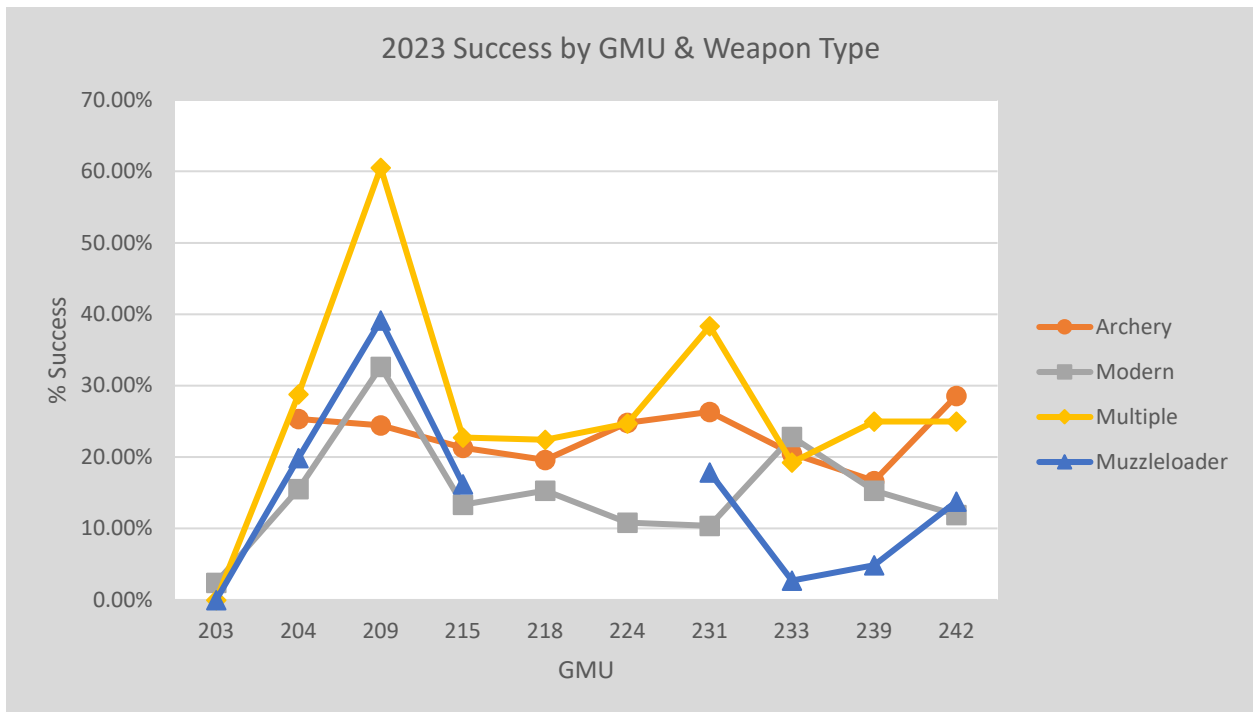


Figure 2. District 6 5-year average general season hunter success by weapon type and GMU.

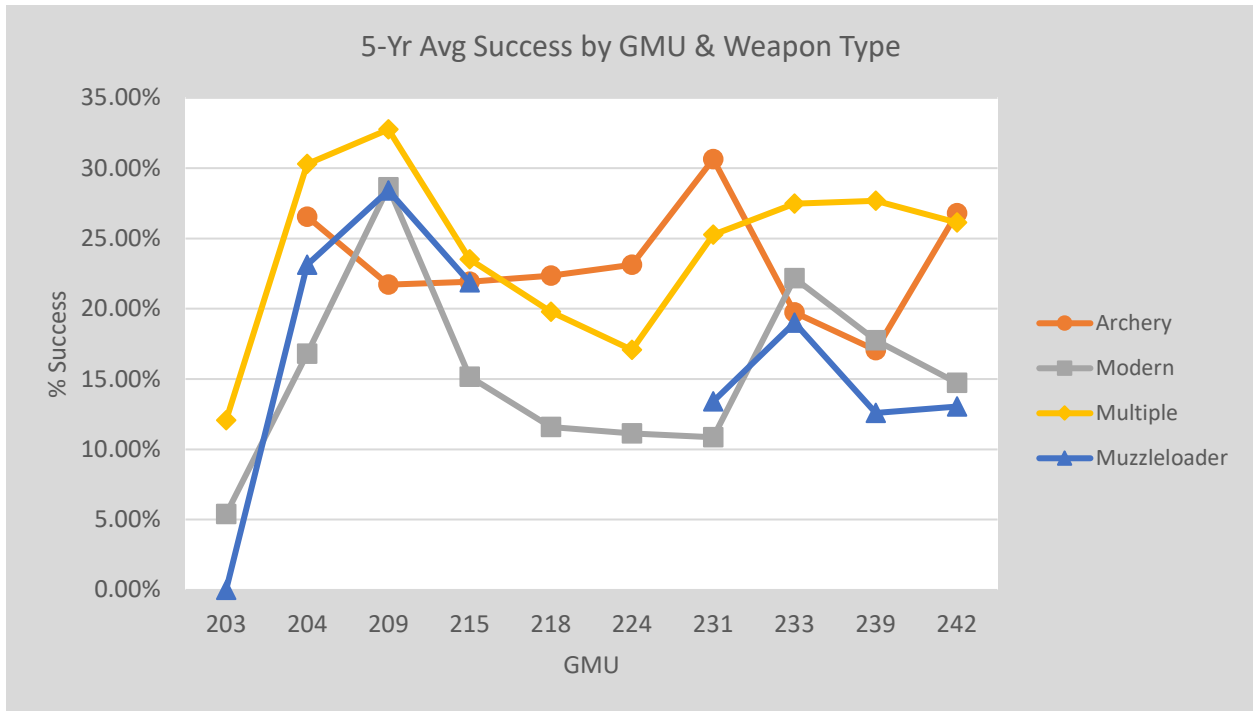
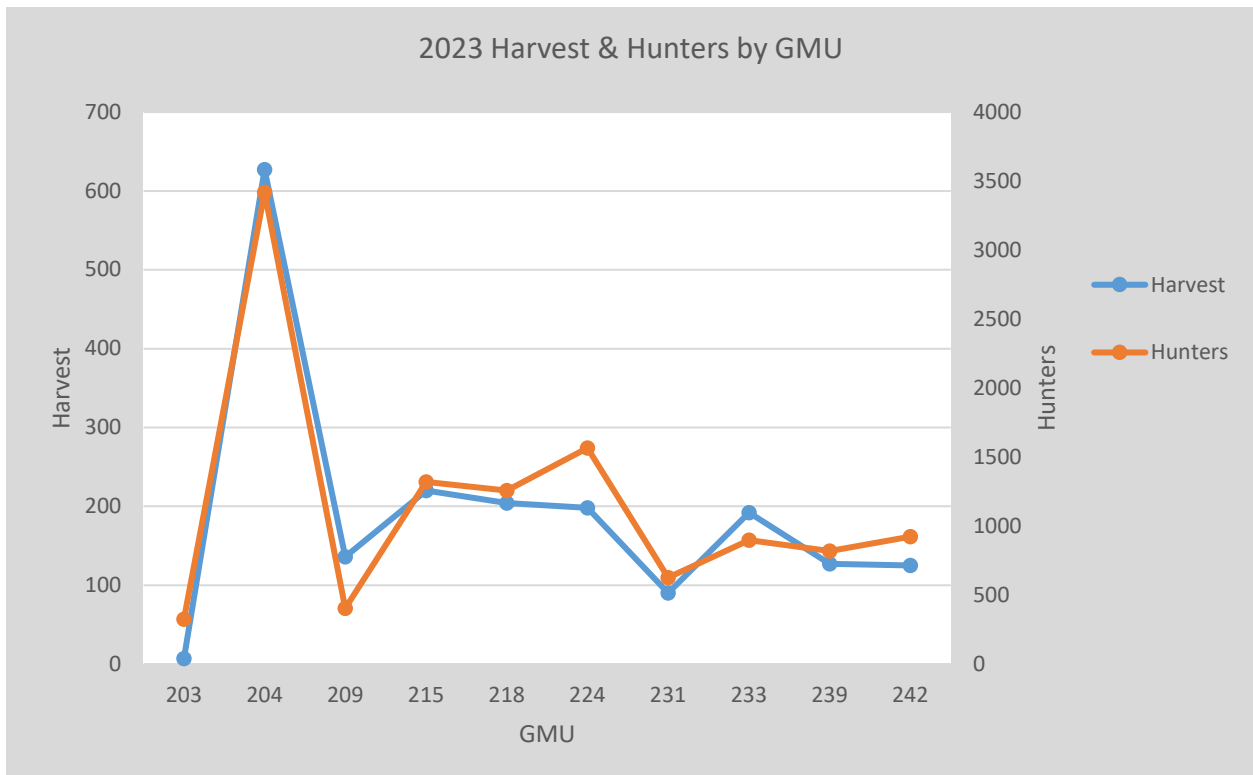


Figure 3. District 6 2023 general season harvest and hunter numbers and GMU.



How to find and hunt mule deer

During the early general seasons, deer will typically be widely distributed on the landscape and not yet concentrated in migration areas or on the winter range. Mature bucks are often at high elevations in remote locations, particularly if succulent vegetation is available. Many of the burn scars from wildfires since 2001 are producing high-quality summer forage, especially at middle and upper elevations. Hunters have high probability of finding significant deer activity in these areas. Although mule deer will use a variety of habitat types, they will often forage well into open environments, particularly at dawn and dusk. As a result, they can often be glassed and stalked from a considerable distance.

During the high hunt, deer will still be spread across the landscape and are found in good numbers throughout the Pasayten Wilderness all the way to the tree line. At this time of year bucks are often more concerned with security than forage and will often bed in tree clumps with commanding views. Hunters on foot can find easier access to higher, more open country via the Harts Pass and Iron Gate trailheads at the western and eastern ends of the Wilderness, respectively. For those with horses, the Andrews Creek and Billy Goat trailheads offer access to good deer terrain further in.

During the late permit seasons, most deer will move to winter range areas at lower elevations for the breeding season, often on more southern-facing slopes. In District 6, there is likelihood of high deer numbers at WDFW wildlife areas and immediately adjacent federal lands in late fall. In years with lesser snowfall, some mature bucks may linger at higher elevations. In exceptionally mild years, hunters may have to travel a bit higher than usual to find deer concentrations.

GMU-specific recommendations for late mule deer permit holders:

GMU 215: Look for deer on south-facing slopes in the Toats Coulee drainage, open portions of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and south-facing slopes of the major drainages to the west of the Sinlahekin, including Cecil, Sarsapkin, and Sinlahekin creeks and their tributaries.

GMU 218: The Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and the Cub Creek, Buck Lake, and Lower Boulder Creek area of the Okanogan National Forest often have late season concentrations of mule deer.

GMU 224: Common locations for mule deer include portions of the Methow Wildlife Area and adjacent Okanogan National Forest lands in the southern portion of the unit. This includes more open habitat in drainages such as Pearrygin, Ramsay, Bear, Blue Buck, Beaver, and Frazier creeks.

GMU 231: Check out the Big Buck portion of the MWA, as well as the Virginia Ridge, Thompson Ridge, and Little Bridge Creek areas of the Okanogan National Forest.

GMU 233: The main unit and Pogue Mountain Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, the Carter Mountain Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and public land in the Salmon Creek Drainage are good places to start.

GMU 239: The Texas Creek Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, along with the adjacent Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land, offer good opportunities. Upper portions of Finley, Benson, and Texas creeks on the Okanogan National Forest are also worth a look.

GMU 242: Look for deer on the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and south-facing slopes on public land in the Libby Creek and Gold Creek drainages.

How to find and hunt white-tailed deer

White-tailed deer in Okanogan County typically migrate less than mule deer and generally favor brushier country with denser cover at lower and middle elevations. Look for white-tailed deer along stream drainages and in other areas where riparian vegetation or thick cover are adjacent. Like mule deer, white-tailed deer are most active at dawn and dusk, but white-tailed deer often won't venture as far into larger openings unless under the cover of darkness. Look for white-tailed deer in edge habitats where denser cover abruptly transitions into more open meadows. Many white-tailed deer hunters will wait patiently at a stationary position along an obvious game trail or the forest edge, often employing the use of a blind or tree stand.



White-tailed deer. Photo by WDFW.

During the late permit season, some white-tailed deer summering at modest elevations will move a little way downslope, but most will be in the same areas where they spent the summer.

GMU-specific recommendations for late permit holders and late archery season in the western portion of the district:

GMU 215: White-tailed deer are abundant on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.

GMU 218: Look for deer in the Eight-mile drainage, along the Chewuch River, and in the lower half of the Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area (despite the open habitat).

GMU 224: Brushier areas along Bear Creek, Upper Beaver Creek and its tributaries, and basin drained by the West Fork Salmon Creek west of Conconully are promising locations.

GMU 231: Good possibilities include the huntable portion of the Big Valley Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area, down low on USFS land in the Twisp River Valley (north of the Twisp River Road), and the Little Bridge Creek drainage. White-tailed deer can also be found on the south slopes of the Big Buck Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area as they move uphill off private land.

GMU 233: Despite the open terrain, the Happy Hill area of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area is productive, along with the Buzzard Lake Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 239: White-tailed deer can be found on Okanogan National Forest land in the South Summit area between Loup Pass and Leecher Mountain and in wetter areas in the western portion of the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 242: Productive areas include the brushy areas along the river and in the northern half of the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area, as well as the valley bottom of the Twisp River drainage. Public land along Libby and Gold creeks is also a possibility.

Antlerless white-tailed deer permit holders should look for deer in the same areas mentioned above, with the added expectation of a few more deer in the higher reaches of areas like the Twisp River and Eight-mile drainages than might be expected during the late season.

Deer Areas

Hunters with second deer permits in Deer Areas 2012 – 2016 should remember that those permits are good **only on private land**. Permit holders are responsible for contacting private landowners to secure hunting access.

Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

Black bears are reasonably abundant and well-distributed throughout District 6 and are managed for sustainable harvest and diverse age structure. The local black bear population and associated harvest appeared to be relatively stable through 2018. In 2019, the bag limit was raised to two bears in eastern Washington. Since this change, harvest has increased by an average of 32% in District 6 as a whole and by roughly 45% in the western two-thirds of the district. Recent data from western Okanogan County estimated black bear densities (including cubs) to be about 22 bears per 100 square kilometers; about average for eastern Washington. Densities in GMU 204 in the eastern third of the district are suspected to be somewhat higher, and WDFW plans to launch a similar density survey effort there next spring.

For hunters pursuing black bear in the northern portion of the Washington Cascades, it is critical to be able to positively identify bear species, as endangered grizzly bears could potentially be seen in this area. WDFW's website features some interactive training materials on how to tell the difference between black and grizzly bears. View the Interactive Bear Identification Program and take the Bear Identification Test on [WDFW's website](#).

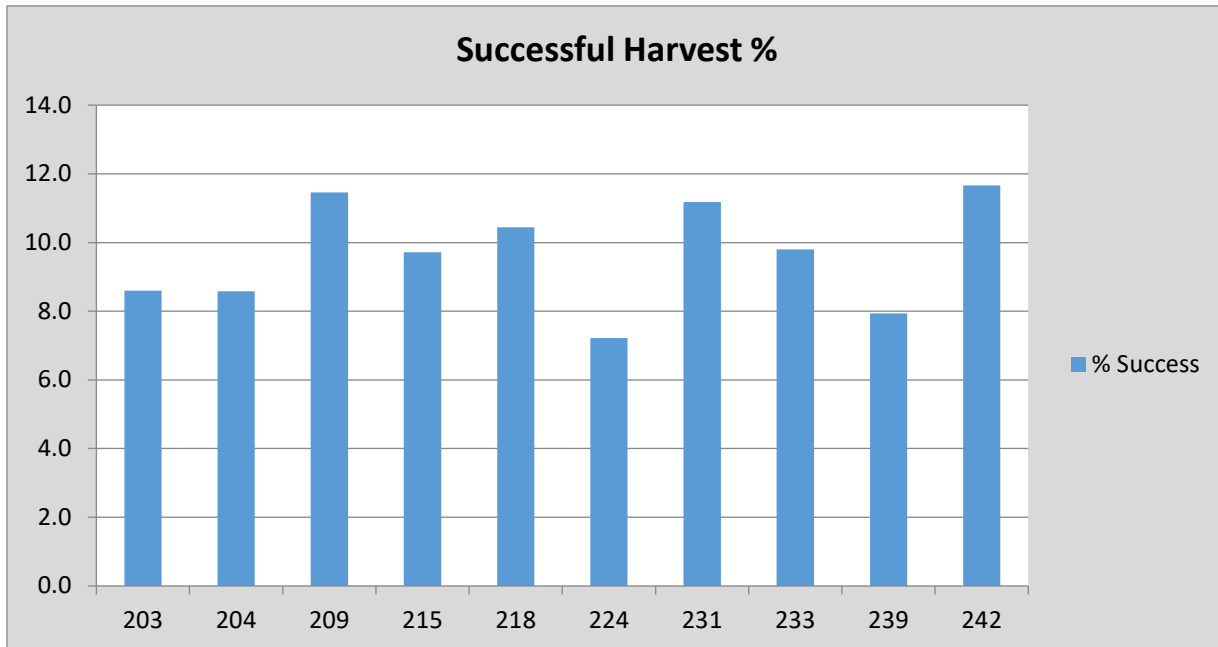


Cinnamon-phase black bear. Photo by WDFW.

Which GMU should bear hunters hunt?

All GMUs in the Okanogan District typically provide good black bear hunting opportunities. In 2023, the success rate (7.8 %) in the Okanogan portion of Bear Management Unit (BMU) 5 declined noticeably along with a 37% decrease in harvest. These decreases came on heels of the harvest spike and berry crop failures in 2022. By contrast, harvest and success were fairly stable in GMU 204 in the Northeastern BMU(7) last year.

Figure 4. Okanogan District 5-year average black bear harvest success rates by GMU.



For specific harvest information, visit [BBMU 5 2023 Black Bear Harvest](#) and [BBMU 7 2023 Black Bear Harvest](#).

What to expect during the 2024 season

Overall bear numbers are likely down in District 6, particularly in BBMU 5 due to a combination of factors including habitat loss to fire in 2021, multiple berry crop failures and a harvest spike in 2022, and diminished cub production in 2023. At the beginning of black bear season, animals are likely to be found at middle elevations in areas where berries are peaking. As the season progresses, expect bears to follow the ripening berries to higher elevations. Berry crops have been variable so far this year. Currently the landscape is extremely dry and the effect on later season foods like huckleberries is still unclear. If the dryness continues, bear may be ranging more widely than usual to find what will likely be patchy food resources.

Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status



Cougar. Photo by WDFW.

The District 6 cougar population is healthy and dispersed throughout the landscape. In the Okanogan District, cougars are managed by a harvest guideline at the scale of one or two GMUs to better promote stable population structure and high-quality sustainable harvest, while also minimizing human-cougar conflicts.

Cougars follow the deer herds, which means they will be spread throughout the district through late October and concentrate more at lower elevations as deer move to winter range. Much cougar foraging activity takes place at night, so the best opportunities to spot the cats on the move are at dawn and dusk.

Which GMU should cougar hunters hunt?

All Okanogan District GMUs support cougars and are open to hunting. **At the time of this writing, cougar hunting regulations have not yet been set for the 2024-25 season. See the [WDFW hunting webpage](#) for updated information.**

Last season, harvest in District 6 did not exceed the guideline in any PMU and control-related mortality was low. As a result, cougar numbers should be robust and hunting opportunities in District 6 should be good in 2024-25. See the five-year harvest summary table (Table 1) for more information.

Table 1. District 6 cougar harvest guidelines and 5-year adult harvest by GMU.

PMU Hunt Area GMUs	Adult Harvest Guideline	2019-2020 Adult Harvest	2020-2021 Adult Harvest	2021-2022 Adult Harvest	2022-2023 Adult Harvest	2023-2024 Adult Harvest
203	4-5	0	0	0	0	0
204	6-8	4	4	3	3	6
209, 215	3-4	3	6	3	4	3
218, 231	4-5	0	1	0	1	0
224	2	0	0	0	0	1
233, 239	4-5	2	2	0	3	3
242, 243	5-6	3	2	1	2	0

Waterfowl

General information

The Okanogan District offers modest waterfowl hunting opportunities as compared to many other areas of the state. The largest concentrations of birds occur at the southern edge of District 6, at the mouth of the Okanogan River and on the Columbia River. The main stem of the Okanogan and Upper Similkameen rivers and the larger lakes and potholes in the Okanogan Watershed are good secondary sites. Hunters can find good public river access at the Washburn Island Unit of the Wells Wildlife Area, the Driscoll-Eyhott Island Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.



Lesser scaup. Photo by WDFW.



Canada geese. Photo by WDFW.

Water levels in smaller local potholes are low this year and some have dried up entirely. River levels are currently running below normal, and the long-term forecast suggests this will be the case into the fall. Aside from water levels, waterfowl hunting opportunities are mostly dependent on the number of birds migrating from Canada and Alaska, and how long it takes before water on the district freezes.

Last year's goose and duck harvest were similar to the previous season. The 2023 waterfowl harvest numbers are available at [2023 Small Game harvest reports webpage](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.

Forest grouse

Species and general habitat characteristics

The Okanogan supports robust populations of ruffed, dusky (blue), and spruce grouse within the forested areas of the district. Ruffed grouse are generally associated with deciduous tree cover at lower to middle elevations, particularly in riparian habitats. During the hunting season, dusky (blue) grouse are generally encountered in mid- to upper-elevation conifer forests, often moving to ridges as snow begins to accumulate. Spruce grouse are found in higher elevation conifer forests throughout the district on a year-round basis. Additional tips on hunting forest grouse can be found on WDFW's [Forest grouse hunting tips webpage](#).

Forest grouse populations (particularly dusky and spruce grouse) remain below historical norms within the boundaries of the many recent large wildfires within the district. These fires have typically burned in some of the best and most densely occupied forest grouse habitat in the region. However, grouse habitat within the burns is improving annually. Some of the older burns, such as the Needles, Farewell, and 30-mile fires have been aggressively colonized by deciduous vegetation and could now support good ruffed grouse populations. The conifers, preferred for dusky and spruce grouse habitat, will take longer to recover, but the birds are beginning to use the habitat again in some portions of the Tripod fire area. Bird numbers outside of burned areas appear to be relatively stable, but fluctuate annually with the severity of winter and spring weather.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Harvest in 2023 more than doubled compared to the take in 2022. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this year's harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Forest Grouse Game harvest reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.



Male ruffed grouse. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasants

Species and general habitat characteristics

Pheasants occur at low densities and in a patchy distribution throughout the Okanogan watershed portion of District 6, with most harvested birds coming from pheasant release sites. This year, pheasants will again be released at the Bureau of Reclamation's Hegdal and Kline sites, and at the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. What little wild production exists within the county comes mostly from private land. Hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private property. Additional hunting tips for pheasants can be found on WDFW's [Pheasant hunting tips webpage](#).

Pheasant release sites are mapped in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Program Booklet](#). Hunters are reminded that nontoxic shot is required for **all** upland bird hunting on **all** pheasant release sites statewide.

District 6 pheasant harvest numbers are fairly consistent year to year and are available at [2023 Pheasant Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.



Pheasant release. Photo by WDFW.

Quail

Species and general habitat characteristics

Quail are locally abundant and widespread throughout the district's lower elevation shrubsteppe and open pine forest habitats. District 6 Wildlife Areas offer good access to quail habitat. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this year's harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Quail Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022. Tips for hunting quail are available on WDFW's [Quail hunting tips webpage](#).

Turkeys

General description

Turkey numbers are highest in GMUs 204, 215, and 239, but all GMUs except 203 offer good opportunities. Hunters can find turkeys in scattered groups throughout the district where they often concentrate on private land near agriculture areas later in the fall. Prospective hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private land. Hunters harvested 200 birds during the general fall season in North Central Washington. Both the harvest number and the 31% success rate were similar to the previous season.

For specific harvest information visit [2023 Statewide Turkey Harvest by Management Unit](#).



Wild turkeys. Photo by WDFW.

Chukar and Hungarian (gray) partridge

General description

In general, Hungarian partridge populations are widely distributed and patchy throughout the district's shrubsteppe habitats. Hunters frequently encounter partridge on most all wildlife area units in the district. Scattered groups of chukar can be found in rocky areas in lower elevations of District 6. The steep hills along the Similkameen River in the north part of the Okanogan Valley and the rocky areas of

the Pateros and Indian Dan Wildlife Areas typically support birds. See tips for hunting chukar and Hungarian partridge by visiting [Hungarian partridge hunting tips](#) and [Chukar hunting tips](#).



Hungarian partridge. Photo by WDFW.

Chukar and Hun harvest declined by around 50% in 2023, like due to the previous tough winter. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this years' harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Small Game Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.

Dove

General description

Look for doves in planted food crops in the Sinlahekin and at lower elevations on other public lands. With warmer fall temps becoming the norm, doves now frequently stay in District 6 well past the Sept. 1 opener.

Like partridge, dove harvest numbers declined significantly in 2023 and the previous winters' weather again have been a factor. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this years' harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Dove Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.



Mourning dove on the Methow Wildlife Area. Photo by WDFW.

2024 District 7 Hunting Prospects

Chelan and Douglas counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

July 2024

2024 District 7 Hunting Prospects

Chelan and Douglas counties

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District 7 general overview

Divided by the Columbia River and comprised of Chelan and Douglas counties, WDFW's District 7 is at the heart of Washington. From the crest of the Cascade Range to the shrubsteppe of the Columbia Basin, the Wenatchee District offers an incredibly diverse array of habitats and hunting opportunities. Hunters in District 7 have access to a variety of small and big game species, with hunting opportunities ranging from agricultural fields and sagebrush to montane forest and alpine basins tucked away deep in the wilderness.

Douglas County, the eastern half of the district, is a plateau of shrubsteppe, farmlands, and deep basalt coulees. Ownership is mostly private, but Douglas County offers excellent opportunities to hunt a variety of species. Hunters seeking pheasant, quail, doves, gray partridge, chukar, and mule deer will find many areas to hunt across the county. The game management units (GMUs) in Douglas County are 248 (Big Bend), 254 (Saint Andrews), 260 (Foster Creek), 262 (Withrow), 266 (Badger), and 269 (Moses Coulee).

Chelan County descends approximately 40 miles from a high point of 9,500-feet atop the Cascade crest at its western boundary down to a low elevation of 800-feet along its eastern border, the Columbia River. Chelan County encompasses five mountain ranges (Sawtooth, Chelan, Entiat, Chiwaukum, and Wenatchee), providing hunters with virtually unlimited terrain.

Home to some of the best mule deer and bighorn sheep hunting in the state, Chelan County is a destination for many hunters. With its large public land base, the county offers almost unlimited opportunities to find a place of your own. Four of the state's six high deer hunt wilderness areas are in Chelan County, as well as three bighorn sheep herds. GMUs in Chelan County are 243 (Manson), 244 (Clark), 245 (Chiwawa), 246 (Slide Ridge), 247 (Entiat), 249 (Alpine), 250 (Swakane), and 251 (Mission).

Current species status

Big game

Almost all the deer harvested in District 7 are mule deer, with very few white-tailed deer. Black-tailed deer can also be found in Chelan County along the Cascade crest, and mule deer here share more black-tailed genes than hunters realize. Elk are present primarily along the southern edge of Chelan County. These elk represent the northern extension of the Colockum elk herd, centered to the south in Kittitas County. Black bears roam across almost all habitats in Chelan County. Their densities are higher in the wetter timbered habitats in western Chelan County and near the crest of the Cascades, and at somewhat lower densities in drier habitats farther east. Hunters harvest few black bears in Douglas County, but they do occur in small numbers in brush-filled riparian draws along the Columbia River and other drainages. Cougars occupy all habitats where deer and elk are found. Most cougars are harvested during deer and elk seasons and the cougar harvest typically does not meet the harvest guidelines. Winter conditions and fresh snow determine the ease or difficulty of a dedicated cougar hunt. There are three California bighorn sheep herds in the district, the Swakane, Chelan Butte, and Manson herds. The world record California bighorn sheep came out of the Swakane herd in Chelan County in 2010, and the

Chelan Butte herd has become known for producing quality California bighorn rams. Mountain goats occupy some of the high elevation habitat in Chelan County, but there are no known herds of sufficient size to allow for hunting. As such, there are currently no mountain goat hunting opportunities in District 7.

Upland birds

Upland bird hunting opportunities are available across the district. Turkey hunting occurs mainly in Chelan County, but numbers are growing in northern Douglas County, and some recently acquired wildlife areas are expanding opportunities. Hunttable grouse species are found in forested environments in both counties. Hunters can pursue sooty, dusky, spruce, and ruffed grouse in different parts of the district. The three other grouse species found in the district (greater sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, and white-tailed ptarmigan) are protected species in Washington and cannot be hunted. Chukar require hunters to climb steep ridgelines and traverse rocky slopes to bag their quarry. Valley quail, as their name suggests, prefer gentler terrain, and usually stay in greater numbers near agricultural areas. Gray partridge, or Huns, are found primarily in Douglas County. Doves are hunted in both counties, but most hunters find success in Douglas County. There are two ring-necked pheasant release sites in Chelan County at the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife areas.

Small game

Coyotes are the most widely adaptable species in Washington, and as such, can be found across District 7 and beyond. Bobcats are another widely distributed species hunted across a wide range of habitats, from high mountains to dry shrubsteppe. Raccoons are almost everywhere, except for the highest peaks and the driest desert. Crows are another small game species available, and rarely pursued. Rabbits and hares offer hunting opportunity throughout the district, with snowshoe hares at higher elevations (mainly in Chelan County) and cottontail rabbits in a variety of habitats in both Douglas and Chelan counties.

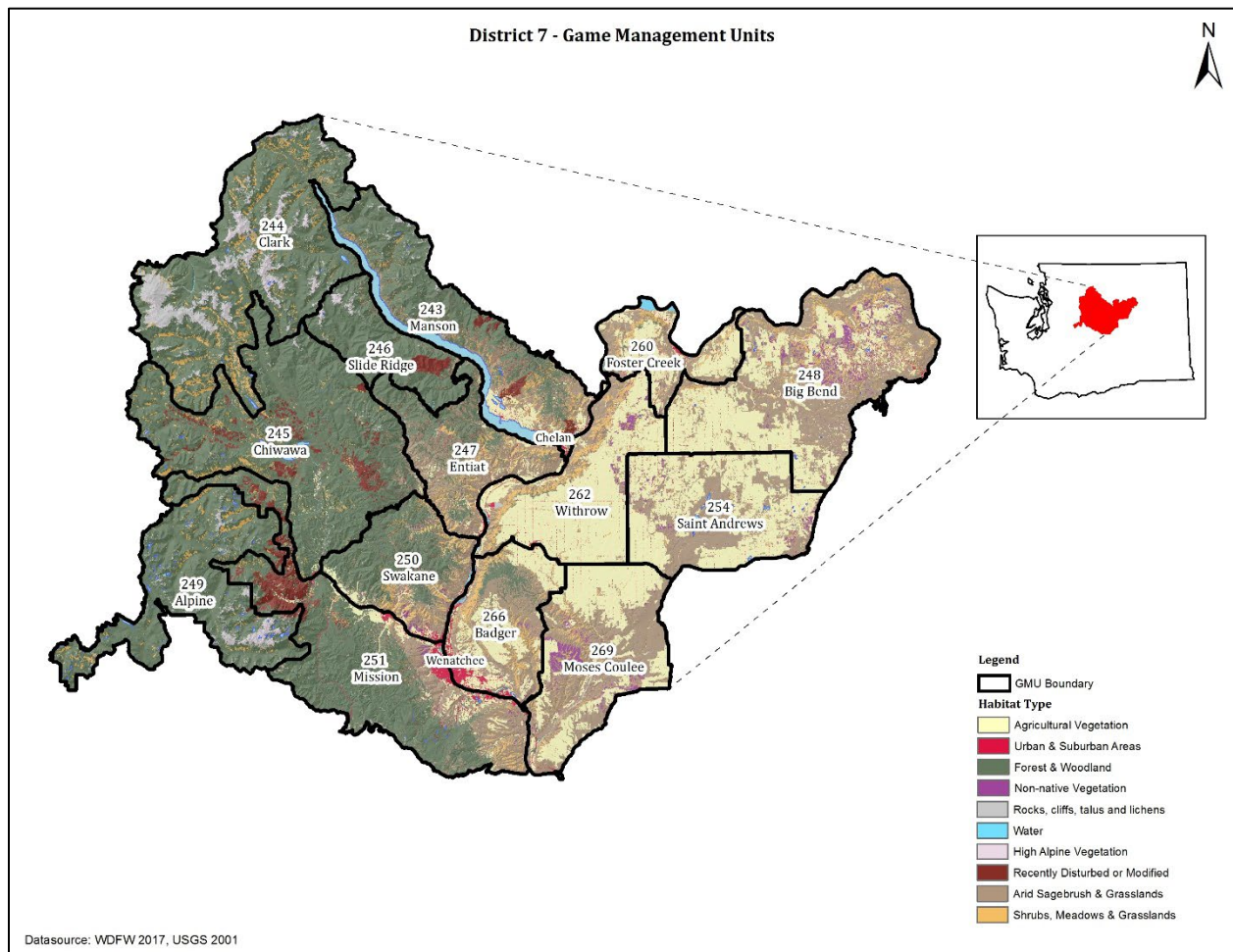
Waterfowl

There are opportunities for duck and geese hunting in different portions of the district. The bulk of waterfowl hunting in District 7 takes place along the Columbia River, with ducks being the primary focus. Goose hunts are mainly in Douglas County, but opportunities are also available along the Columbia River.

Game Management Units

The 14 Game Management Units (GMUs) in District 7 run from the crest of the Cascade Range to Moses Coulee and Banks Lake (Figure 1). Units in western and central Chelan County are high, rugged, and timbered. Eastern Chelan County units grade from mid-to-high elevation forested terrain down into low elevation dry habitat that provides mule deer winter range. The eastern half of the district lies above the Columbia River and encompasses six GMUs in Douglas County. Shrubsteppe and grasslands comprise native habitat in Douglas County and agricultural lands offer some of the best upland bird opportunities in the district.

Figure 1. District 7 Game Management Units.



Each GMU is unique and offers a different experience for hunters. GMUs 244 and 249, for example, are legally designated Wilderness Areas administered by the U. S. Forest Service (USFS). There are no roads within these Wilderness Areas and no mechanized vehicles, including bicycles, are allowed for any type of recreation. In turn, these two GMUs offer exceptional hunting experiences for those willing to go by foot or horse. By contrast, GMU 262 is the heart of Douglas County's wheat production and provides

great upland bird hunting and open country mule deer hunting where access is granted. GMU 269 offers the most dramatic coulee habitat in the district with stunning landscapes and a variety of hunting opportunities. GMU 260 is in the center of the district's rangeland and features big ranches and big views.

Once you have a GMU in mind, refine your scouting efforts by using the websites below to identify specific hunt areas, WDFW Wildlife Areas, and private lands offering hunting.

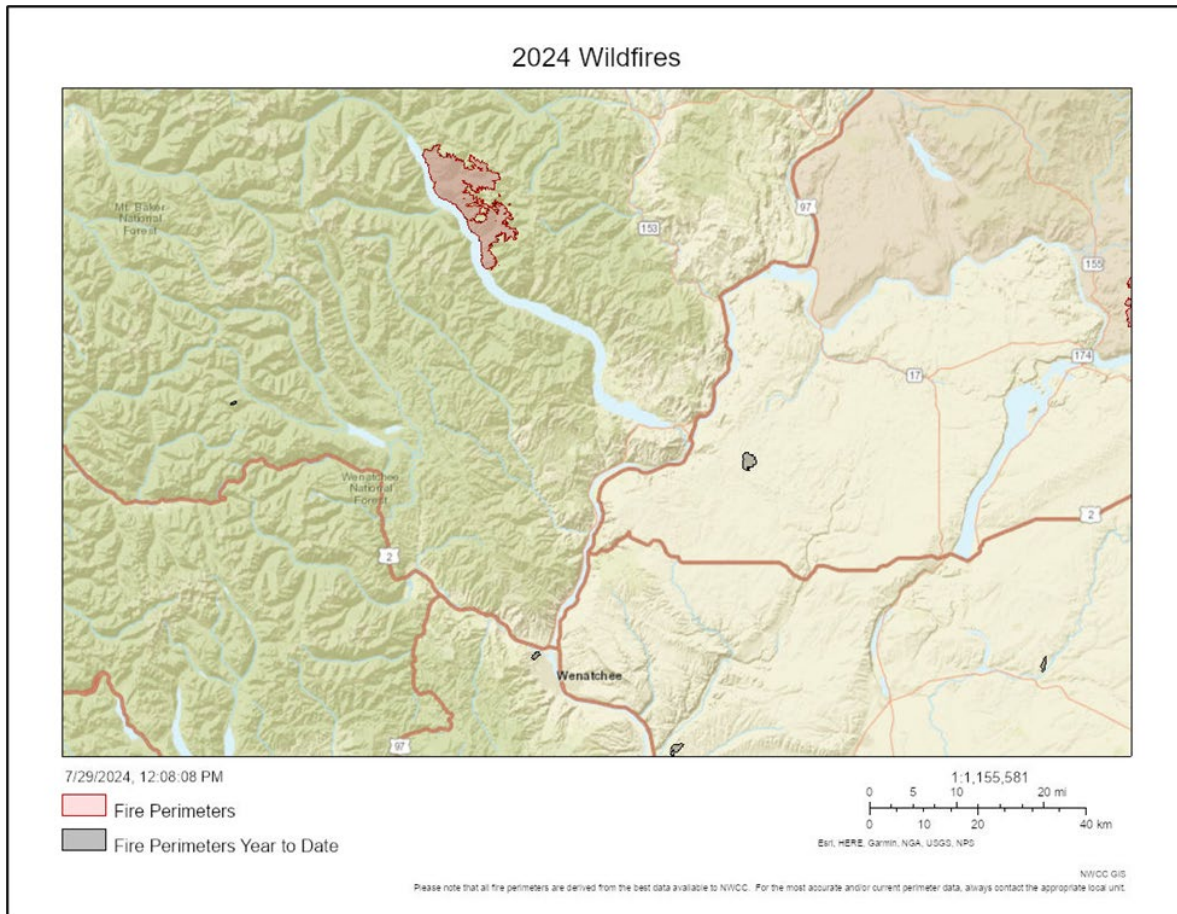
- [Printable maps of each GMU](#) with its respective land ownership composition and roads.
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#).
- The [Public Lands website](#) offers multiple ways to search for and identify public lands in Washington.
- The [WDFW Hunt Planner Web Map](#) allows you to select any GMU to learn what hunting opportunities are available there and when the seasons run.
- The [Washington Department of Natural Resources](#) offers LIDAR images if you need detailed topographic information.

Wildfire

Fire is a natural part of the ecosystem in central and eastern Washington and a common occurrence in summer and fall in District 7, affecting both forested and shrubsteppe habitats. However, fires have increased dramatically in frequency, severity, and size over the past decade. The aftermath of wildfires can impart both beneficial and deleterious effects to different wildlife species on different timescales, so it is useful to know when and where fires have burned in recent years. Burn areas from very recent fires (e.g., less than two years prior) are often areas to avoid- particularly if burn severity was high- as revegetation is unlikely to have occurred in such a short timeframe. On the other hand, burn areas 2-5 years old and sometimes older are often attractive to game species such as deer and elk, due to the nutritious forbes and grasses characterizing the early successional vegetation that can recolonize an area in the absence of mature shrubs or canopy cover. Below is information regarding recent fires in Chelan and Douglas counties that may assist hunters in identifying locations to avoid, choosing potential areas for scouting, and assessing access.

At the time of this report, the Pioneer Fire is burning on the north side of Lake Chelan between the shoreline and the Chelan/Okanogan County line, from Lone Fir Creek to Hazard Creek just south of Stehekin (Figure 2). It started on June 8, 2024, and has now reached 33,276 acres as of July 29, 2024. It is expected to burn well into fall and the USFS has issued a large-scale [Closure Order](#) for this fire that will likely significantly reduce hunting access and opportunity in GMU 243 (Manson) during the 2024 hunting season.

Figure 2. Map of wildfire in Chelan and Douglas counties in the 2024 fire season. Dark red are active fires as of 7/29/2024, and the grayscale layer are inactive wildfires.



Map collected from [Northwest Coordination Center](#).

There are still a few months left in the 2024 fire season, so watch for wildfire condition updates in the monthly Weekender hunting reports, WDFW news releases, or WDFW social media posts. Access restrictions can be put in place on short notice in the event of an emergency, so make sure to check fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. There are multiple websites where you can check regional and statewide wildfire updates:

Resources management agency websites

- [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#)
- [Washington Department of Natural Resources](#)
- [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest](#)
- [Bureau of Land Management](#)
- [Chelan County](#)
- [Douglas County](#)

Fire monitoring websites

Visit these sites to learn what wildfires are active near your favorite hunting spots.

- [Inciweb](#)
- [Watch Duty](#)
- [National Fire Map](#)
- [WA Smoke Blog](#)

Recent Wildfires: 2020-2023

2023 Wildfires

While the 2023 fire season saw its share of small brushfires in Chelan and Douglas counties, only one large fire occurred (Figure 3). This was the Airplane Lake fire which was caused by a lightning strike in the White River drainage of GMU 245 (Chiwawa) on July 7, 2023. A total of 6,956 acres burned before the fire was fully contained on September 27, 2023.

2022 Wildfires

The 2022 wildfire season had multiple shrubsteppe and forest fires occurring in Chelan and Douglas counties (Figure 3). Over 25,000 acres of habitat burned in District 7, a similar amount to what burned in 2021.

In late July 2022, the Stayman Flats fire began burning on the Chelan Butte wildlife area and burned 1,200 acres. This area is within the range of the Chelan Butte bighorn sheep herd in GMU 247 (Entiat) and provides winter range for mule deer. The largest fire in District 7 in 2022 was the White River/Irving Peak fire near Lake Wenatchee in GMU 245, which started in mid-August 2022 and continued until November 2022, burning 11,180 acres.

2021 Wildfires

Central and eastern Washington experienced severe drought in 2021, with precipitation up to 50% below average in places. A record-setting heatwave developed in late June and lasted a couple of weeks, and temperatures remained above average throughout July. The 2021 wildfire season started with the Batterman Road fire in early July, which burned more than 14,000 acres of GMU 266 (Badger) in the Badger Mountain area of Douglas County (Figure 3). In mid-July, the Red Apple fire rapidly burned through approximately 12,000 acres of the southern portion of GMU 250 (Swakane) in the foothills north of Wenatchee, burning public and private lands, including parts of the Swakane Unit of the Chelan Wildlife Area. This area is home to the Swakane bighorn sheep herd and provides important winter range for mule deer. In mid-August, the Twentyfive Mile fire began burning on the south shore of Lake Chelan near Twentyfive Mile Creek State Park and quickly expanded south and west of the area. This fire continued to burn through late September and eventually burned more than 22,000 acres. The Twentyfive Mile fire primarily impacted GMU 246 (Slide Ridge) but also reached into the far northwest

portion of 247 (Entiat), with closures and reduced access due to safety hazards continuing into the general season and beyond.

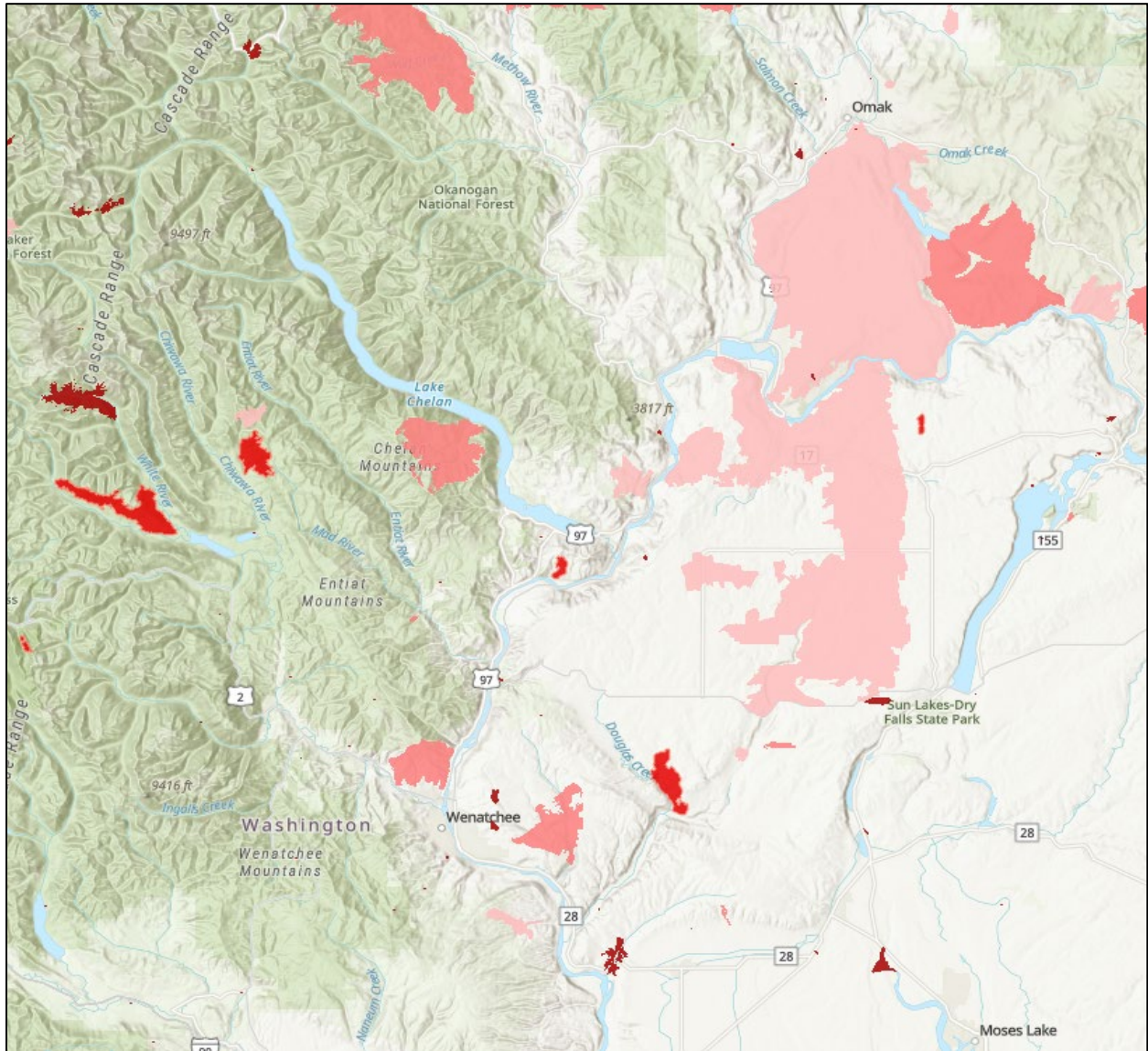
2020 Wildfires

In September 2020, the Pearl Hill fire spread across 224,000 acres of shrubsteppe habitats in northern Douglas County (Figure 3). This impacted both upland and riparian habitats in parts of GMUs 260, 262, 254, and 248. Post-fire recovery and restoration in the burn area has been variable depending on burn severity, resources for active restoration, and precipitation. WDFW wildlife areas implemented habitat recovery efforts on units in GMUs 248, 254, and 260. Those efforts focused on weed suppression, seeding native grasses, rebuilding irrigation systems, installing erosion control materials, building fences, and planting woody vegetation in creeks. Partner organizations including Foster Creek Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Chelan – Douglas Land Trust, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have conducted similar efforts on private and other public lands. These efforts will continue in the coming years to the extent that current and additional funding allows. New riparian plantings and beaver dam analogs in East Foster Creek are designed to stabilize streambanks, help with soil deposition, and provide woody browse in the future.

Table 1. Wildfires larger than 500 acres in District 7, 2020-2023.

County	Year	Fire Name	Acres Burned	GMU
Chelan	2023	Airplane Lake	6,956	244
Chelan	2022	Stayman Flats	1,200	247
Chelan	2022	White River Irving Peak	11,180	245
Chelan	2022	Minnow Ridge	5,140	246, 247
Douglas	2022	Mohr	6,944	269
Douglas	2022	Nilles	589	248
Chelan	2021	Twentyfive Mile	22,118	246, 247
Chelan	2021	Red Apple	12,280	250
Douglas	2021	Batterman Road	14,124	266
Chelan	2020	Chikamin	1,610	245
Chelan	2020	Apple Acres	5,755	243
Douglas	2020	Road 11	9,633	254, 262
Douglas	2020	Pearl Hill	223,802	260, 262, 254, 248

Figure 3. Map of wildfires in Chelan and Douglas counties in years 2020 through 2023.



Elk



Elk harvest. Photo by Pete Lopushinsky.

Although elk densities vary across the unit and are low to moderate throughout, GMU 251 (Mission) continues to offer the best elk hunting in District 7. Most elk harvested in the Wenatchee District come from here, where the Colockum Herd reaches its northern range extension in southern Chelan County (Figure 4). In GMU 251, elk are known to reliably use Jumpoff Ridge, Tronsen Meadows and Blewett Pass, the Camas Meadows/Peshastin area, and lands throughout the upper reaches of Mission, Stemilt, and Squilchuck Creeks. The Mission unit has a significant amount of private land, and hunters need to be aware of property boundaries when hunting elk near private ownership.

Elk are also found loosely distributed through the southern portion of GMU 249 (Alpine) near the boundary with GMUs 251 and 335 (Teaway) in areas such as Ingalls Creek and Jack Creek. GMU 249 comprises a large block of public land within the USFS Alpine Lakes Wilderness. While this GMU offers an opportunity for an over-the-counter archery tag for a branch-antlered bull, elk occur at relatively low densities here and occupy rugged terrain where hunters cannot use motorized vehicles. Hunters participating in the GMU 249 archery season are often surprised at the numbers of other hunters chasing elk.

Small, dispersed bands of elk can be found in GMUs 245, 246, 247, and 250 in areas such as Lake Wenatchee and in the canyons dominated by orchard and forested landscapes on the breaks of the Wenatchee River. However, elk here are much fewer and farther between and hunters hoping to be successful in these GMUs must be prepared to conduct a great deal of scouting. Local hunters who live and work in these areas tend to be the most successful at harvesting elk in these GMUs. A few elk harvests are scattered across Douglas County each season, but that harvest is not consistent from year to year and elk are very scarce throughout the county. Liberal harvest seasons are in place in Douglas County to keep elk from establishing herds in the agriculture-dominated landscape where they can cause commercial crop damage.

Opportunities to harvest a branch-antler bull in District 7 are primarily through limited-entry hunts. Most general season harvest opportunities are “spike bull” and “true spike bull”, but hunters that manage to locate elk in GMUs 243-247 and all Douglas County GMUs can legally harvest any elk. Hunters have the opportunity to harvest a branch-antlered bull in GMU 251 only via special permit hunt during two quality seasons and one bull elk season. Special permits are offered for branch antlered bulls and antlerless elk in Chelan County’s two Elk Areas, as well: 2032 (Malaga) and 2033 (Peshastin). Downloadable maps of these Elk Areas are available on [WDFW’s website](#).

The Malaga Elk Area offers the greatest number of permits for antlerless elk, with the intention of reducing elk numbers within and along the boundary of the Stemilt Basin agricultural area. WDFW reinstated both antlered and antlerless hunts in the Peshastin Elk Area in 2021 as biologists and agricultural producers noted an increase in elk use in the area, prompting concerns about orchard damage. The first three years of re-established Peshastin hunts have proven successful in providing a quality experience for hunters as well as keeping elk moving across the landscape and decreasing the time elk spent in any one orchard. In 2024/2025, 20 cow tags (mid-December through early February) and four any-bull tags (mid-February) are again available for the Peshastin Elk Area. Access is highly restricted to private lands, so be sure to contact landowners early if you have drawn a permit for Elk Area 2033. Permit holders should contact the Wenatchee District Office for additional information.

Elk eat a wide range of forage including grasses and forbs in the summer months, incorporating shrubby browse as more palatable plants dry out. Areas where timber harvest or wildfire has occurred can be excellent places to find elk, especially adjacent to creek drainages and intact timber stands. The disturbance stimulates the growth of elk’s preferred forage. Cow elk are especially dependent on finding high-quality forage in the fall to prepare their bodies for pregnancy over the winter. In areas of agricultural production, elk tend to concentrate in orchards in the winter once sufficient snow has accumulated at higher elevations, driving elk to seek lower elevation food sources.

Several recent changes to elk general seasons in District 7 have resulted in increased opportunity for hunters since 2021. One notable change is that GMU 251 was opened to early and late general season archery elk hunts for spike bulls. This increase in archery opportunity was reflected in the 2021 harvest statistics, with an increase in the number of archery hunters as well as elk harvested by archers over the previous years. That same level of success was maintained in fall 2022 but decreased in 2023, although archery harvest still exceeded pre-2021 levels. Additionally, as of 2023, muzzleloader hunters can now

harvest a spike bull in 249 in the early general season. Muzzleloader harvest nearly doubled from six in 2022 to 11 in 2023 and exceeds the previous 5-year average, likely due to this rule change.

Aside from a slump in the 2017 and 2018 seasons following the harsh winter conditions of 2016/2017, hunters typically harvest 40-55 elk under general seasons in Chelan County annually, and 53 were harvested in 2023, of which 49 were antlered and 4 were antlerless (Figures 4-9). Between 2022 and 2023, modern firearm elk harvest increased proportionate to the rise in hunter numbers and hunter days, with success rates remaining consistent between years. Although District 7 does not formally monitor elk populations, hunters and landowners alike report seeing increasing numbers of elk over the past several years, and the 2024 season should yield a harvest similar to the last few years.

Figure 4. Snapshot of general season elk harvest illustrating the preeminence of GMU 251 for elk hunting in District 7.

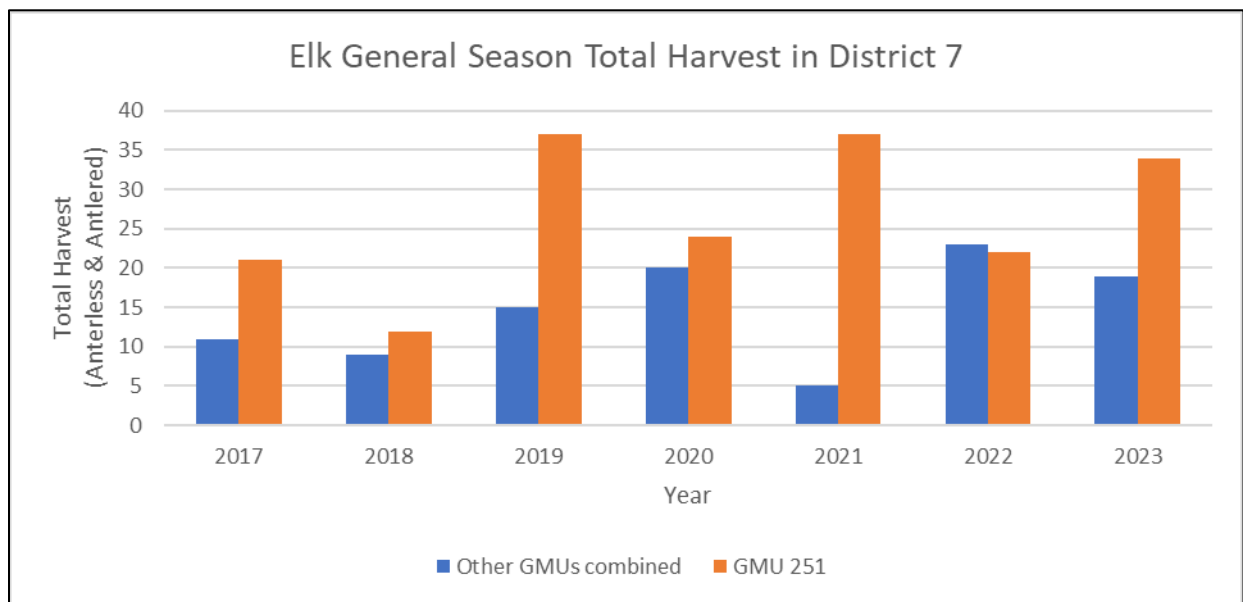


Figure 5. Total number of elk harvested by antler point during the general season in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

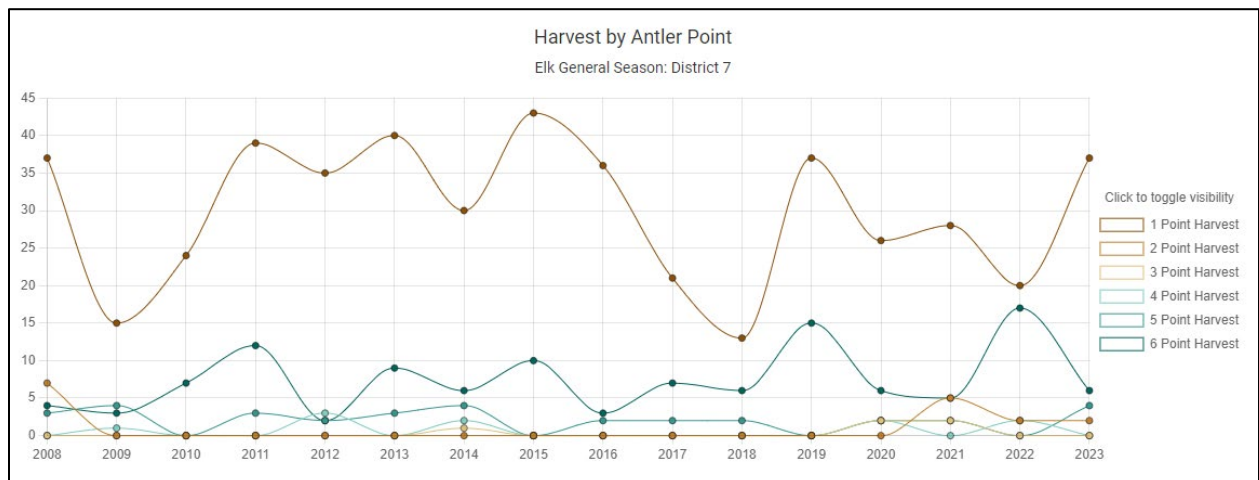


Figure 6. Total number of elk harvested by weapon type during the general season in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

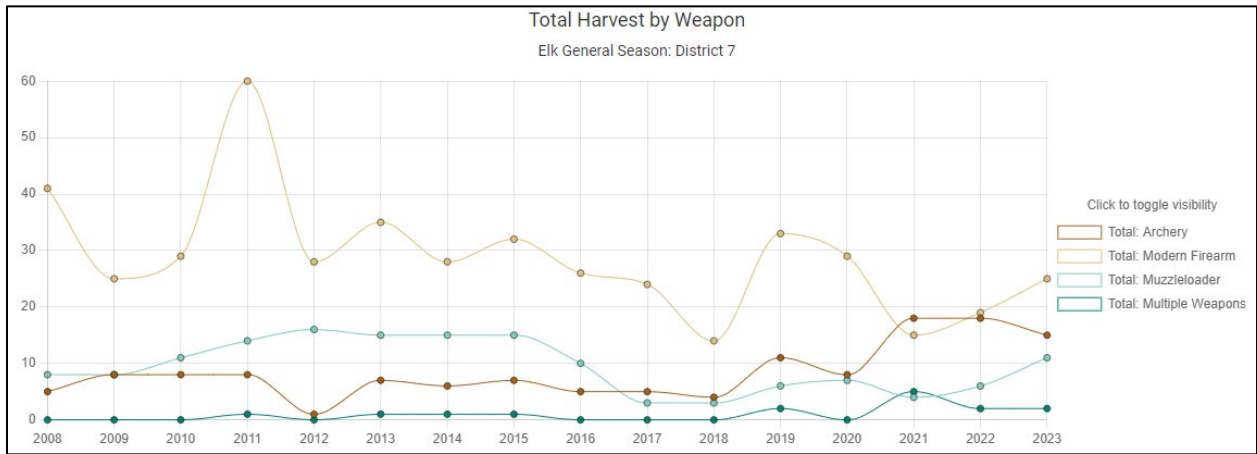


Figure 7. Number of general season elk hunters in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

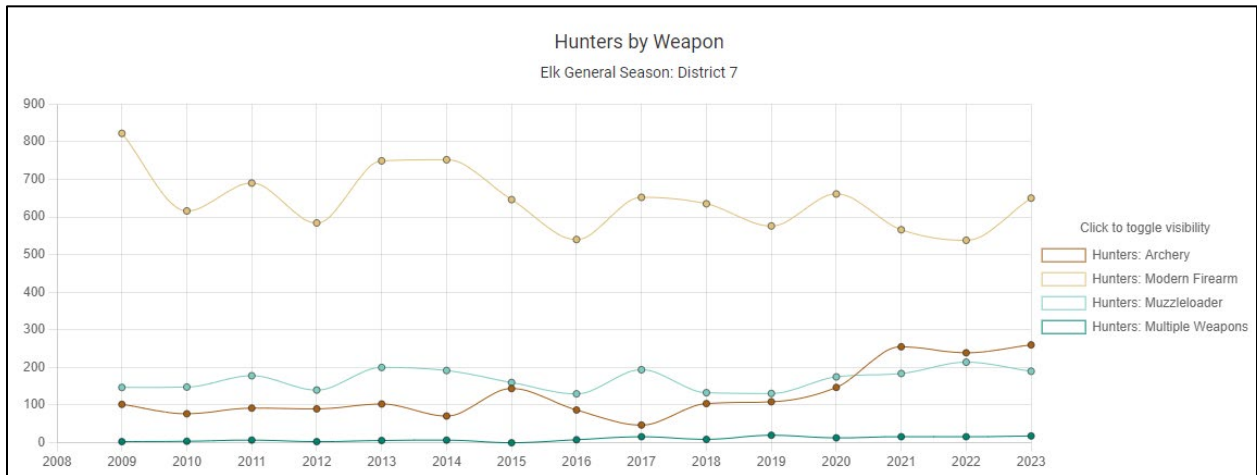


Figure 8. The number of days spent hunting per kill during elk general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

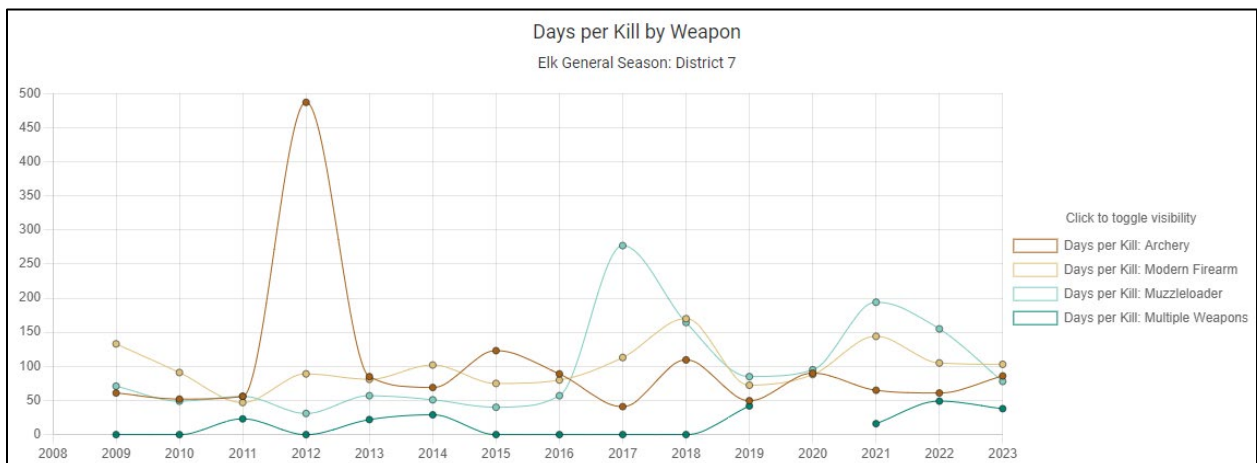
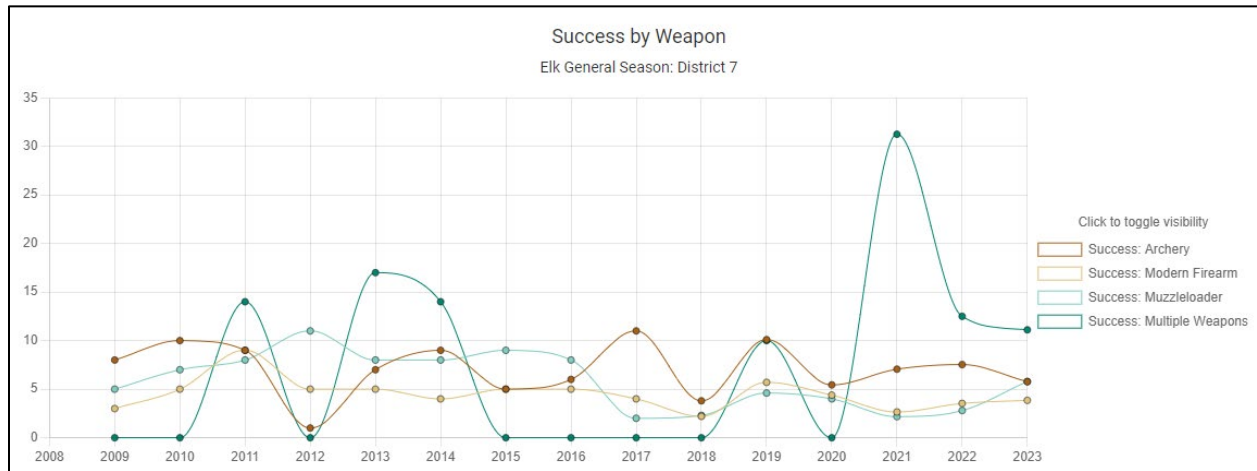


Figure 9. The percentage of successful hunters by weapon type for elk general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.



Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. WDFW diagnostic research from 2009 to 2014, in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate.

The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is found less frequently in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area. **TAHD has not been detected in the Colockum Herd or anywhere in District 7 at this time.** However, hunters are asked to be on the lookout for any signs of this disease.

If you harvest an elk with abnormal looking hooves (for example, overgrown or broken hoof claws or skin lesions) in eastern Washington, please report that harvest to your local WDFW regional office. TAHD appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. The hooves of any elk—young or old, male or female—can be affected by TAHD. Tests show TAHD is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat. Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk through the Department's [online reporting form](#).

Additionally, anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area. WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, refer to [WDFW's](#)

[website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Regulations Pamphlet.

Deer



Mule deer buck harvest. Photo by Scott Moore.

Mule deer hunting is the bread and butter of the Wenatchee District. While the district does support a few white-tailed deer, mule deer far outnumber them and dominate hunters' attention. Chelan County has become a destination hunt for many mule deer enthusiasts across Washington, with late season limited entry permits being highly prized. Within District 7, hunters can pursue deer across a range of habitats, from high alpine basins along the crest of the Cascades in Chelan County to expanses of sagebrush in Douglas County. Deer in Chelan County are part of the East Slope Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone, while deer in Douglas County are part of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone. For more information on these herds and mule deer management in Washington, please refer to the [Washington State Mule Deer Management Plan](#).

In 2023, 1,312 deer were harvested from Chelan and Douglas Counties during the general season in 2023, an approximate 3% decrease from 2022's harvest of 1,355 deer (Figures 10 and 11). These

numbers represent a significant drop from the number of mule deer harvested from District 7 in years 2020 (2,061 deer) and 2021 (1,800 deer). There are likely several factors contributing to the last two year’s low general season harvests, including the decreased turnout of modern firearm hunters compared to 2020 and 2021 and unseasonably warm temperatures before and during the modern firearm season and well into the late archery and muzzleloader seasons (Figure 12). Archers experienced a particularly stark drop in success in 2023 compared to 2022 and lower than the previous 5-year average, while modern firearm hunters experienced a slight bump in success between 2022 and 2023 (Figure 13 and 14).

Approximately 85% of mule deer found within Chelan County (comprised of the Wenatchee Mountains and Chelan subherds of the East Slope Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone) are migratory and summer at higher elevations outside of the most popular GMUs (including Entiat and Swakane). Modern firearm hunters represent the largest portion of mule deer hunters by far, and hunters struggled to find deer in low to mid-elevations throughout Chelan County in both 2022 and 2023, as the heat and lack of snow at high elevations meant that bucks had no reason to head to lower ground in October and even early November.

It’s unknown whether a decline in overall mule deer abundance in Chelan County is another factor that contributed to the low general season harvest of 2022 and 2023 but it appears likely from aerial post-hunt survey data (refer to Chelan County mule deer section). Additionally, aerial survey data strongly suggests that a decline in mule deer abundance within the Douglas subherd of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone can at least partially explain the low harvest in Douglas County in 2022 and 2023 (refer to Douglas County mule deer section).

The Entiat (GMU 247), Swakane (GMU 250), and Mission (GMU 251) units tend to be the most productive deer hunting units in Chelan County, and 2023 was no exception (Table 2). In Douglas County, the most productive GMU in 2023 was the Big Bend Unit (GMU 248), as is almost always the case (Table 3).

Figure 10. Total number of mule deer harvested by antler point in the general season in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

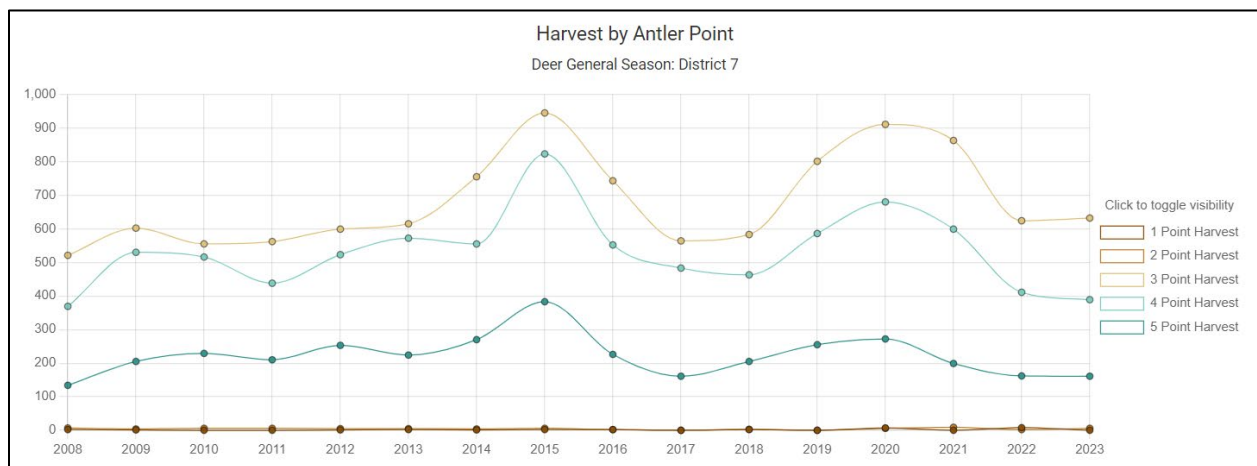


Figure 11. Total number of mule deer harvested by weapon type in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

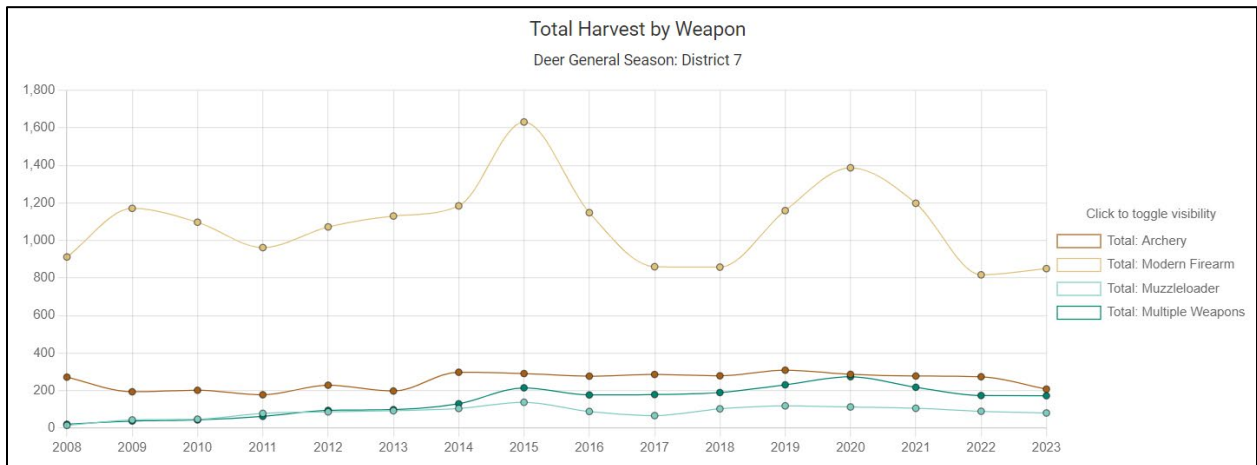


Figure 12. Number of hunters by weapon type for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

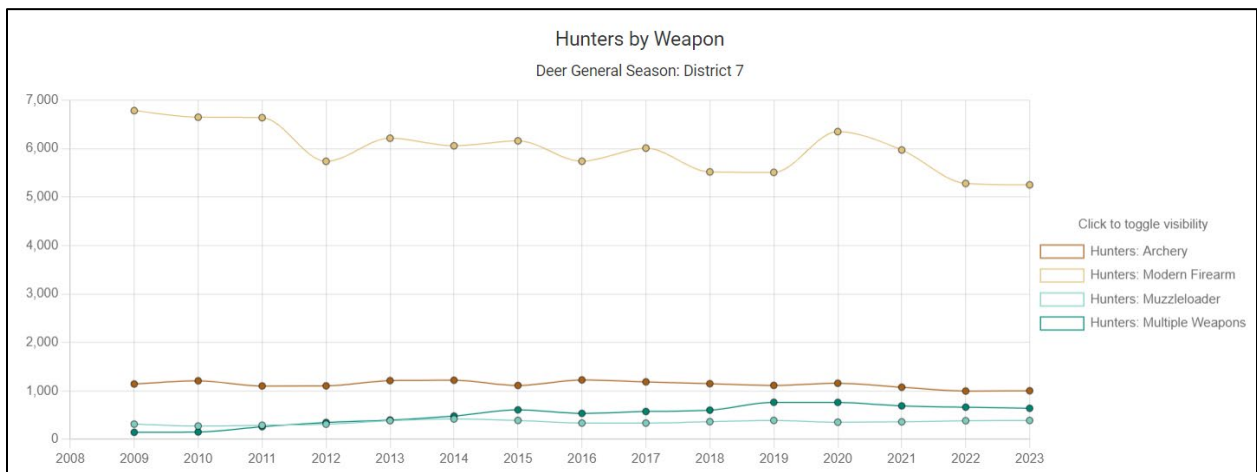


Figure 13. Percentage of harvest success by weapon type for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

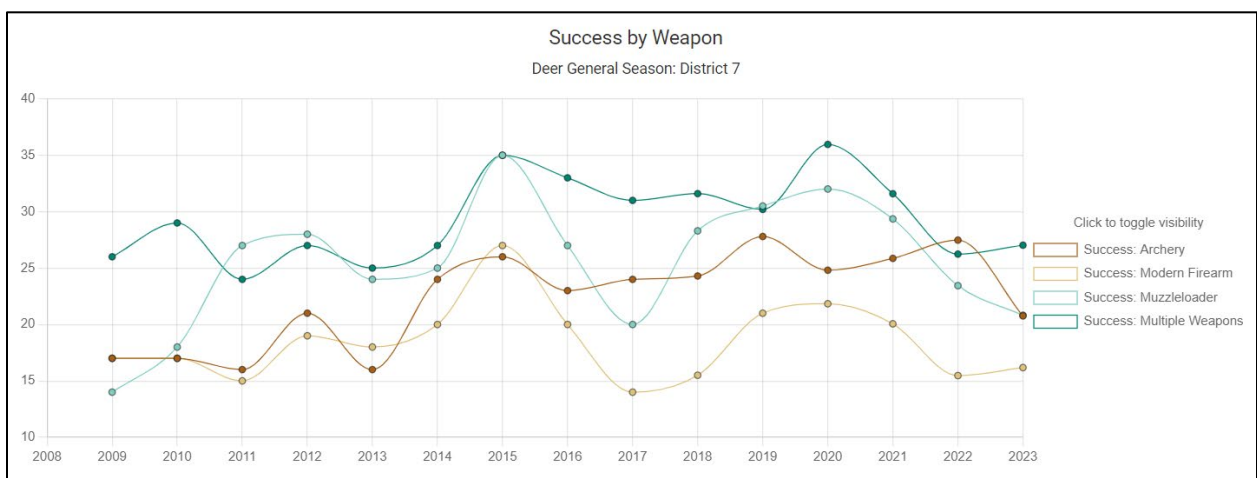
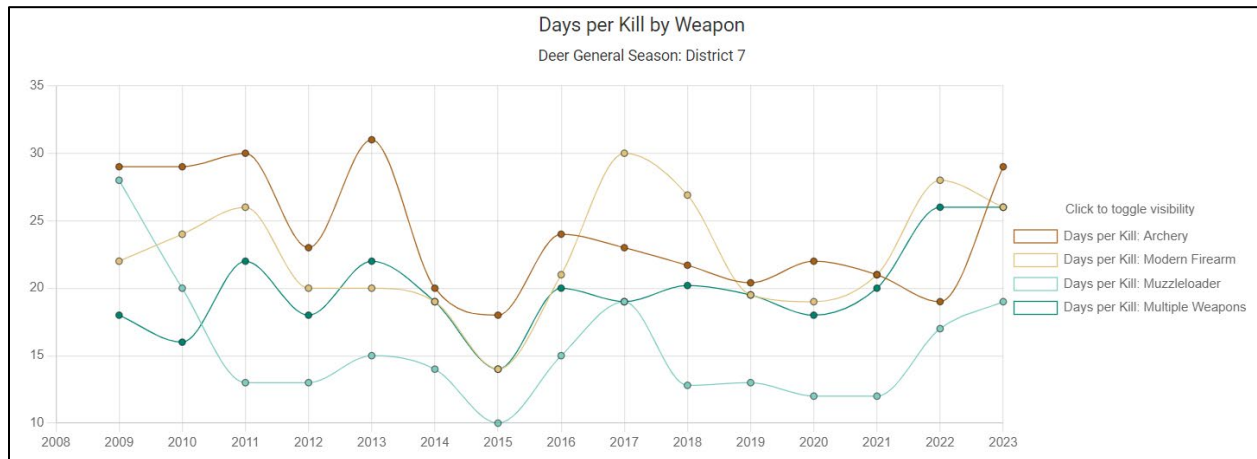


Figure 14. Number of days spent hunting per kill for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.



Chelan County mule deer

***Please note while reading the information provided below that the [Pioneer Fire](#) currently burning a large area on the north shore of Lake Chelan and the resulting [USFS Closure Area](#) and [NPS Closure Area](#) are likely to impact many general and special permit seasons occurring in GMU 243 (Manson) in 2024. General seasons that will be particularly impacted by reduced access this year are the High Buck Hunt in Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, the general modern firearm season in GMU 243, and the early archery and muzzleloader seasons in GMU 243.**

The Chelan County portion of the district’s management goal 25 bucks per 100 does (minimum) post-season has been successful in providing hunters with opportunities for quality bucks over the last 10 years, and aerial surveys have found increasing buck:doe ratios in that time frame. The December 2023 aerial survey yielded a robust estimated buck:doe ratio of 29:100, well over the management goal. This represents an increase from the 24:100 buck:doe ratio estimated from the December 2021 aerial survey, which in turn was a slight increase from the 2018 buck:doe estimate of 23:100 and a major increase from the 2016 buck:doe ratio estimated at 18:100. At the same time that buck:doe ratios have been rising in Chelan County deer, post-hunt fawn:doe ratios have been declining. The 2023 fawn:doe ratio was estimated at 66:100, which, while still robust, represents a decline from the 2021 fawn:doe ratio of 76:100, and a greater decline from the 2018 fawn:doe ratio of 86:100.

Several years of decreased harvest, declining fawn:doe ratios, ongoing environmental impacts to mule deer such as drought, and many reports from hunters seeing fewer mule deer on the landscape throughout much of the county have all contributed to the decision to reduce antlerless hunting pressure in Chelan County. To conserve does in this portion of the East Slope Cascades, several changes have been made to the 2024 general deer season and special permit seasons. The early archery general season in GMUs 244-247 and 249, in which previously a legal deer was defined as 3 pt. minimum or antlerless, is now restricted to 3 pt. minimum harvest. Additionally, all Chelan County special permits previously in the antlerless category are now reduced in number but liberalized to allow harvest of any deer.

The 2022 and 2023 fire seasons have not been extensive enough to displace significant numbers of deer, and the nature of general season hunts in Chelan County remains unchanged. Ultimately, fall weather and deer movements determine harvest success in large part because greater snowfall results in mule deer moving farther off high-elevation summer range and into mid-to-low elevation transitional and winter range. The Chelan County mule deer herd spends winters on the breaks along the Columbia River and surrounding foothills but disperses into the large expanse of the Cascades during summer. These movements are characteristic of a strategy used by mule deer to maximize forage quality during summer and minimize energy expenditure during winter. Some Chelan mule deer travel as far as 40 to 50 miles while transitioning between summer and winter range.

A typical hillside of mule deer habitat in the Cascades will transition through the seasons from bright green in the spring and summer to light green to yellow, to orange, to red, to brown, then to bare branches. While we see changes in color, mule deer are perceiving changes in forage quality. The summer forage that supports deer and allows them to produce young and grow antlers does not retain its high quality all year, so as it changes, so do the habitats that deer occupy.

As early as mid-September, deer start responding to changes in vegetation by moving lower in elevation and occupying north-facing slopes where conditions are cooler and wetter, and forage is of better quality. From mid-September through the onset of winter, deer respond to changes in the quality of the available forage and utilize areas that best meet their needs. By mid-November, bucks are in condition and focused on breeding, but until then they are focused on food and security.

While hunting on winter ranges may sound appealing, as hunters can see long distances, most Chelan County deer will still be in areas of higher quality forage and greater security during the general seasons. Most deer will be in thicker cover where the food is higher quality and they have protection. These are usually the brushy north-facing slopes or at elevations much higher than typical open mule deer winter range.

There is one Deer Area in District 7 (2017, North Lake Chelan), a site of localized deer concentration where crop damage is a concern. WDFW provides limited, permit-only opportunities here to harvest antlerless deer to deter mule deer presence and reduce crop damage. Refer to [Washington Hunting Seasons and Rules](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions. A map of Deer Area 2017 is available on [WDFW’s website](#).

Table 2. The number of harvested mule deer for each GMU within Chelan County in 2023.

GMU	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
243	0	104	104	0	2	55	33	14
244	0	11	11	0	0	2	5	4
245	13	67	80	0	0	31	25	11
246	10	62	72	0	0	24	28	10

GMU	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
247	39	142	181	0	2	75	44	21
249	0	4	4	0	0	0	2	2
250	29	163	192	0	2	99	35	27
251	0	178	178	0	0	77	71	30
TOTALS	91	731	822	0	6	363	243	119

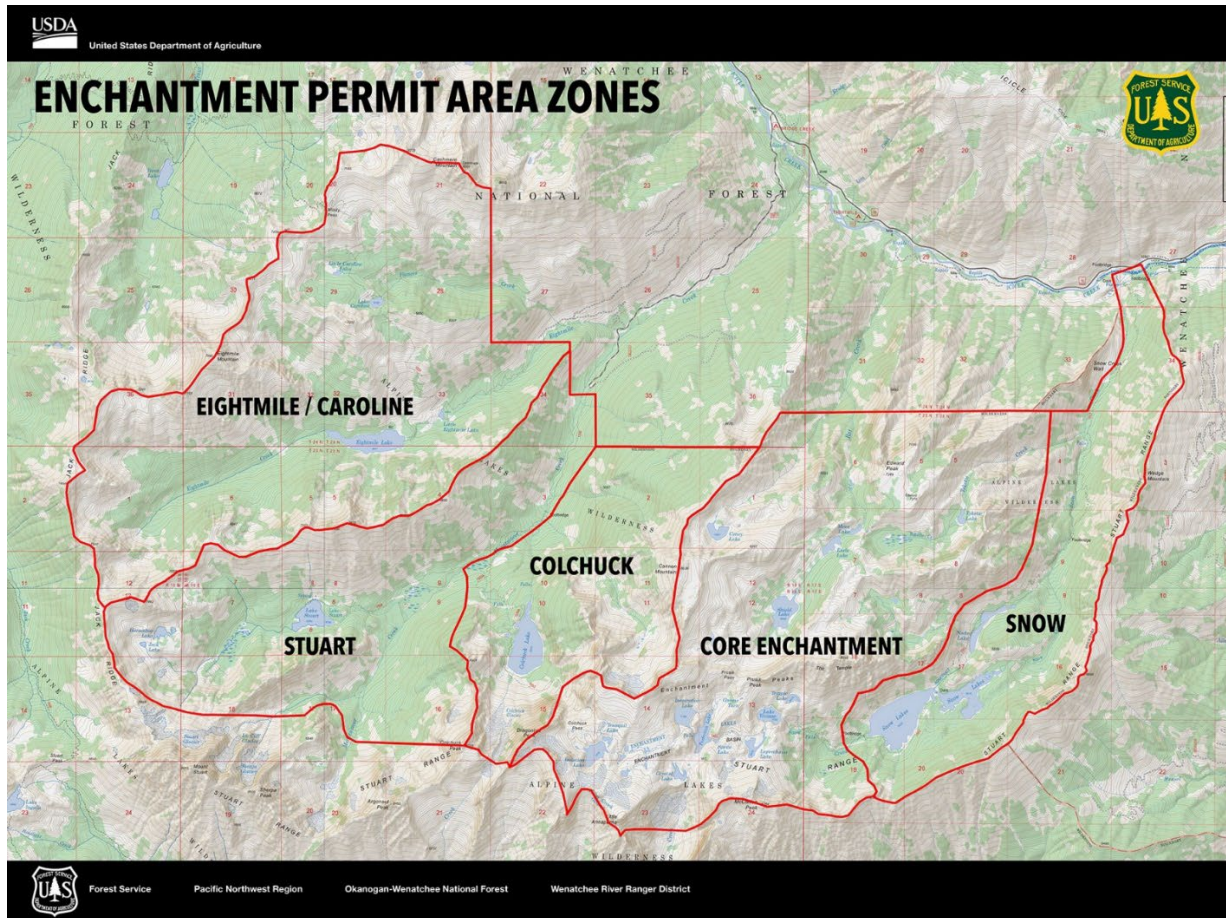
High buck hunts

High buck hunts in the Cascade Range are one of the most popular opportunities provided in the district. Each year, hunters don backpacks and ride pack strings into the heart of wilderness areas to pursue mule deer bucks and black bears. Within District 7, the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, Henry M. Jackson Wilderness, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area include open high buck hunt units. The administrative boundaries of these wildernesses and the recreation area are the hunt boundaries. Please note that **the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness is closed to high buck hunting Sept. 15-25** but opens for early archery where it overlaps GMU 243 (refer to the note on Pioneer Fire at the beginning of this section).

Hunters need to be aware of permit requirements in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and the Enchantment Permit Area Zones. U.S. Forest Service permits are now required for **day and overnight** use in any of these five zones (Figure 15). Permits are distributed through a lottery drawing system and are highly sought after. Hunters who have hunted these zones in the past need to be aware that permitting dates and requirements have changed. Without a permit, they may not have access to previously hunted areas. For more information about the Enchantment Permit Area Zones, visit the [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest webpage](#) or contact USFS directly.

High-quality topographic maps and aerial imagery can help hone in on spots to target for scouting. Bucks can be difficult to encounter during high hunt seasons because of the complex topography of Chelan County and the vast acreage of dissected terrain and escape cover available that time of year. Hunters should scout early, when bucks are still in velvet and protecting their antlers, making them more likely to occupy less dense habitat, increasing their visibility. During the high hunt, deer are still on their abundant summer range and occur at low densities, making this hunt even more challenging.

Figure 15. Map of the Enchantment permit area zones within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.



Douglas County mule deer

Post-hunt ground surveys were conducted for the Douglas subherd in November/December 2023 and yielded a buck:doe ratio of 18:100. While this represents a decline from the B:D ratio of 20:100 estimated from 2022 post-hunt aerial surveys of the Douglas subherd in and is lower than the previous 5-year average of 22:100, it is still well-within the management objective for this herd of 15-19 bucks per 100 does. The fawn:doe ratio derived from 2023 Douglas ground surveys was 48:100, a marked decrease from the 67:100 estimated during aerial surveys in 2022 but a less pronounced decrease from the more comparable 52:100 F:D ratio derived from 2022 post-hunt ground surveys. Still, 48:100 marks a considerable departure from the previous 5-year average fawn:doe ratio of 65:100 does estimated from Douglas subherd ground surveys. Further, the 2022 post-hunt abundance estimate calculated from aerial sightability surveys was 11,873 mule deer. This represents a 22% decline from the last aerial survey performed here in 2018, which returned a population estimate of 15,254 (Figure 16).

The drop in fawn:doe ratios and significantly lower abundance estimate in 2022 over that of 2018 is cause for concern, particularly when paired with reports of hunters and landowners seeing fewer deer in some of the Douglas County GMUs in recent years. Biologists do not know what is driving this apparent

decline, and several factors could be at play including prolonged drought, severe wildfires, disease, and emigration to other parts of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone. Biologists seek to learn more in the coming years through continuing ground and aerial surveys. There are also discussions about potentially initiating a collaring project to track the movements of mule deer and investigate mortalities.

In the meantime, strong evidence of a herd in decline calls for more conservative antlerless harvest, and several changes have been made to the 2024 general deer season and special permit seasons in Douglas County designed to conserve the number of does in the herd. The early archery general season in GMUs 248, 254, 262, 266, and 269, in which previously a legal deer was defined as 3 pt. minimum or antlerless, is now restricted to 3 pt. minimum harvest. Additionally, fewer second deer antlerless special permits are available in Douglas County for the 2024 hunting season, and special permits in the youth, hunters with disabilities, and 65 years or over categories that previously allowed for only antlerless harvest have been reduced in number but liberalized to allow for the harvest of any deer. Special permit buck harvest opportunity is increased in Douglas County for the 2024 hunting season with the addition of two new any buck hunts, one in the modern firearm category in GMU 254 (St. Andrews) and one in the muzzleloader category in GMU 269 (Moses Coulee).

While deer numbers may be down in recent years, Douglas County still offers good mule deer hunting opportunity in a very different environment than found in Chelan County. Unlike Chelan County's largely migratory population, Douglas County's mule deer herd is thought to consist primarily of residents, and the landscape here poses a different set of conditions for deer hunters. Because much of the county is comprised of private lands, hunters have less opportunity to pursue deer freely across habitats, as they must pay attention to ownership boundaries. However, deer are more vulnerable in Douglas County's relatively open habitat with an extensive road network, compared to the rugged terrain of the Cascades.

Without the diverse cover provided by mountains and forests, buck escapement is lower in the sagebrush. This means a smaller portion of the bucks surviving are mature. Deer utilize the dry shrubsteppe habitat where forage quality remains higher longer, while balancing the need for security. Optimal hunting areas will include a mixture of sagebrush cover or steep, broken, rocky terrain and adjacent agricultural fields for forage (mostly winter wheat and canola fields). Large expanses of sagebrush, while not providing the best forage, can give deer the security they need.

In the broken Coulee County, the topography provides security for deer and riparian vegetation provides food resources. Deer in these areas often become experts at living in small, secure habitat pockets where they meet their needs and avoid hunters. While most of the county is private, more than 80,000 acres are enrolled in WDFW's Hunter Access Program. Start scouting now for deer herds on private lands and reach out to landowners before the rush of other hunters descend on them days before the season starts. Many farmers are partial to allowing youth hunters.

Figure 16. Aerial survey estimates of Douglas County mule deer population and structure, calculated from the modified Idaho Sightability Model, 2017-2022; 90% confidence intervals are demonstrated with brackets.

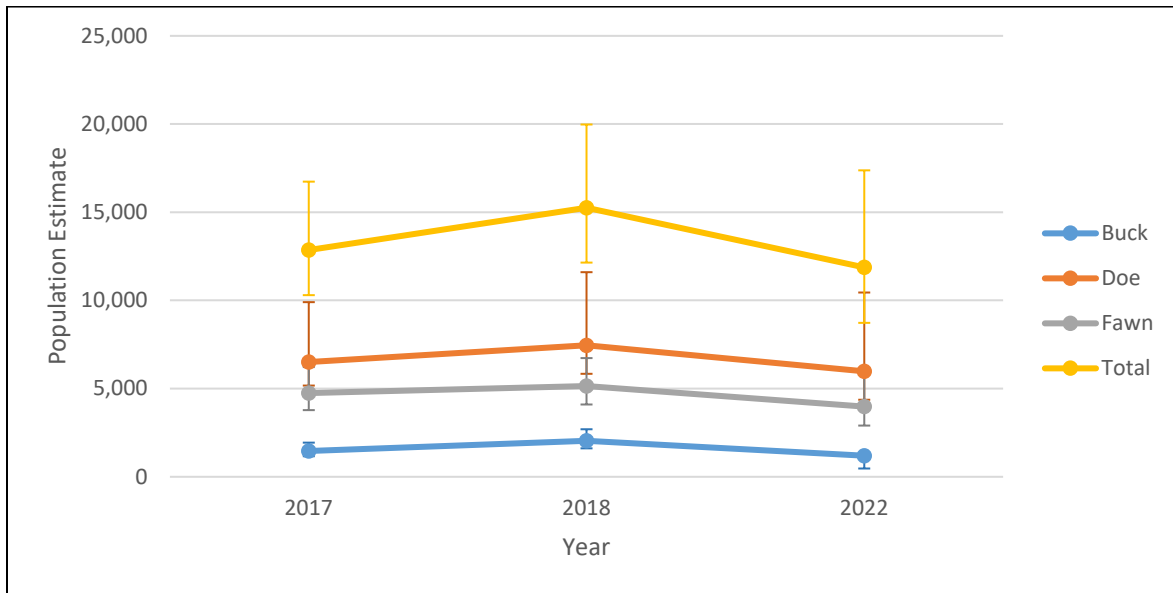


Table 3. The number of harvested mule deer for each GMU within Douglas County in 2023.

GMU	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
248	9	107	116	0	0	68	27	12
254	6	55	61	0	0	30	22	3
260	5	75	80	0	0	47	21	7
262	2	67	69	0	0	43	20	4
266	11	67	78	0	0	40	19	8
269	0	86	86	0	0	41	37	8
TOTALS	33	457	490	0	0	269	146	42

Black bear



Bears at Mud Creek. Photo by WDFW.

District 7 continues to provide great black bear hunting opportunity while maintaining a stable population with healthy age and sex composition. Black bears are common throughout much of Chelan County, particularly in the forested slopes of areas such as Mission Ridge, Blewett Pass, and Lake Wenatchee. In Douglas County, hunters can find bears sparsely distributed in small numbers in brushy riparian draws along the Columbia River and other drainages. Douglas County is part of the Columbia Basin Bear Management Unit (BMU 9), which is largely comprised of the most arid lands in Washington and makes up the smallest percentage of bear harvest in the state by far. Typically, fewer than 15 bears are harvested from the Douglas GMUs each year, most of which are taken from brushy riparian areas in GMU 248 (Big Bend).

Recent research by WDFW monitoring bear survival and productivity has contributed to our understanding of black bear population densities and sex and age structure in District 7. However, age analysis conducted using the teeth of harvested bears remains the most consistent method of monitoring black bear populations.

Research conducted in Chelan County indicates that fall forage availability influences reproduction and survivorship of cubs and yearlings. Black bears in Chelan County typically have a large amount of forage available to them and are most predictably found in areas suitable for berry crops, like huckleberries. As the season progresses and temperatures decrease, bears tend to move up in elevation to take

advantage of berries that are able to continue ripening in the later growing season of higher altitudes. By October, berries become scarce, and bears enter a period of frenzied eating known as polyphagia to prepare for hibernation. During this time, bears wander a broader range of elevations and habitats in search of all possible sources of food. Most bears harvested in the district are taken during open deer and elk seasons. Dedicated bear hunters will often hunt early in the season when bears are foraging on predictable annual berry crops. The incidental harvest that occurs during open deer and elk seasons is much more dependent on bear behavior and how widely they will have to travel for food.

All GMUs in Chelan County except for 243 (Manson), are part of the East Cascades Bear Management Unit (BMU 6). The East Cascades BMU is comprised of 23 GMUs along the Central Cascades, and the Wenatchee District is normally responsible for a substantial amount of this unit's harvest. While success relative to effort fluctuates from year to year, participation has been relatively stable, with approximately 4,000-4,600 hunters participating in the black bear season throughout BMU 6 each year. In Chelan County- and BMU 6 as a whole- GMUs 245 (Chiwawa) and 251 (Mission) consistently produce the highest numbers of harvested bears (Figure 17). BMU 6 saw a considerable decrease in black bear harvest and hunter success in fall 2023 as compared to 2022, with 26% fewer bears harvested and a drop-in success rate from 9.7% to 6.7%. Likewise, the North Cascades Bear Management Unit, BMU 5, which is made up almost entirely of Okanogan County GMUs with the exception of GMU 243 (Manson) in Chelan County, experienced a similarly stark drop in bear harvest and hunter success between 2022 and 2023.

However, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that bear harvest and hunter success declined in BMUs 5 and 6 as a whole, harvest in Chelan County itself experienced a significantly less pronounced reduction in harvest between 2022 and 2023, in which 198 and 168 bears, respectively, were harvested in all Chelan GMUs combined. Additionally, the 168 bears harvested in Chelan County in 2023 represent a number consistent with and a little better than the 5-year average of 153 bears taken here annually. Also interesting to note is that of all the GMUs encompassed by BMU 5, the lone Chelan County unit, 243 (Manson), was the only GMU to experience an increase in bear harvest in 2023 over 2022, and a substantial one at that. The 43 bears harvested in the Manson GMU in 2023 represent an all-time record for that GMU and a 47% increase over its previous 5-year average (Figure 17 & 18). However, bear hunters interested in GMU 243 for the 2024 season should note that much of the Manson unit currently falls within the [Pioneer Fire Closure Area](#), and is likely to remain so until late in the season.

Overall, examining Chelan County bear harvest on its own affords a more encouraging outlook on the 2024 season in the Wenatchee District. More importantly for this upcoming season, reports from the field of fair to good berry crops throughout much of Chelan County and a higher than usual frequency of bear sightings in several GMUs suggest that the 2024 bear season will be a productive one in District 7, with harvest and success rates likely remaining at or above 2023 levels. Hunters statewide are required to submit a premolar tooth from all harvested black bears by Dec. 1. Please contact the district office if you need assistance with submitting a tooth. For more information, refer to page 68 of the Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Figure 17. The number of black bears harvested during the general season in each Game Management Unit (GMU) in District 7. The total number of bears harvested in 2023 (orange) are compared to the 5-year average (blue).

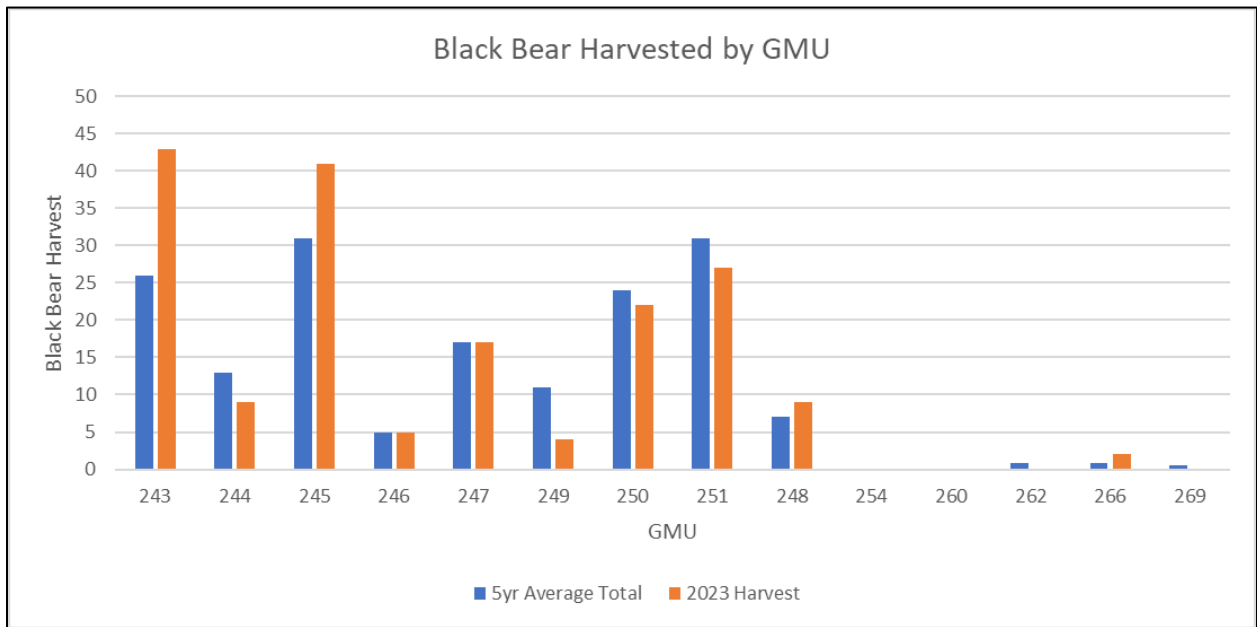
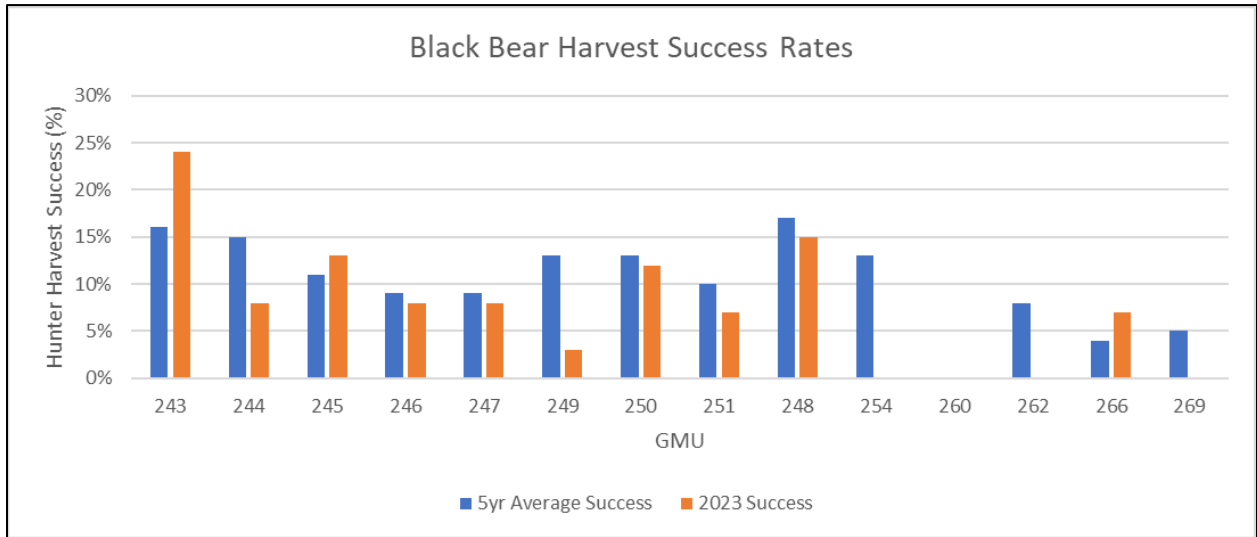


Figure 18. Black bear general season harvest success rates (%) in each GMU in District 7. The 2023 success rates (orange) are compared to the 5-year averages (blue).

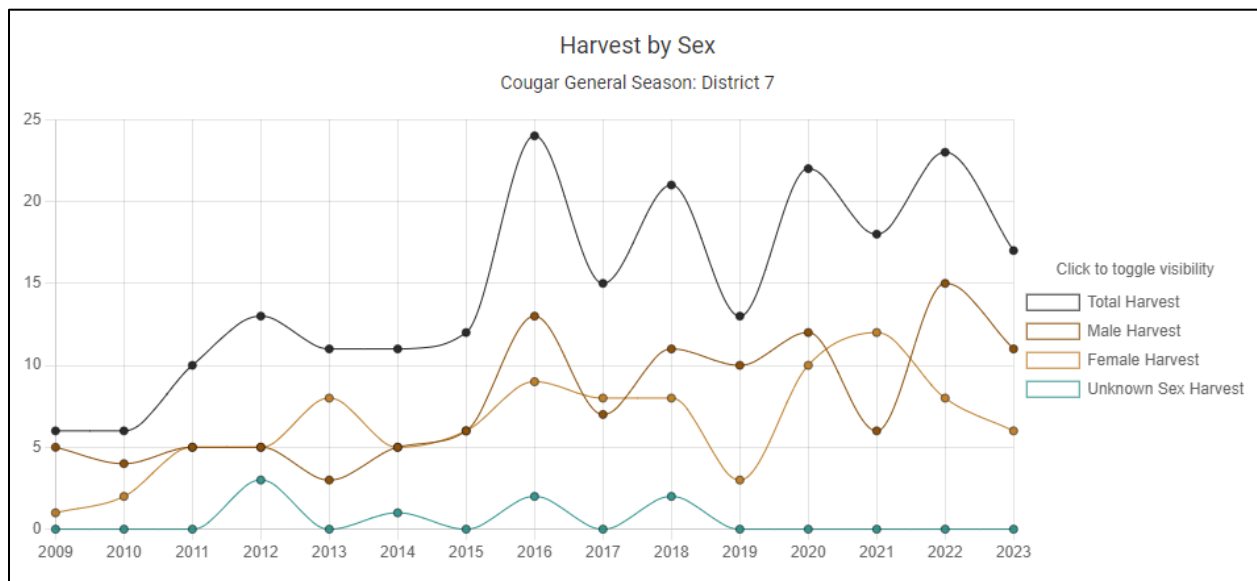


Cougar

Like black bears, population monitoring for cougar management comes primarily from harvest data. In District 7, cougar hunt areas are split into four different Population Management Units (PMU) in Chelan County and a Columbia Basin PMU which includes Douglas County. Within each of these hunt areas, harvest guidelines are established based on ungulate habitat and cougar population biology. Although cougar harvest fluctuates from year to year, cougar populations appear stable in District 7. In 2023, 24 cougars were harvested in District 7 which is right in line with the 10-year average of 25 (Figure 19). Cougars are dispersed widely throughout both Chelan and Douglas counties and both offer good hunting opportunities, especially when enough snow falls to allow for tracking.

2023 cougar harvest data are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage.

Figure 9. Number of cougars harvested by sex during general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.



While many cougars are harvested in Chelan County opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons, dedicated cougar hunters will wait until snow accumulation allows for tracking later in the winter. Cougars are most active when deer are most active, typically at dawn and dusk. Cougars follow deer herds and can typically be found at lower elevations as the early season progresses and deer move off summer range and migrate to winter range. Douglas County also offers good cougar hunting opportunities. Most hunters will focus on the Columbia River breaks, Moses Coulee, and Rufus Woods Reservoir. This rough country allows cougars access to deer herds while providing stalking cover. Successful hunters often wait for snow and track cats on foot.

In July 2024, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved changes to cougar hunting seasons. Going forward, there will be a single cougar season from September 1 to March 31, and there will be a cap set for each population management unit (PMU) at the intrinsic growth rate of 13% based

on specific statewide density estimates. All known human-caused cougar mortalities will count towards the 13% cap (e.g., cougars removed to protect humans or livestock will count towards the cap). If a PMU reaches the 13% cap before the season opens September 1, the cap for that PMU will extend to 20%. Once the assigned cap is reached, that area will close to cougar harvest. All hunters are responsible for knowing if their hunt area is open or closed; to confirm its status, all hunters must call the cougar hotline (1-866-364-4868) or [check online](#) prior to hunting.

To facilitate implementation of the cap, all successful cougar hunters are required to report their harvest to WDFW via the hotline within 72 hours of harvest (press 3 after greeting), and provide WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill. The **unfrozen** hide and skull must be presented to WDFW within five days of the kill. Proof of sex must be left attached for inspection and it is recommended that hunters insert a stick perpendicularly in the cougar's mouth to prevent the jaw from locking, as a tooth will need to be extracted at the time of inspection. Learn more about these changes to the [cougar hunting season](#).

Bighorn sheep



Bighorn sheep harvest. Photo by Mark Beardemphl.

Within District 7, WDFW manages three bighorn sheep herds in Chelan County: Swakane, Chelan Butte, and Manson. Each of these herds is the result of multiple translocation efforts beginning in 1969. Bighorn sheep continue to thrive in District 7, offering prized, once-in-a-lifetime sheep hunting opportunity sought by thousands of special permit applicants each year (Figure 20). Hunters selected under these drawings are encouraged to contact District 7 for additional information. All hunters harvesting a bighorn sheep ram in Washington are required to have the horn sets measured and plugged by WDFW within 10 days. Hunters need to call a WDFW Regional or District Office to **schedule an appointment** with a biologist for this inspection.



Each harvested ram must be plugged with an aluminum pin featuring a unique ID number. Photo by WDFW.

Swakane

The core range of this herd is within the Swakane Unit of the Chelan Butte Wildlife Area and the surrounding public lands adjacent to the Wildlife Area. Hunting pressure on this herd is low, as only two mature ram permits have been offered here each year. The Swakane herd is famed for producing the world record California bighorn in 2010 as scored by Safari Club International. Over the past two decades, this herd has increased from approximately 100 animals to a minimum count of 200 animals in 2019, well above the population objective for this herd. A 2022 spring aerial survey of the Swakane herd returned a minimum count of 195 sheep with a ram:ewe ratio of 84:100 and a robust population of mature rams. An aerial survey was not performed in 2023, however the ground-based surveys yielded a minimum count of 186 bighorn sheep in the Swakane subherd, with a high ram:ewe ratio at 95 rams per 100 ewes. The 2024 season will no doubt provide another year of world-class bighorn ram hunting opportunity.

Given the consistently high minimum counts and stable population trend seen in the Swakane herd, a new adult ewe season is being offered here in 2024. For the first time, two hunters will have the opportunity to harvest an adult ewe in the Swakane concurrent with the Hunters with Disabilities- Adult Ewe season open on Chelan Butte from October 11-31. This hunt follows the Swakane Any Ram hunt and thus will not have an effect on ram permit holders in the Swakane.

Bands of sheep of both sexes are routinely found on the cliffs and steep slopes along the Columbia River breaks. Permit winners can take advantage of the network of USFS roads within the Swakane bighorn hunt unit to gain access to high points for scoping out groups of rams. Hunters can also glass for this herd from the east side of the Columbia River at pullouts on Highway 97. In recent years, the Swakane herd has expanded its range, and sheep are regularly observed as far north as the Entiat River.

Chelan Butte

This herd is central to Chelan Butte between the Columbia River and the city of Chelan. The Chelan Butte herd provides some of the best access of all the sheep herds in Washington and is known to produce large rams. This fall will be no exception as the November 2023 aerial survey returned a ram:ewe ratio of 91:100, with 44% of the rams being mature ($\frac{3}{4}$ curl or full curl). Apart from any ram hunting opportunities, WDFW offers both ewe and juvenile ram permit hunts for the Chelan Butte herd for hunters with disabilities.

Permit levels for ewe hunts have been reduced due to multiple years of lower-than-expected minimum counts, and in 2024 two adult ewe and two juvenile ram permits are available for hunters with disabilities. Additionally, the four adult ewe permits offered in Chelan Butte have been discontinued, and instead one adult ewe permit is being offered in a newly added youth category for Chelan Butte. The relatively high number of ewe permits offered in Chelan Butte dates back to 2018, when the previous year's high count was well over the population objective at 218 individuals. However, the herd appears to have declined since that time, and the past three years of aerial surveys have yielded minimum counts of only 84-114 sheep despite extensive survey coverage (2023 minimum count = 93). It is unknown what factors may be leading to this decline, but ewe harvest must be more conservative for the foreseeable future as adult ewe survival and reproduction is essential to maintaining and growing a bighorn sheep herd. In the meantime, the high proportion of $\frac{3}{4}$ and full curl rams in this herd still makes for exceptional California bighorn hunting and some of the best sheep hunting in the state.

A county road bisects the Chelan Butte Wildlife Area, providing access to state and federal lands open for hunting. Some of the best glassing is available from the hang-gliding launch near the summit of Chelan Butte. For views of the cliffs along the Columbia River, try glassing by boat or from points along Highway 97 east of the Columbia River. Sheep in this herd are concentrated on the side of Chelan Butte facing the river, and range north as far as Wells Dam although the majority of sheep can be found in the Chelan Butte unit of the Chelan Wildlife Area. Hunters have also harvested rams from Deer Mountain, just north of Chelan.

The Manson herd primarily occupies USFS land on the north shore of Lake Chelan, concentrated between Antilon Creek north to Lone Fir Creek. The Manson herd occupies some of the most rugged and inaccessible terrain of all the sheep herds in Chelan County and Washington as a whole. This herd is most readily accessible by boat on Lake Chelan. USFS maintains several public docks and campgrounds along the Lake Chelan shoreline. A Federal Dock Permit is required to use any USFS dock between May 1 – Oct. 31. This herd can also be accessed by 4WD vehicle and what will likely be a steep downhill hike towards the lake by driving Grade Creek Road.

However, access to the Manson hunt unit may be limited in 2024 due to the currently ongoing [Pioneer Fire](#), which at the time of this writing (July 2024) spans over 33,000 acres between the north shore of Lake Chelan and the Chelan/Okanogan County line, from Lone Fir Creek to Hazard Creek just south of Stehekin. Although the fire itself will most likely be out by November, it could last well into October, potentially impacting pre-season scouting. **More importantly, the current [USFS Fire Closure Area](#) spans the entirety of the Manson hunt unit, including all boat-in docks and campgrounds in the area and Grade Creek Rd. Provided that the fire does not move far south of Lone Fir Creek, all areas to the south of the current fire perimeter should be open by November. However, Prince Creek and all uplake docks and campgrounds will likely remain closed due to hazardous post-fire conditions. Likewise, the Safety Harbor boat-in campground remains closed in 2024 due to the risk of flash flooding caused by the 2017 Uno Peak fire.**

The Manson hunt season occurs much later than the season for the Swakane and Chelan Butte herds and is timed for when rams should be more concentrated at lower elevations along the lake. A spring 2024 aerial survey of the Manson herd yielded a minimum population count of 69 total bighorn sheep, with a ram:ewe ratio of 60 rams per 100 ewes. The comparatively remote, rugged terrain and lower number of rams in the Manson herd makes for a more challenging hunt than either the Chelan Butte or Swakane Units, with days per kill consistently averaging higher here than in the other two sheep units in Chelan County (Figure 21). While it may take hunters more time to find the ram of their choice, hunters in the Manson unit still enjoy a 100% success rate each year along with some of the best scenery in the state.

District 7 bighorn sheep survival and health

Over winter survival for adult sheep remains high in all three of the Wenatchee District's sheep herds. Annual lamb mortality is characteristic of most sheep populations, where lambs suffer the highest rates of mortality during their first year of life, and the highest mortality of the year immediately after birth.

While *M. ovi* has not yet been detected in the Swakane, Chelan Butte, or Manson herds, this deadly pathogen has now infected bighorn herds to the north and south of District 7. The public is asked to be on the lookout for signs of infection in Chelan County's bighorn sheep, as *M. ovi* can cause pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn herds resulting in high sheep mortality. Symptoms of *M. ovi* in sheep include coughing, nasal discharge, persistent headshaking, lethargy, and sudden death. **Hunters are asked to report observations of any symptoms right away to the Wenatchee District Office and provide GPS coordinates for the observed sick or dead sheep.**

Figure 20. The number of applicants for Any Ram special hunt permits within District 7 from 2017 to 2023.

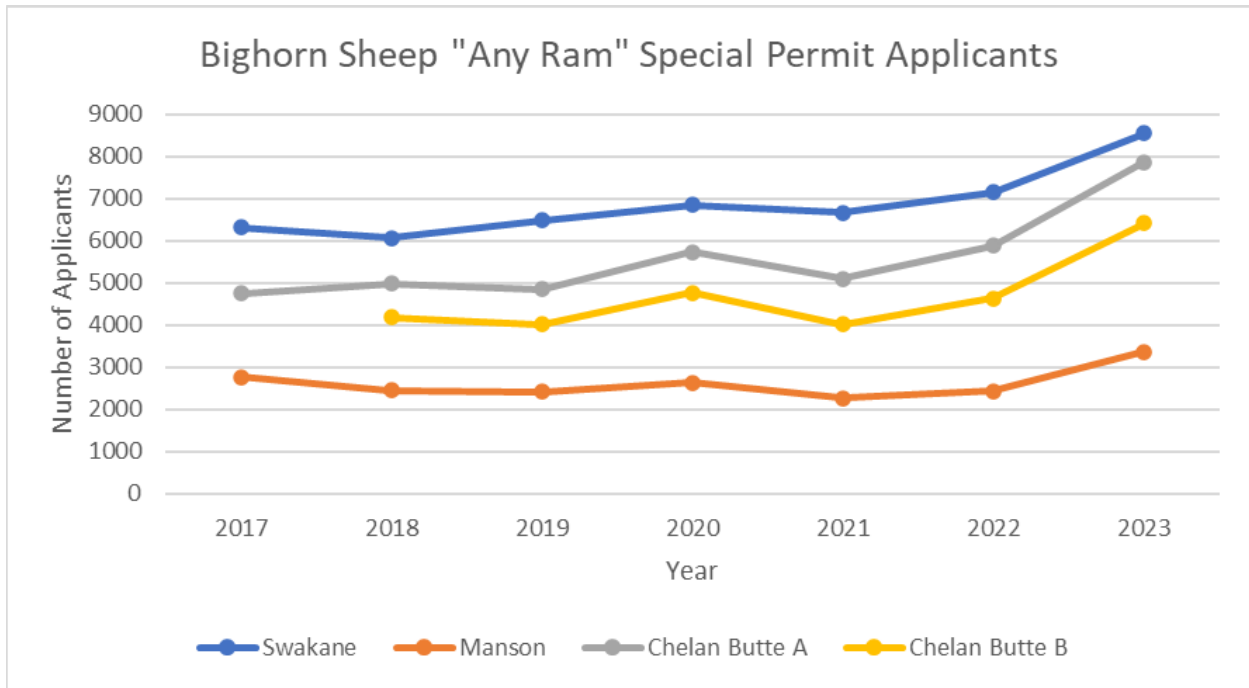
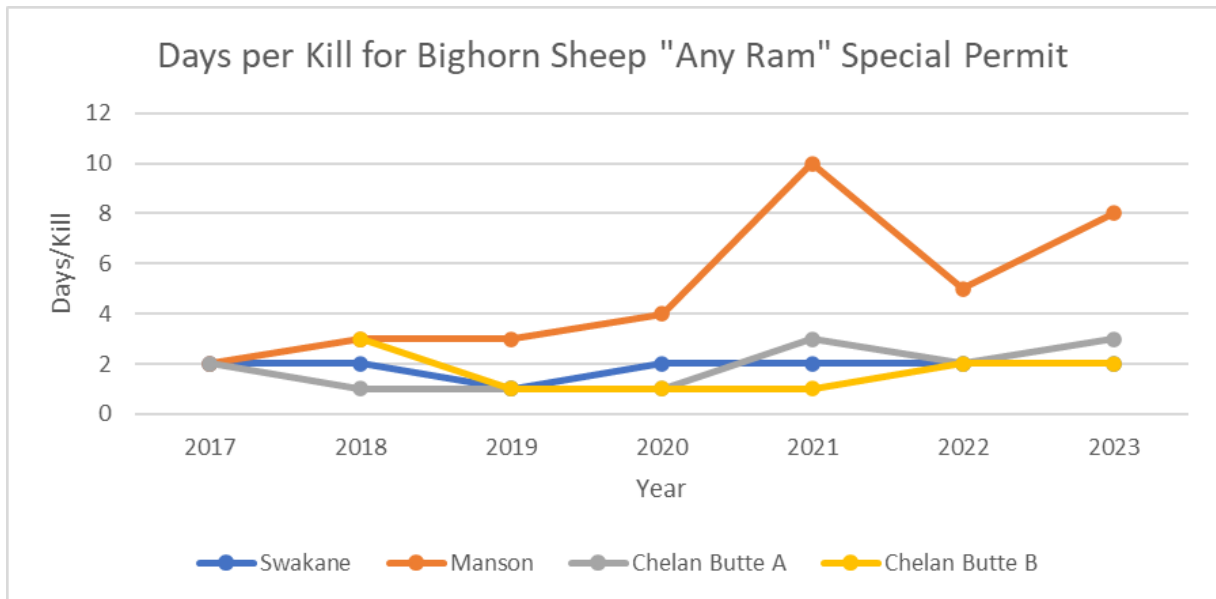


Figure 21. The number of days per harvest by each hunter for Any Ram special hunt permits within District 7 from 2017 through 2023.



Turkey



Youth turkey harvest. Photo by Adam Russell.

Merriam's turkeys in Chelan County descend from over 400 birds released between 2000-2002. Turkeys are not native to Washington, but their popularity with hunters make them a prized game species. Turkey densities in the district are relatively concentrated, but populations appear to be increasing in the northern portions of Douglas County and parts of Chelan County.

In Chelan County, the number of turkeys the landscape can support is determined primarily by the amount and availability of wintering habitat under typical snow depths. When winter snow depths reach 20 inches or more, wild turkeys have a difficult time making it through the winter. In areas where turkey can utilize ranches, barnyards, and farms for winter forage, they can show significant survival over winter. In Chelan County, GMUs 245, 250, and 251 produce the greatest turkey harvest.

The Stemilt Basin outside of Wenatchee and canyons of the Wenatchee River between Cashmere and Leavenworth offer good opportunities to find turkeys. Turkeys can often be found in these areas near the edge of private and public lands. Recent forest thinning projects and logging on public lands have created good spring turkey habitat. Areas to focus for turkeys on recently logged USFS lands include Derby Canyon, Yaksum Canyon, Mission Creek, Eagle Creek, and any other canyons that lead off Chumstick Highway between Leavenworth and Plain. Hunters can also find turkeys west through Plain, but they are often on private land. In Douglas County, GMUs 266 and 248 have been producing an increasing number of turkeys. Remember to scout early and get permission to hunt private lands.

Turkey hunters have enjoyed greater harvest opportunities in District 7 since 2021, when a fall season for the North Central PMU was introduced that allowed for the harvest of one turkey of either sex. All three fall seasons since have yielded very similar hunter turnout, harvest levels, and hunter success, with 611 hunters harvesting 218 turkeys in the North Central PMU in fall 2021, 706 hunters harvesting 220 turkeys in the fall of 2022, and 638 hunters harvesting 200 turkeys in the fall of 2023 (Table 4).

Beginning in spring 2022, the bag limit for bearded turkeys in Chelan County was raised from one to two. However, this increase in hunt opportunity has not yet resulted in an increase in hunter numbers or harvest during the spring season in PMU 20, and both metrics have actually decreased at roughly equivalent rates each of the past two years. Regardless, turkey opportunity remains strong in Chelan and Douglas counties with populations thought to be stable to increasing throughout District 7 and the updated bag limits remain in place for the coming fall and spring turkey seasons.

Table 4. Fall general season turkey harvest statistics for the North Central PMU (P20).

Year	Total Harvest	# of Hunters	Hunter Success Rate	Days per Kill
2023	200	638	31%	16
2022	220	706	31%	17
2021	218	618	36%	13

2023 turkey harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage.

Quail



Male California (valley) quail. Photo by WDFW.

District 7 offers excellent quail hunting opportunity. In both Chelan and Douglas counties, quail benefit from a variety of agricultural land uses that create edge habitat, such as where the edge of an irrigated field meets shrubsteppe, that they rely on. Edges of standing corn, wheat, or other grain fields, medium to heavy cover surrounding harvested fields, and other places where weed and grass seed are readily available are prime places to look for quail. Fortunately, areas such as these are plentiful in Douglas County.

Quail are also often found in thick tangles of trees and tall brush, especially near stream beds, valley bottoms with patches of Russian olive, oak or high sage; and weather-break tree lines and fence lines. In Chelan County especially, quail tend to be found in and around orchards and other irrigated crops. Swakane Canyon also provides great quail opportunity in Chelan County. However, public lands can be tough places to find larger coveys later in the season. To improve success, hunters should look for areas without easy access and spend some time seeking permission from private landowners.

Chelan County quail harvest dropped between 2022 and 2023 as did the number of hunters pursuing quail, and hunter days declined slightly as well (Figure 22). Because harvest numbers can be used as rough indices of population trends, this could mean that quail numbers may have remained relatively

stable in Chelan County from the previous year and the decrease in harvest might have more to do with hunter participation than with quail population size. Meanwhile, Douglas County saw a modest uptick in quail harvest in 2023 along with an inversely proportionate decrease in hunter numbers but an increase in hunter days, which could indicate a relatively stable quail population in Douglas County between years, as well (Figure 23).

Cool, wet weather prior to hatches and adequate early summer precipitation are ideal for increasing forage and insect mass for quail, whereas drought can stunt vegetation growth and reduce insect production, negatively impacting brood recruitment. Quail hunters in Chelan County will likely see lower numbers of birds during the 2024 season as, despite a cooler than average spring and early summer, much of the county remained in severe drought (and likely will continue to do so through the fall). However, quail numbers will likely remain stable or decline only mildly in Douglas County during the 2024 season due to the more moderate drought conditions present in much of the Columbia Basin.

2023 quail harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) website. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to previous years. For more information, refer to [Quail Hunting](#).

Figure 22. The total harvest for quail in Chelan County from 1997 through 2023.

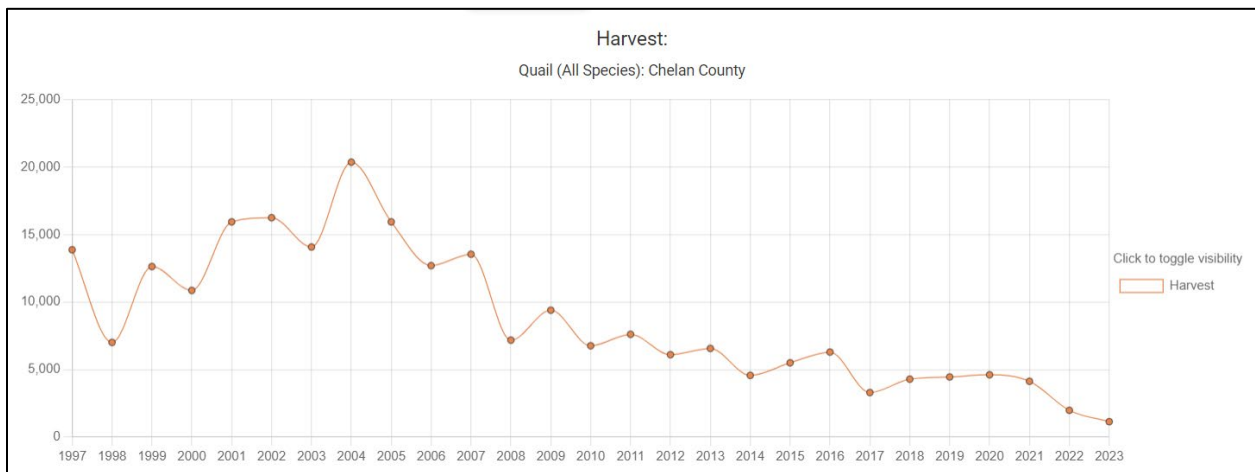
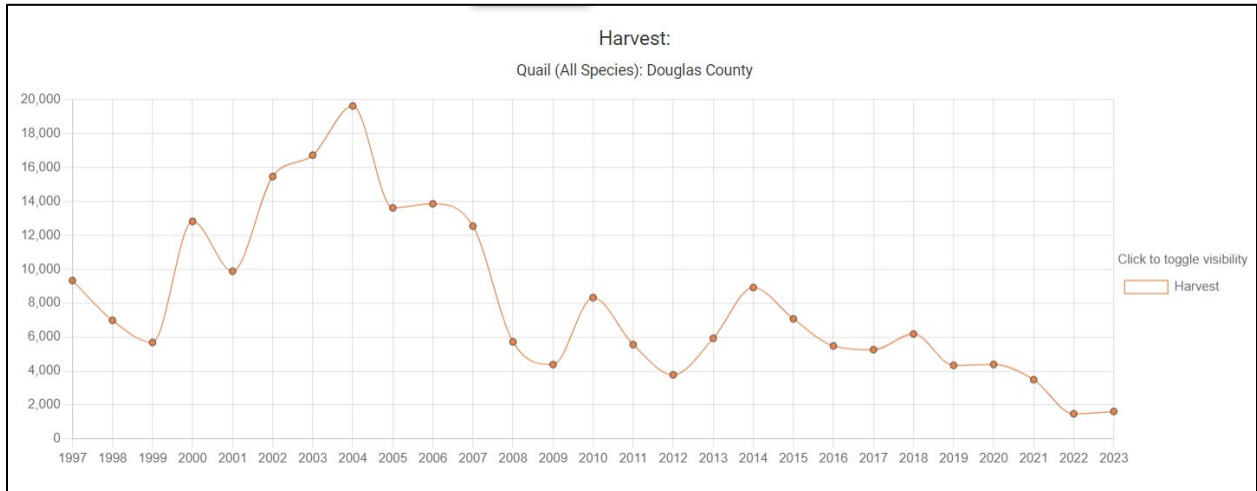


Figure 23. The total harvest for quail in Douglas County from 1997 through 2023.



Gray partridge



Gray partridge. Photo by Neil Paprocki.

Gray partridges, or “huns” as they are commonly called, are more common in Douglas County than in Chelan County and are associated with grasslands or agricultural areas that are interspersed with

patches of sagebrush. Brushy hedgerows adjacent to agricultural fields can often harbor huns in the winter. They occur at low density, with coveys dispersed across larger areas. Look to fields of grain crops enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with lots of grass cover extending into draws, as these are often a good place to find coveys. Covering a wide range of cover types is the best way to locate coveys.

District 7 hun harvest last season was lower than in 2022. Like chukar, hun populations are subject to steep yearly fluctuations, so the level of harvest in 2023 does not provide much insight into the outcome of the upcoming 2024 season. 2023 partridge harvest figures are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to previous years.

Chukar

Traditionally, more chukar have been harvested in District 7 than in any other district in the state, and opportunities for chukar hunting are numerous here due to a large amount of prime habitat on public lands. Chelan County has traditionally yielded more chukar harvest than Douglas County, but harvest rates have risen substantially in Douglas County over the past couple of years. In 2023, hunters harvested 1,914 chukar in Douglas County, more than double the previous year, and exceeded only by the harvest in Kittitas County (Figure 24a). This leap in chukar harvest in Douglas County is especially noteworthy because the number of hunters in 2023 remained consistent with hunter numbers in 2022 (Figure 24b). Whether east or west of the Columbia River, however, hunters have a large selection of lands to choose from throughout District 7.

On the Chelan County side of the Columbia River, BLM, USFS, DNR, Chelan PUD, and WDFW all manage lands with chukar hunting opportunities, such as the Chelan Wildlife Area and Rocky Reach Wildlife Area. Chukar are also abundant on the north shore of Lake Chelan in the rocky exposed grassland habitats below Grade Creek Road, although as of July 29th, 2024, much of this habitat currently falls within the [Pioneer Fire Closure Area](#) and may remain closed to access through much of October. Along the Columbia River breaks in Douglas County, the majority of chukar habitat falls under private ownership, but Big Bend Wildlife Area in northern Douglas County offers hunters good chukar opportunity on public land.

Chukar inhabit steep, rocky shrublands and grasslands, and will readily fly uphill when flushed, so hunters should try to pursue these birds from above when possible. Chukar hunting falls into two distinct seasons: with snow and without snow. While trying to negotiate chukar habitat with snow and ice on the ground can be hazardous, there is no doubt that birds become concentrated following the accumulation of snow, so serious chukar hunters take advantage of this change in conditions. Throughout the season, the Columbia River breaks provide the majority of chukar habitat, along with areas adjacent to Banks Lake and Moses Coulee.

This species is subject to major population fluctuations due to low annual survival, so past trends are not very useful in predicting future harvest. Instead, spring and summer climate is the strongest predictor of what the hunting season holds for chukar. For instance, the jump in Douglas County chukar harvest from 2022 to 2023 likely can be partly attributed to the fact that drought conditions actually improved somewhat in much of Douglas County over that time period, whereas conditions worsened in Chelan County in that same time frame, corresponding with a drop in harvest here. Chukar clutch size is often greatly reduced in drought years, and some chukars do not breed at all in such difficult conditions. Cool, wet weather prior to hatches and adequate early summer precipitation are ideal for increasing forage and insect mass. Chukar hunters in Chelan County will likely continue to see lower numbers of birds during the 2024 season as, despite a cooler than average spring and early summer, much of the county remained in severe drought (and likely will continue to do so through the fall). However, chukar numbers will likely remain stable or decline only mildly in Douglas County during the 2024 season due to the more moderate drought conditions present in much of the Columbia Basin.

2023 chukar harvest figures are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and data from 2022 and 2023 will not be directly comparable to previous years. For more information, refer to [Hunting Chukar Partridge](#).

Figure 24. The total chukar harvest (top, a) and hunters (bottom, b) in Douglas County from 1998 to 2023.



Forest grouse



Spruce grouse. Photo by Neil Paprocki.

Three species of forest grouse can be found in the Wenatchee District: blue grouse (dusky grouse), spruce grouse, and ruffed grouse. Most grouse harvested in District 7 are taken in Chelan County in GMUs 245, 246, and 251, although 243 and 244 also offer good grouse opportunity. Please note that as of July 29th, 2024, much of GMU 243 currently falls within the [Pioneer Fire Closure Area](#) and may remain closed to access through much of October and possibly beyond. There are fewer dispersed opportunities for ruffed grouse and dusky grouse hunting in Douglas County, but coniferous and riparian forests offer the best hunting opportunities. GMUs 248 and 266 are the most promising for grouse hunters.

Most grouse harvest on the district occurs over opening weekend and then increases again with the general mule deer season. Hunters are asked to deposit one wing and the tail from each harvested grouse in wing barrels located across Chelan County. For directions on collecting these samples and a list of wing and tail collection barrel locations, visit the [WDFW website](#).

Hunters can find ruffed grouse in healthy riparian forests and aspen stands at the margin of timbered habitat, and dusky grouse will use timbered stringers that extend down as far as the shrubsteppe. Spruce grouse are restricted to higher elevation conifer forests, usually above the Ponderosa pine.

Hunters interested in forest grouse will improve their chances by searching out areas where fewer hunters concentrate. Popular road systems can provide early season hunting; however, they often “dry up” quickly due to the numbers of hunters and the vulnerability of hatch-year birds. Chelan County has a relatively limited road system within grouse habitat, and dedicated hunters know where they are, so hunters can increase the productive length of their season by hunting areas on foot away from roads and the bulk of the other hunters.

While forest grouse harvest and hunter participation exhibited a declining trend regionally and statewide for many years, 2022 and 2023 actually saw a roughly 30% increase in forest grouse harvest in Chelan County despite hunter numbers remaining stable (Figures 25 & 26). Interestingly, this trend corresponds precisely to what occurred on the state level, as statewide forest grouse harvest in 2023 was also approximately 30% higher than in 2022 despite consistent hunter participation between years. In the absence of brood surveys, which are not performed in District 7, it is difficult to predict what the 2024 forest grouse season holds, but the relatively cool and dry spring/early summer may result in stable forest grouse populations yielding harvest similar to or slightly below 2023.

In 2021, WDFW changed the forest grouse season to September 15 – January 15 to reduce harvest of reproductive age females and allow for brood dispersal, which will help sustain a harvestable population over the long run. The Sept. 15 grouse season opening date will remain in effect for the 2024 season.

2023 grouse harvest figures are available at WDFW’s [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and the results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to previous years. For more information, refer to [Hunting Forest Grouse](#).

Figure 25. The total harvest of forest grouse in Chelan County from 1998 to 2023.

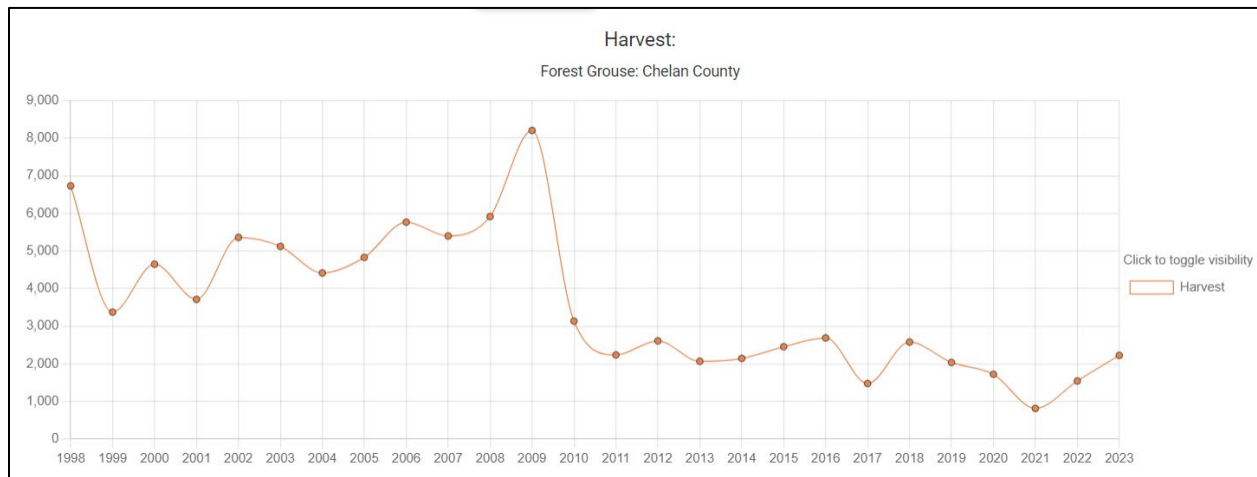
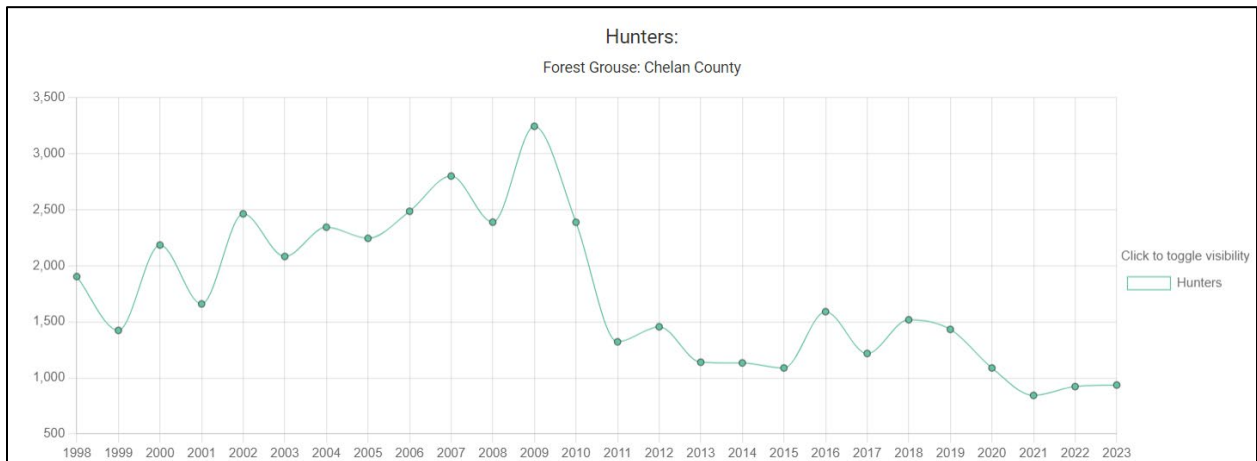


Figure 26. The total harvest of forest grouse in Chelan County from 1998 to 2023.



Dove



Mourning Dove. Photo by Neil Paprocki.

Most mourning doves harvested in District 7 are taken in Douglas County, but viable options for dove hunting exist in Chelan County in places like Swakane Canyon. Hunters should contact private landowners to secure hunting opportunities and gain access permission to agricultural fields. Look for open areas such as grain fields near wetlands, brushy upland streams, woodlands, and orchards where

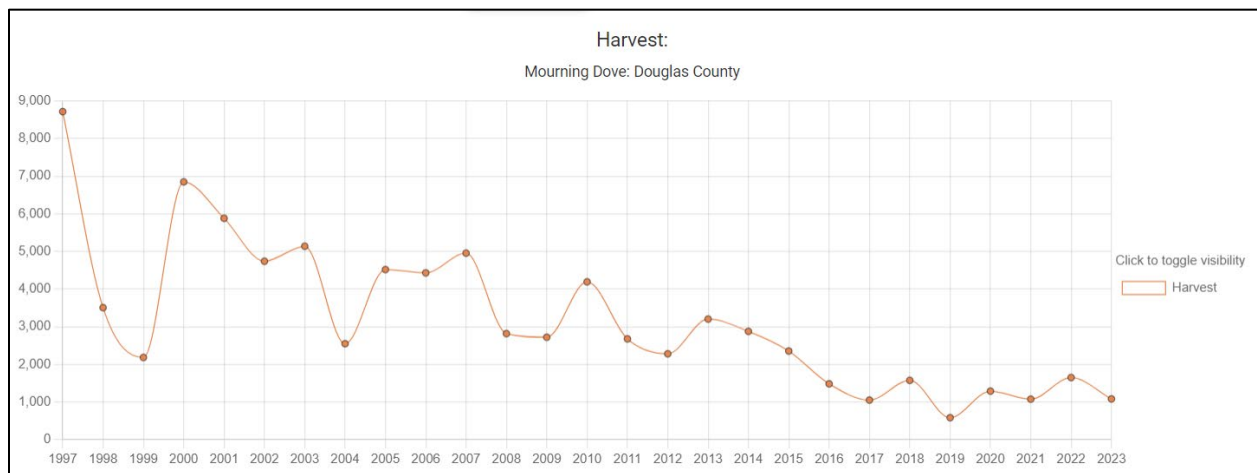
birds find both roosting cover and food later in the season. Evening roost hunting can be a productive approach for doves, with the best locations being stands of trees near water and surrounded by agriculture.

Dove harvest in Douglas County was 35% lower in 2023 than the previous year despite the virtually identical number of hunters on the landscape (Figure 27). The factors contributing to this drop in harvest are currently unknown, and it is difficult to predict what dove numbers in the 2024 season will look like. It is possible that the persistent, strong spring and summer winds reduced nest success, which may in turn contribute to another year of low harvest in District 7.

Hunters should remember that Eurasian collared doves can be found in the same areas as mourning doves. Eurasian collared doves are classified as a deleterious species in Washington and do not count toward daily dove bag limits, so be sure to take a few when the opportunity arises. The Eurasian collared dove is a stocky bird with a distinct black collar on the dorsal side of the neck. Refer to a photo comparison of the two species in the [Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlets](#).

2023 dove harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to those from previous years.

Figure 27. The total harvest of forest grouse in Chelan County from 1997 to 2023.



Pheasant

Wild populations of pheasants can be found on public and private land in a few locations in Douglas County. Hunters should focus on areas with a mixture of native shrubsteppe habitat, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands, and wet meadows/wetlands. Look for weedy and tall vegetation on the roadsides, which provides good cover. Good pheasant hunting can be found in Foster Creek (GMU 260), St. Andrews (GMU 254), and Big Bend (GMU 248).

In Chelan County, WDFW releases cock pheasants annually at both the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife units. Nontoxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites (Figures 28 & 29). Please note that pheasant release dates are not made public to reduce overcrowding at release sites and ensure the safety of WDFW staff members during releases. Pheasants are released before the youth upland season and before the general season opening day, with a final release taking place before the end of November. Hunters interested in hunting pheasant release sites in Chelan County can visit the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program website](#) for more information.

While modest compared to other areas such as neighboring Grant County, pheasant harvest in Douglas County tends to be consistent from year to year. With 216 birds taken in Douglas County in 2023 and 333 from Chelan County, pheasant harvest was down from the previous year throughout District 7, with a more marked decrease in Chelan County. This may be partially attributed to the fewer days hunters spent pursuing pheasants in Chelan County in 2023 and does not reflect the number of pheasants available to hunters, as the number of pheasants released at the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife units remained consistent between 2022 and 2023.

2023 pheasant harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to those from previous years.

Figure 28. Chelan Butte Pheasant Release Site in Chelan County

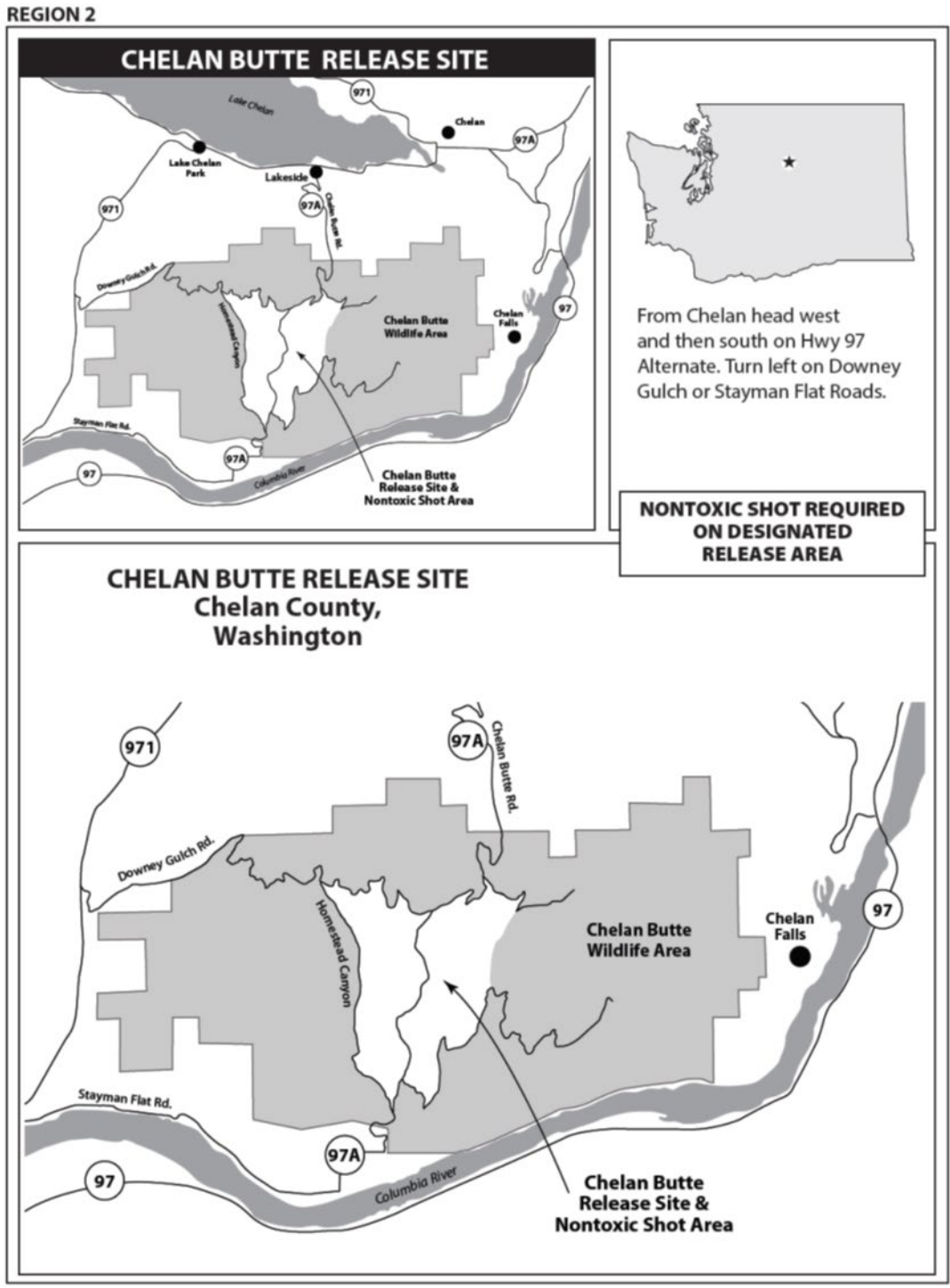
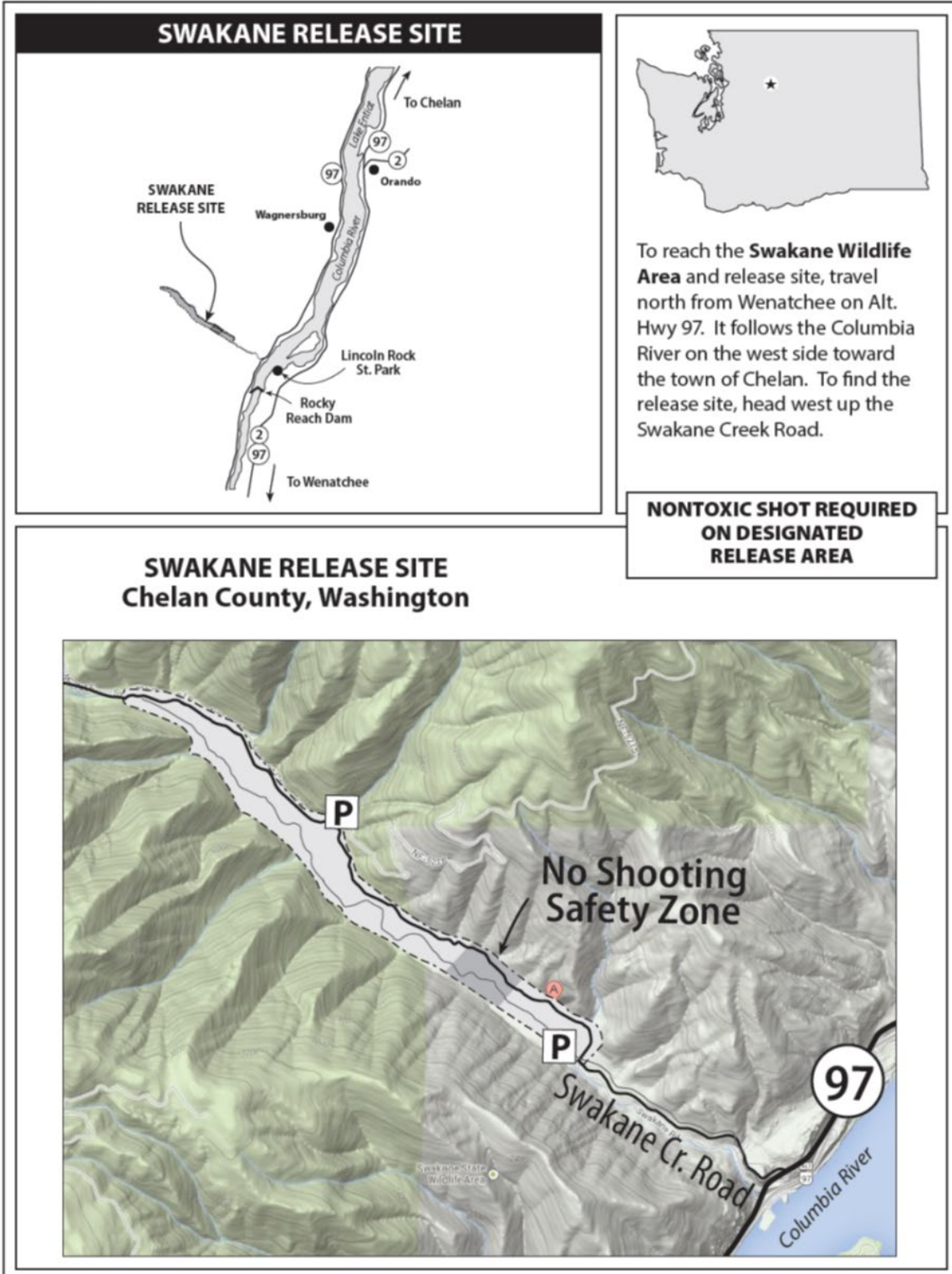


Figure 29. Swakane Pheasant Release Site in Chelan County

REGION 2



Waterfowl



Duck hunters. Photo by Adam Neff.

While not a major waterfowl hunting destination, District 7 provides opportunity for duck and geese hunting in several areas across both counties. In Chelan County, most waterfowl hunting is focused along the Columbia River. It is important to note that, due to county ordinances and the expansion of Wenatchee City Limits, **there is a no-shooting zone from the Odabashian Bridge to the George Sellar Bridge** which connects Wenatchee and East Wenatchee.

The Columbia River is the primary site for waterfowl hunting in Douglas County. The Bridgeport Bar Unit is a popular and productive hunting location, where ducks form large rafts on the Brewster Pool. Northern Douglas County also has a concentration of small lands and ponds that hold waterfowl. Currently, both Chelan County and Douglas County are in moderate to severe drought, with river levels running low and less water in local ponds, potholes, and lakes. The lingering effects of a decreased winter snowpack and lower than usual precipitation makes it likely that these drought conditions will last well into the fall. This could in turn concentrate waterfowl activity in areas with available water, so hunters will likely need to get creative in searching out locations off the beaten path to avoid hunting pressure at the better-known areas. The success of the season also depends on the number of birds migrating through the area, the timing of this migration, and how late into the season smaller water sources remain unfrozen. Although waterfowl harvest decreased statewide between 2022 and 2023, duck and goose harvest levels in Chelan County and Douglas County remained largely consistent across

both years (Figures 30 & 31). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to those from previous years. 2023 waterfowl harvest results are available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#).

For an introduction to waterfowl hunting, visit [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#).

Figure 30. The total duck harvest in Chelan County from 1997 to 2023.

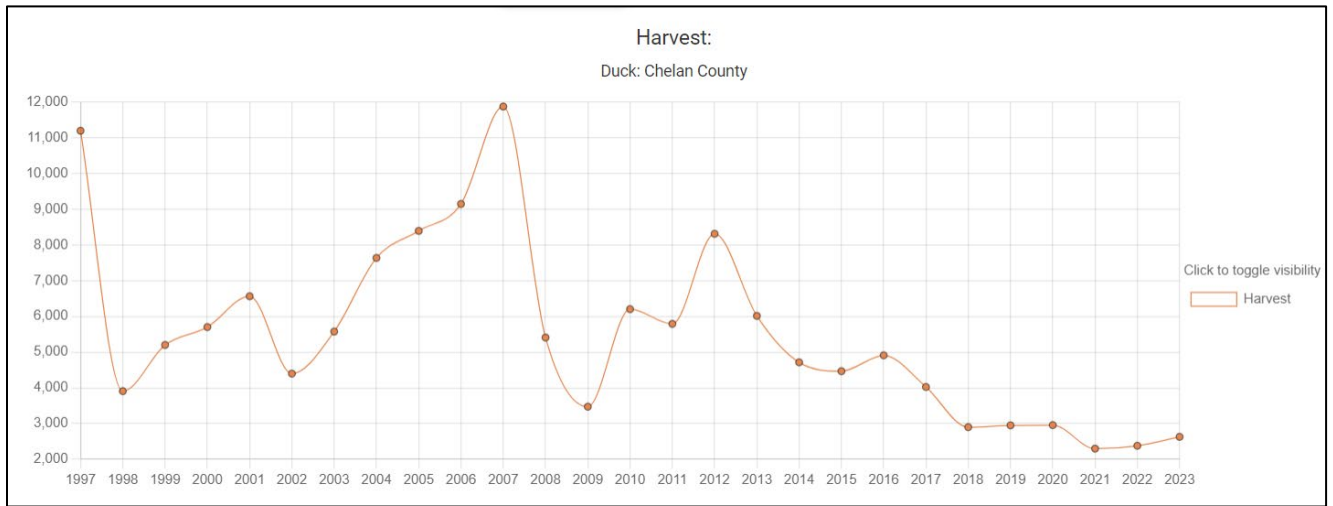
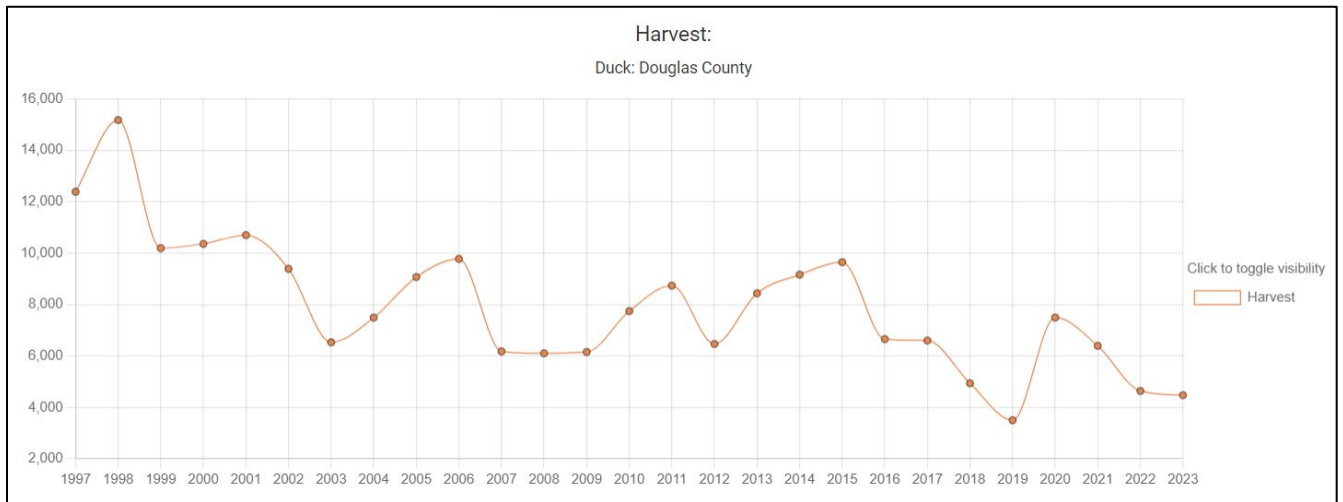


Figure 31. The total duck harvest in Douglas County from 1997 to 2023.



Private lands hunter access

WDFW maintains hunter access agreements with hundreds of participating landowners across the state, providing public hunting on private lands. There are thousands of acres of Hunter Access Program lands in Douglas County to utilize throughout the season. Please respect any closures and be aware of all wildfire restrictions during hunting season. Access lands are marked with signs displaying contact information, and hunters can also locate all private land hunter access areas on [WDFW's website](#).

In Chelan County, private landowners often allow hunting access in areas of high deer or elk concentration, but there are no formal hunting access agreements. Hunters in Chelan County must be proactive in gaining permission from landowners. Hunters wishing to apply for tags in the Lake Chelan North Deer Area, the Malaga Elk Area or the Peshastin Elk Area are encouraged to contact the Wenatchee District Office prior to applying.

Additional online tools and maps

As digital technology has rapidly advanced, today's hunters have a plethora of apps and online resources available to them to help plan their hunting trips. While these tools are excellent for focusing your efforts, navigating, and coordinating logistics, they can't replace scouting in the field. Below is a list of helpful resources to help you plan your hunting trip.

- [USGS Topo maps](#): downloadable topographical maps for the United States.
- [GoogleEarth](#): free application for exploring aerial and 3D imagery. Useful for importing and exporting locations.
- [AgWeather Net](#): Washington State University maintains an array of weather stations from across Washington. View real-time and historic weather data. Also available as a free app.
- [Interactive Snow Depth Map](#): This map compiles NOAA snowfall data for the U.S.
- [SNOTEL](#): Customizable tables looking at historic and forecast data as well as current snow conditions.
- County landownership maps: Most counties in Washington publish web maps with landowner data by parcel. These maps can be used to ensure you are hunting on public lands and are aware of where private land permissions may be needed. District 7 encompasses [Chelan](#) and [Douglas](#) counties.

2024 District 4 Hunting Prospects

Benton and Franklin counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

July 2024

2024 District 4 Hunting Prospects

Benton and Franklin counties

Author

Jason Fidorra, District Wildlife Biologist

Cover photo by Jason Fidorra.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

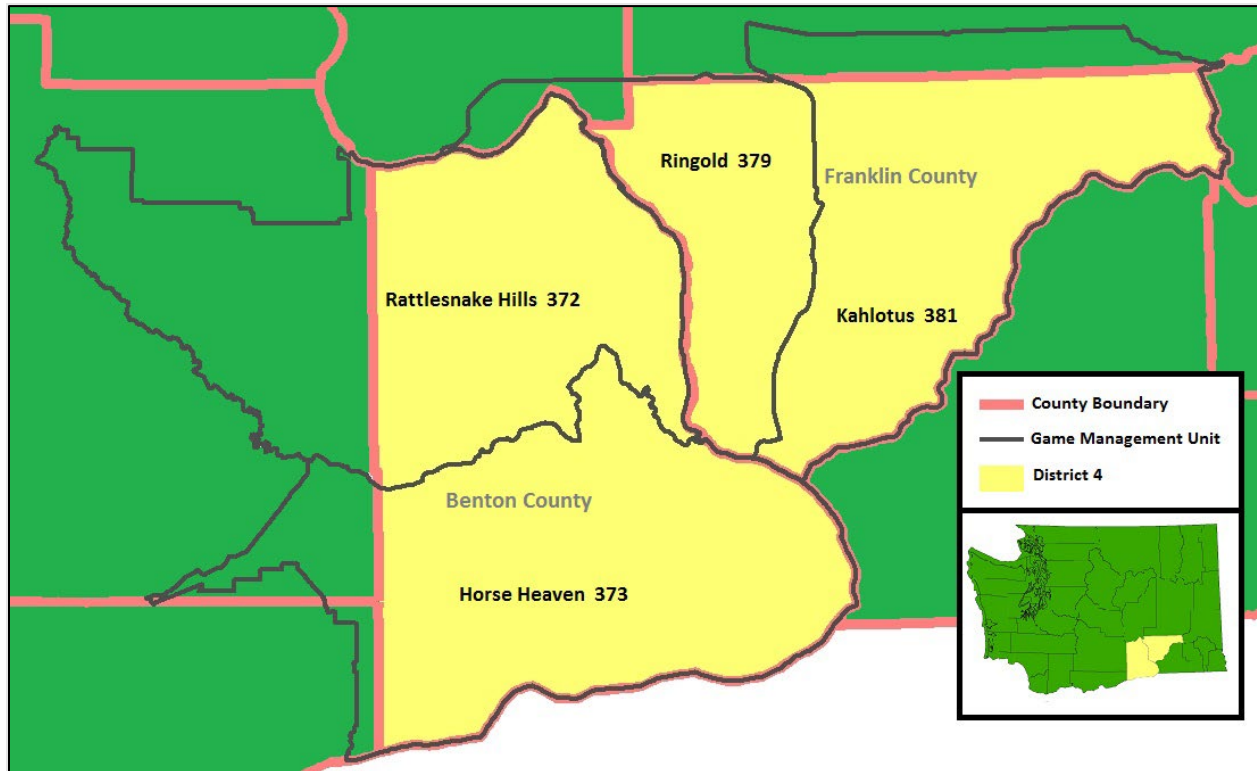
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District 4 general overview

District 4 is in the Columbia Basin in the south central area of Washington (Figure 1). The district is comprised of Benton and Franklin counties and is part of WDFW's South Central Region 3. The following game management units (GMUs) are included in District 4: GMU 372 (Rattlesnake Hills), GMU 373 (Horse Heaven), GMU 379 (Ringold), and GMU 381 (Kahlotus).

Figure 1. Location of District 4 in Washington and associated counties and game management units.



Several of Washington's major rivers are in District 4. The Hanford Reach of the Columbia River runs between Benton and Franklin counties. This 50-mile stretch is one of the most scenic segments of the Columbia River in Washington. The Snake and Palouse rivers delineate the eastern boundary of Franklin County. In District 4, you'll find the confluence of the Yakima, Snake, and Walla Walla rivers with the mainstem of the Columbia River near Tri-Cities (Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland). Large populations of waterfowl congregate throughout the district for breeding, migrating, and wintering, even though this is the driest part of Washington with only six to nine inches of precipitation annually. While this district is a mostly treeless landscape, riparian and shrubsteppe vegetation provides habitat and cover for game birds, and the breaks along the Snake and Palouse rivers are favored by wintering mule deer. The Rattlesnake Hills elk population is centered on the access-restricted Hanford Site and Hanford Reach National Monument, though lucky hunters may find small groups scattered across the district.

Upland habitats are part of the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion, historically dominated by native shrubsteppe. Intensive irrigated agriculture—supporting many crops, orchards, and vineyards— is a major land use in the Yakima River Valley, southern Benton County, and western Franklin County. Dryland wheat is dominant in central Benton County and eastern Franklin County. Many thousands of acres of this wheat country have been enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Program (SAFE), providing cover for mule deer and other wildlife that have lost much of their natural shrubsteppe habitat. Fires are currently the largest threat to the remaining habitat and are frequently human caused. Invasive cheatgrass has created a flammable carpet throughout the shrubsteppe, often facilitating large and fast-moving fires. Sagebrush takes decades to return post-fire, so please be careful and fire-wise.

In Benton County, large east-west trending ridges, including the Horse Heaven Hills and Rattlesnake Hills, add to the topographic diversity of the district. The eastern Franklin County landscape includes the rolling hills of the Palouse Prairie and the southernmost extent of the channeled scablands. Western Franklin County contains several small lakes and depression wetlands that provide additional wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

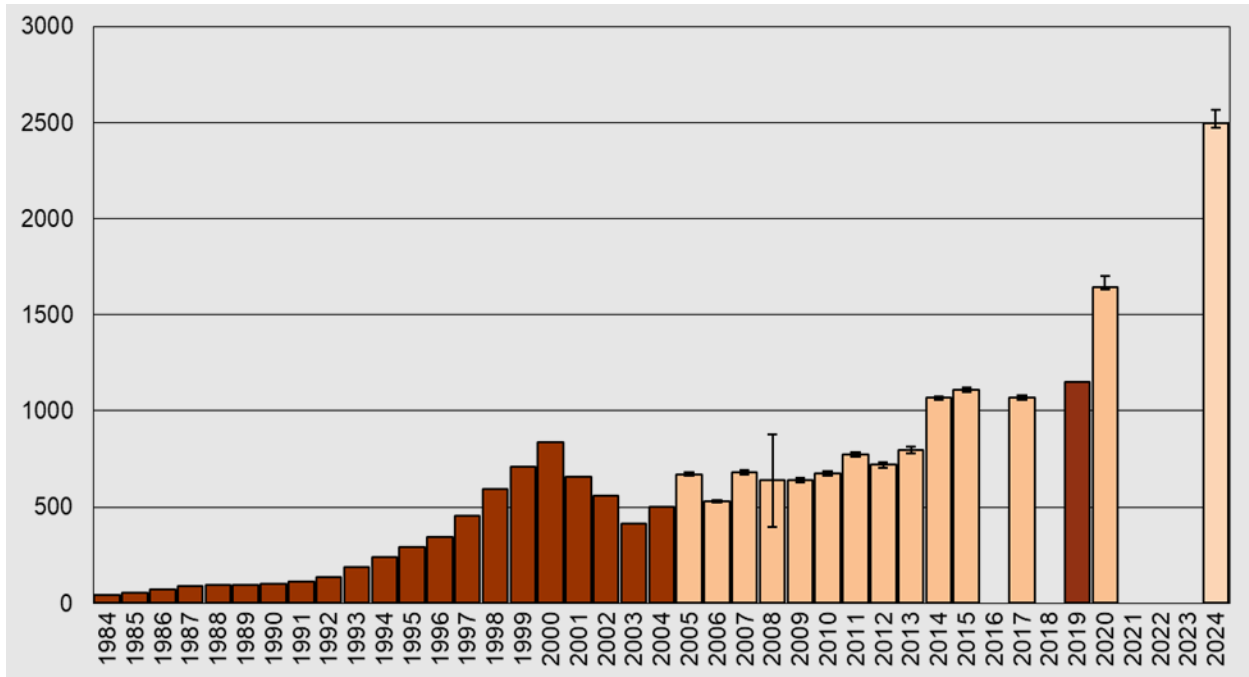
Hunting access in District 4 is more limited than in some other parts of the state, as much of the district is in private ownership or on federal properties closed to hunting. However, quality opportunities do exist, and WDFW is always trying to expand hunting access. Information and related links to several public sites listed in each game section can be found in the Major Public Lands section. Information on where to hunt including WDFW-managed Wildlife Areas, public land maps, and access to private land through one of WDFW's access programs is available in the Where to Hunt section on the [WDFW website](#).

Overall, the landscape of District 4 provides a diversity of habitats favored by waterfowl, upland birds (including chukar, partridge, pheasant, quail, and dove), and big game (including deer and elk). Welcome to District 4 and happy hunting!

Elk

There are good opportunities for elk hunting in District 4 on lands surrounding the Hanford Reach National Monument in Rattlesnake Hills GMU 372, which contains Blackrock Elk Area 3722 and Corral Canyon Elk Area 3721. There are also parts of the Ringold 379 and Kahlotus 381 GMUs where small groups of around 100 elk reside. Surveys on the Hanford Monument in January 2024 yielded a total herd estimate of 2,497 elk (Figure 2). This herd is referred to as the Rattlesnake Hills sub-herd of the Yakima Elk Herd. It is well above the management objective of 350 individuals, but harvest remains challenging as the herd knows to seek refuge on closed federal Hanford lands during daylight hours in hunting season.

Figure 2. Winter population estimates of Hanford elk herd over time.



Rattlesnake Hills elk winter population estimate over time including data from direct minimum counts (dark brown), and estimates from sightability surveys (light brown).

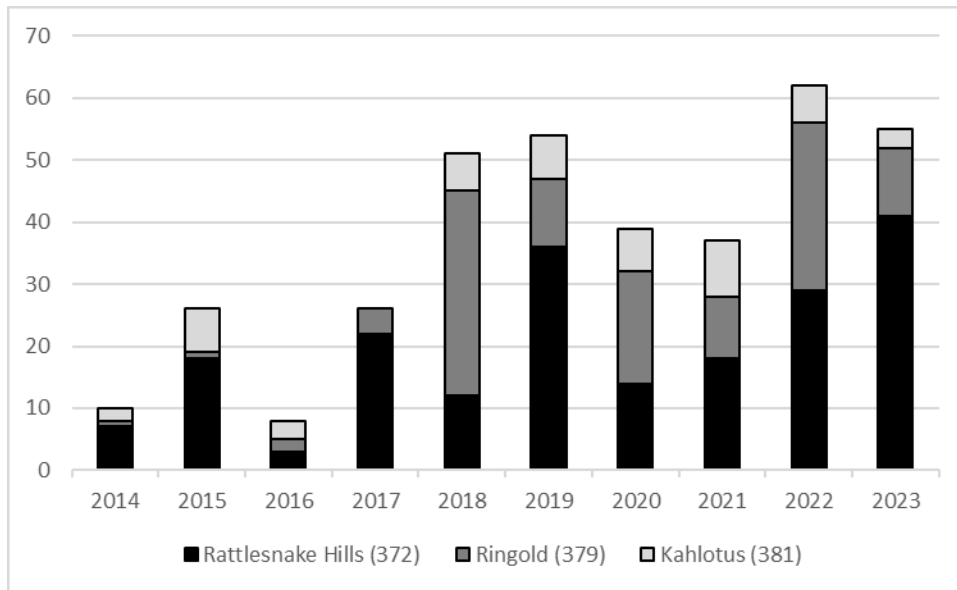
While most of the land around the Hanford Monument is private, hunters can pursue elk in Benton County on WDFW’s Thornton and Rattlesnake Slope Units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area during modern firearm season. If looking at private land, know that there is high demand for access in this area, so coordinate well ahead of time to improve success. One way to gain access to private lands here is through the Blackrock Ranches and Silver Dollar special permit hunts. These offer a chance to hunt Hanford elk on private land. If selected, permit holders are typically issued a one-day hunt coordinated by the landowner. There are permits for youth and hunters with disabilities, plus quality elk and antlerless elk permits open to any hunter. Refer to the current [hunting regulations](#) for more information.

Increasingly, some elk hunters have had success in the Ringold 379 GMU where there are both early and late archery and muzzleloader seasons for elk, in addition to modern rifle seasons. The numbers of elk here are small, but the Windmill Ranch and Bailie Units (open only Wednesdays, weekends, and holidays) of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area might be your best bet. Each of these hunting areas has two designated parking areas where hunters are required to park and register, and each allows a maximum of eight vehicles per lot. Occasionally the Ringold Unit of the [Hanford Reach Monument](#) (shotgun, muzzleloader, and archery only, refer to [USFWS Regulations](#)), and rarely the Juniper Dune Wilderness, have elk during hunting seasons. In Kahlotus 381 GMU, small groups roam between Kahlotus and the Palouse River, but they are rarely encountered off private land.

During general hunting seasons, 200-350 hunters report that they pursue elk in District 4. Of which 30-60 are usually successful (Figure 3). You can access online [Harvest Reports](#) for any species, weapon, or hunt over past years. Harvest success usually depends upon private land access, forage conditions on the Hanford Site, and the availability of forage crops outside of the restricted area. Hunters are usually more successful early in the season.

For more details on game populations in the Columbia Basin and statewide, refer to WDFW’s annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

Figure 3. General Season elk harvest in District 4 by GMU over time.



Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Elk Hoof Disease is currently not known to occur in elk from District 4. The disease is concentrated in southwest Washington, but it occurs occasionally in other herds around the state. WDFW diagnostic research, in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that the reported hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

Vulnerability: The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.

Hooves only: Tests show the disease is limited to animals’ hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters follow good harvest processes, cooking practices, and good hygiene, the meat is probably safe to eat.

No treatment: There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

Report elk: Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department’s online reporting form (link below). If you harvest an elk with abnormal looking hooves in eastern Washington (for example, overgrown or broken hoof claws or skin lesions), please report that harvest to your local WDFW regional office.

Clean shoes and tires: Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. There’s more information about [TAHD and the online reporting tool](#).

Deer

District 4 primarily offers mule deer hunting opportunities. White-tailed deer are relatively uncommon in the district, making up less than one percent of deer on surveys, but WDFW offers white-tail seasons to allow hunters to legally harvest them if encountered. In 2023, the hunter success rate during the general seasons for deer across all weapons in the district was 27%, with a five-year average of 26% success. Statewide, average general season deer hunter success was 25% (all species).

Eastern Franklin County (Kahlotus – GMU 381) is an important wintering area for mule deer that migrate to the relatively mild winter conditions near the Snake River. A small resident population does exist, but most mule deer migrate in from more northern GMUs starting in October. During mild winters, some of these deer may remain further north or delay moving into the district. The late general muzzleloader season in Franklin County (GMUs 379 and 381) usually provides a good opportunity to find mule deer in November. The season allows the harvest of bucks three-point or better.

In addition to GMU specific special permit hunts, hunters should look for “Washtucna” permit hunts in the pamphlet that include GMU 381-Kahlotus along with three adjacent GMUs (Figure 4). These replaced most of the Kahlotus hunts offered prior to 2018. Washtucna permits include late muzzleloader antlerless, modern antlerless, plus youth, disabled, and senior permits.

Post-hunt surveys in December 2023 yielded an estimated 14 bucks to 100 does in GMU 381 (Figure 5), which is below the management goal of 15-19 bucks per 100 does for the Columbia Plateau population. This includes non-legal bucks (spike and 2 point). High hunter success and low buck escapement in the open country where this population lives can contribute to challenges locating legal bucks. Fawn

numbers were at a surprising 91 fawns per 100 does (Figure 5). The ten-year average has been 70 fawns per 100 does. Population estimates for the broader Benge sub-herd which contains part of GMU 381 appear consistent over time. For more details on deer populations in the Columbia Basin and statewide, refer to WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

Figure 4. Boundary map of the Washtucna Hunt area encompassing four GMUs.

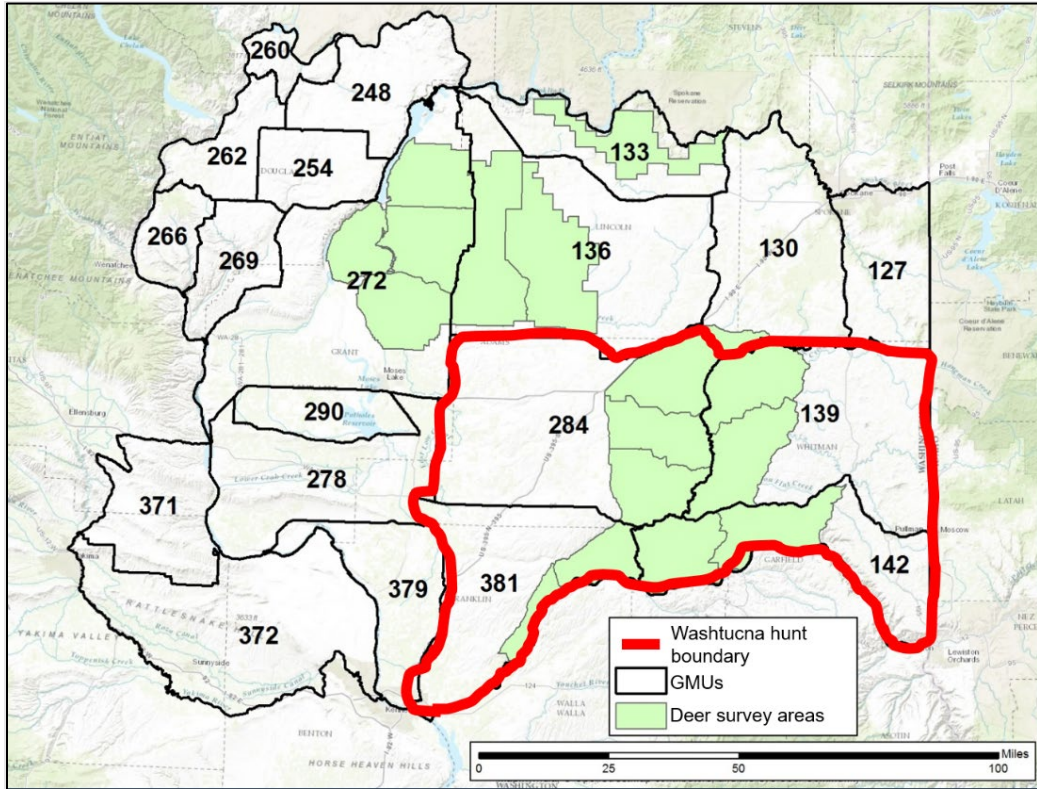
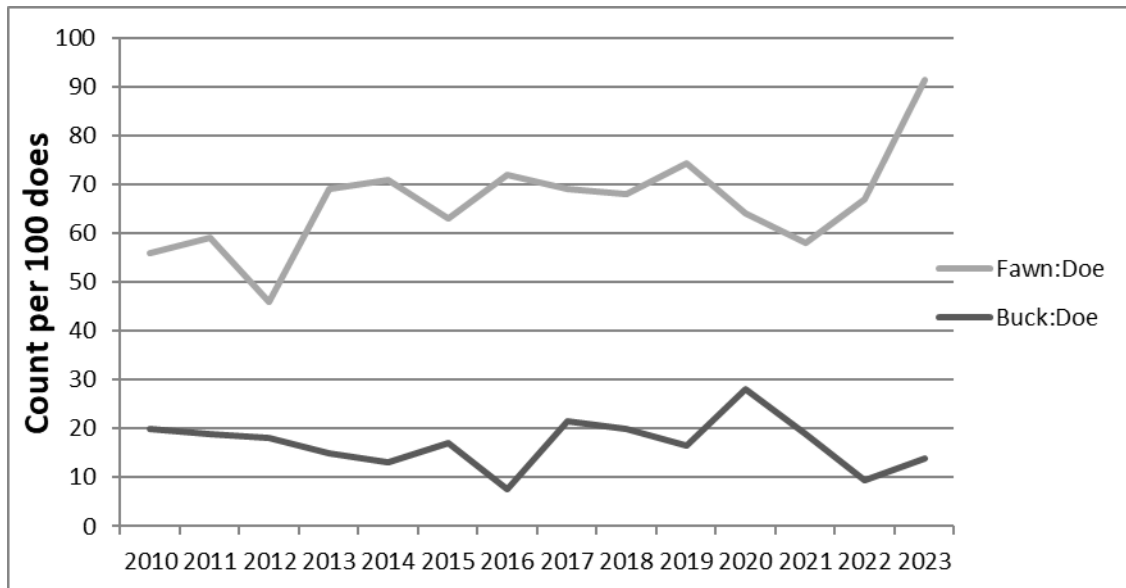


Figure 5. Buck and fawn ratios per 100 does in Kahlotus GMU 381 based on post-hunt road surveys.



In western Franklin County (Ringold – GMU 379), units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area and the Ringold Unit of the Hanford Reach National Monument (refer to [weapon restrictions](#)) provide public hunting opportunities for deer. Like Kahlotus, there is a late Muzzleloader season and early archery and muzzleloader seasons, plus the modern season.

In northern Benton County (Rattlesnake Hills - GMU 372), spend some time scouting for deer in the Thornton and Rattlesnake units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area. There are also some Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) parcels available. Be sure to know who's land you are on, and do not trespass on private property, including when navigating property corners and retrieving game.

In southern Benton County (Horse Heaven Hills - GMU 373), there are deer on BLM lands in the Horse Heaven Hills, scattered tracts of DNR, and private property within WDFW access programs. Part of GMU 372, Deer Area 3372 - Sunnyside (Benton and Yakima counties) provides an early muzzleloader opportunity along the Yakima River from Prosser to Union Gap.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) [Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge \(NWR\)](#) Deer Areas 3071 (Whitcomb) and 3072 (Paterson) provide 80 special permits to harvest deer on the NWR, including archery and muzzleloader hunts. Permits are available through the state permit draw in the [Hunting Regulations](#).

There are many properties where hunters can gain access to deer through one of WDFW's private land access programs. Preseason scouting is advisable to learn where to hunt and obtain permission from private landowners where needed. Updated access information and locations are provided in WDFW's [Hunt Planner Web map](#) (select your species, then go to the Layer List > WDFW Places > and check [Private lands hunt opportunities](#)) and the [Private Lands website](#). Access Program properties frequently change from year to year and sometimes within a season. Please double-check that lands previously available for hunting are still open to the public.

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permit hunts for any GMU on [WDFW's website](#). For more details on game populations in the Columbia Basin and statewide, refer to WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

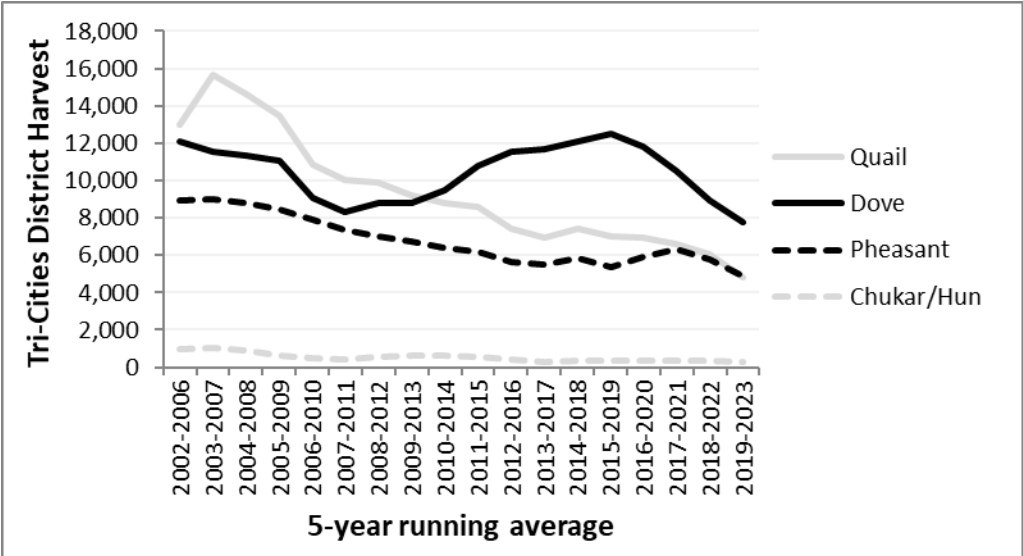


A buck harvested in Franklin County in GMU 381. Photo by John Hone.

Upland bird

Benton and Franklin counties offer upland bird opportunities for quail, dove, pheasant, and even a few chukar and partridge (also known as hun) if you are lucky (Figure 6). Habitat and weather are the key components influencing the survival and reproductive success of birds. Increasingly, fires and agricultural efficiencies have reduced cover and forage for upland birds in the Columbia Basin and District 4. Be sure to review the WDFW [Game Bird Regulations](#) for seasons and regulations. For more details on game populations statewide, refer to WDFW’s annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

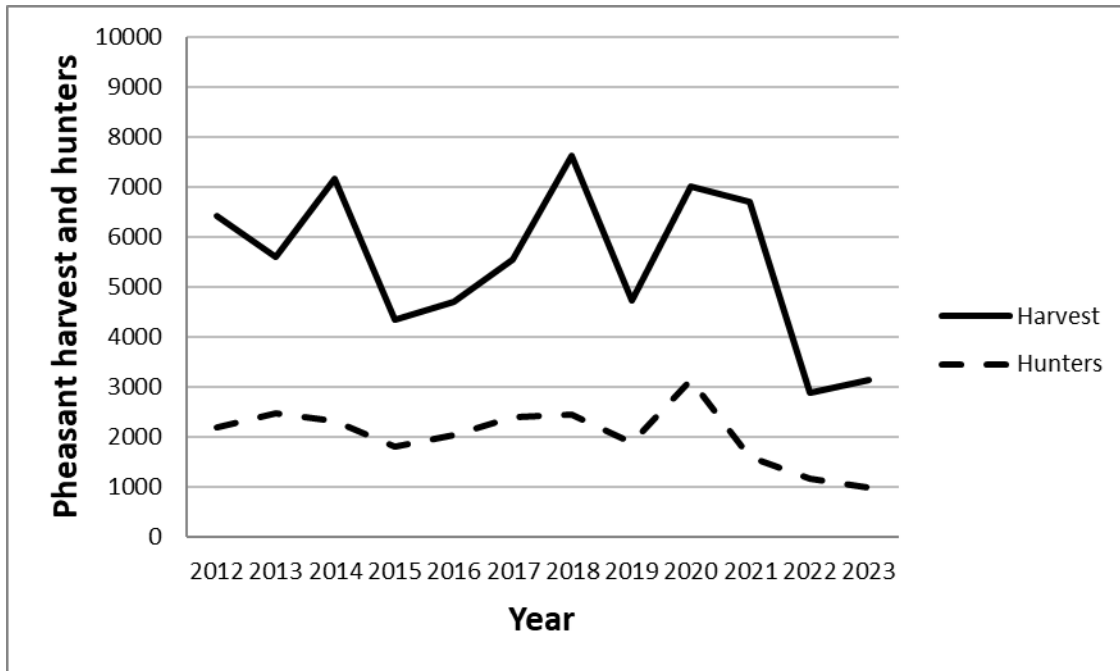
Figure 6. District 4 upland bird harvest trends based on five-year running averages.



Pheasant

Ring-necked pheasant hunters and harvest vary annually (Figure 7). Pheasant hunters should focus efforts in dense weedy and grassy upland areas adjacent to wetlands, and irrigation waterways and around irrigated farmland. Some of the best pheasant habitat in the district is in north Franklin County on and surrounding WDFW’s Windmill Ranch Unit (nontoxic shot), Mesa Lake Unit, and the Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch. Each of these hunting areas has two designated parking areas where hunters are required to park and register, and each allows a maximum of eight vehicles per lot. Other areas with good pheasant habitat include USFWS’ Hanford Reach National Monument’s East Wahluke Unit, Ringold GMU 379, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) Habitat Management Units along the Snake River, and [Umatilla NWR](#) along the Columbia River, near the town of Paterson. For more details on game populations statewide, refer to WDFW’s annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

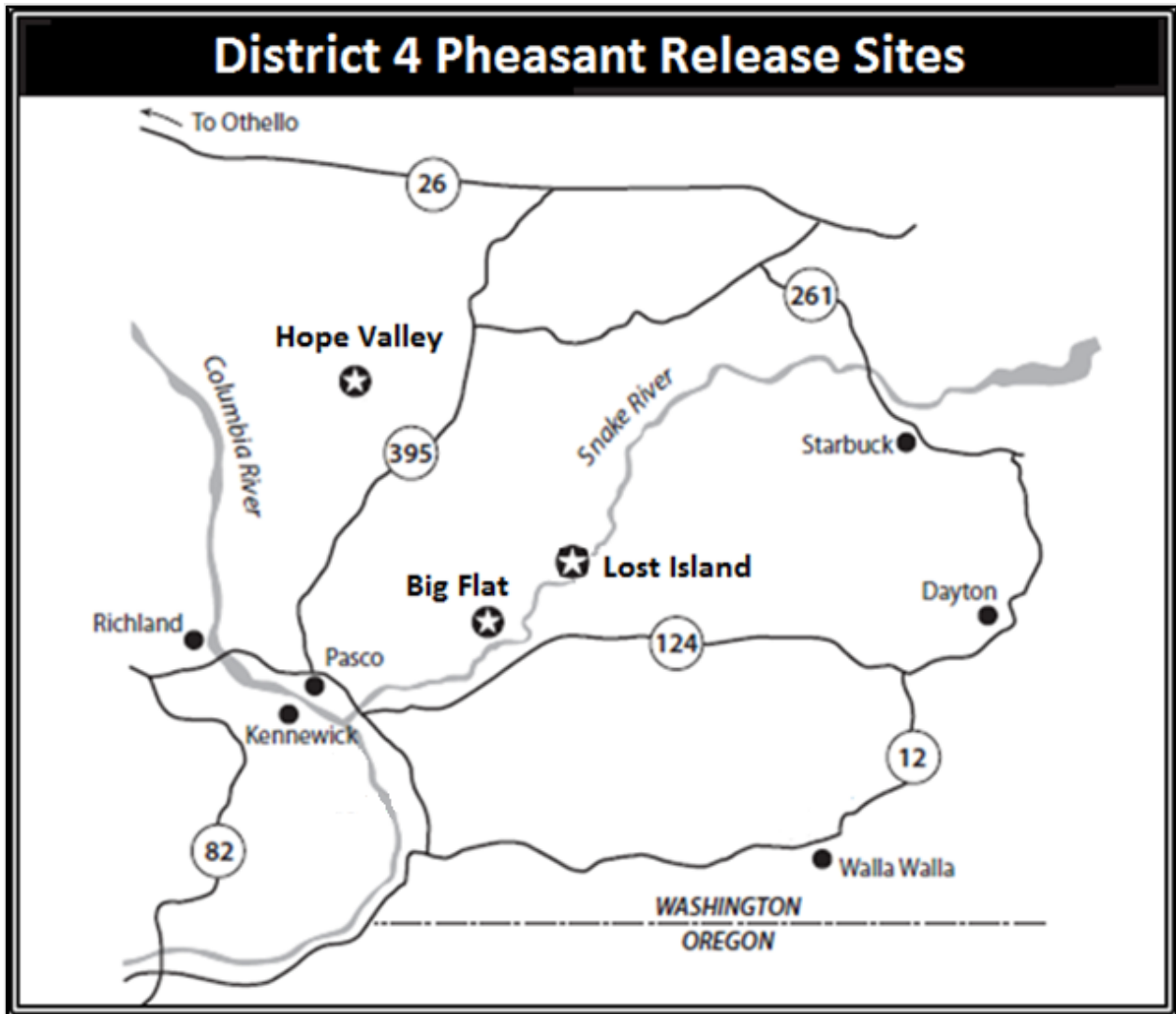
Figure 7. Pheasant harvest and hunters in District 4.



Pursuing birds released as part of WDFW’s [Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) is a great way to work dogs and gain experience for new hunters. WDFW releases pheasants at three locations in District 4: the Hope Valley Unit of the WDFW Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area, and the Big Flat and Lost Island Habitat Management Units (HMUs) held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) (Figure 8). Releases at the Toothaker HMU in Benton County were discontinued due to fire and low bird retention onsite. Pheasant release site maps can be found in the program link above or on WDFW’s [Hunt Planner Web map](#) (select the Layer > WDFW Places > Pheasant Release Sites). Army Corps HMUs contact information is available on the [Army Corps’ website](#).

To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. Refer to the [Washington Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information.

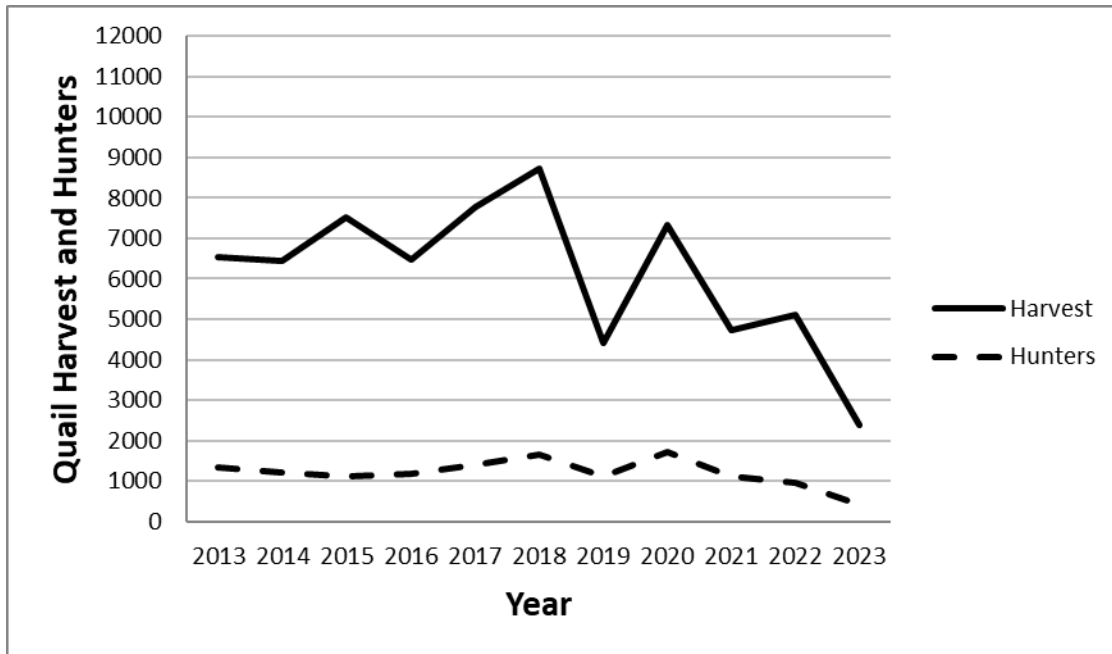
Figure 8. Location of District 4 pheasant release sites.



Quail

California quail are present in the district, though there has been a decreasing trend in harvest numbers over the past decade (Figure 9). The best quail habitat in District 4 is similar to those listed for pheasant. Also, anywhere along water bodies where riparian and herbaceous vegetation intersects provide quail habitat. An ideal setting is where Russian olives or willows are adjacent to black greasewood or sagebrush. For more details on game populations statewide, refer to WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

Figure 9. Quail harvest and hunters in District 4.



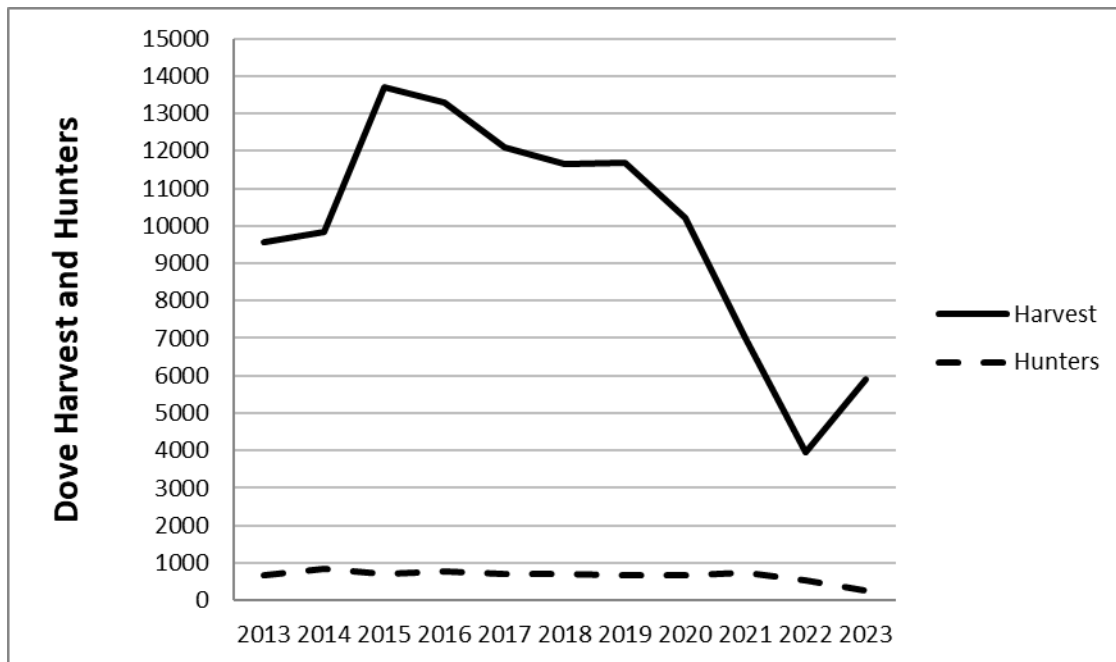
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Dove

Mourning dove harvest in District 4 has been decreasing over the past few years (Figure 10). There should be an opportunity for hunters to find doves moving through the area and in local patches where production has been successful. Weather patterns play a critical role in determining how many doves are present during the season opener. Focus your hunting efforts in or near wheat or corn stubble fields in the irrigated Yakima and Columbia Basins. The best combination of habitat includes a stubble field near water and large isolated trees or power lines where doves perch and attract other doves.

Dove hunters are also encouraged to harvest Eurasian collared doves, an introduced exotic species that has spread across North America. They are larger than mourning doves with a square tail and thin black half-collar on the back of their necks. This species is most abundant in rural and suburban areas near mature trees. Numbers have been increasing across Washington since first establishing in the state in the 1990s. There is no limit and collared doves can be hunted year-round in Washington with a big or small game hunting license. For more details on game populations statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

Figure 10. Dove harvest and hunters in District 4.



Waterfowl

There are many places to hunt ducks and geese in the district. The Snake, Columbia, and Yakima rivers plus associated water bodies will hold tens of thousands of ducks once the cold weather sets in. See details and map in the Public Lands Section of this document below for river hunting. Access can be gained at the USFWS McNary and Umatilla NWRs, the Hanford Reach National Monument, USACE properties, or one of the many WDFW managed Water Access Sites on the [Hunt Planner Web map](#) (select Layer > WDFW Places > Water Access Sites).

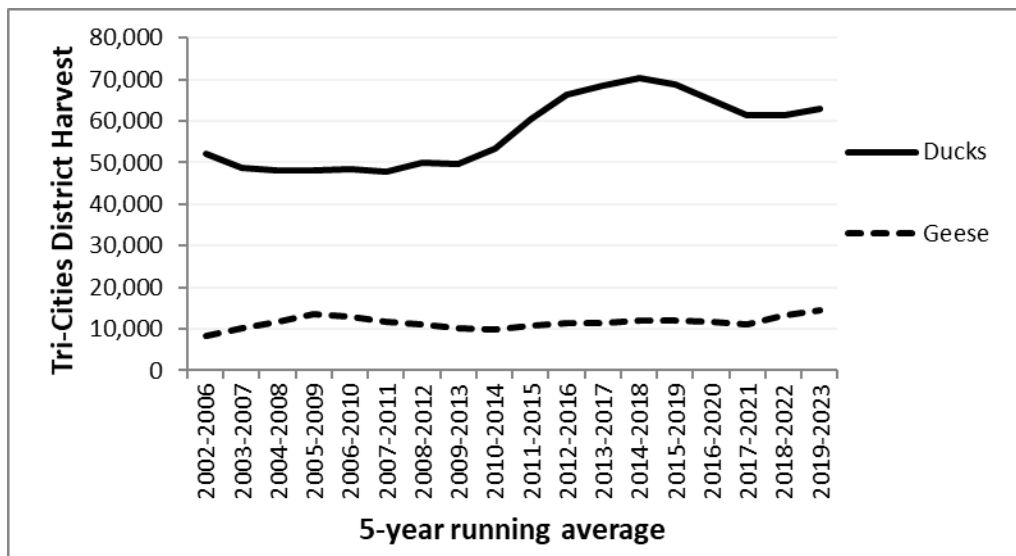
Small ponds and lakes can be found on WDFW's Windmill Ranch Unit, Mesa Lake Unit, and Bailie Memorial Youth Ranch. Continued management of the [Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area](#) units will result in more habitat for waterfowl and opportunities for hunters in the coming years. Several Sunnyside Snake River WLA Units in Franklin County are managed especially for waterfowl hunting. Scootenev Reservoir, managed by the Bureau of Reclamation, can also provide good hunting.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, see [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) on the WDFW website and be sure to check the [WDFW Migratory Bird Regulations](#) for seasons and rules. For more details on game populations statewide, see WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

Duck harvest in District 4 has been relatively high since 2014, while the goose harvest has largely remained stable (Figure 11). New reporting methods make comparisons of the past two years to prior seasons somewhat difficult, so the apparent rise in harvest in recent years may not be accurate. After the season opener, hunter success will likely taper off as the local ducks become less naïve and restrict

their daytime movements to local reserves and sanctuaries. At that point, hunters will likely have to wait for the migrants to arrive in the mid-to-late season. Weather patterns will determine when they arrive and where they will congregate. Freezing temps can eliminate opportunity from inland waterbodies and push ducks to the rivers or further south out of state.

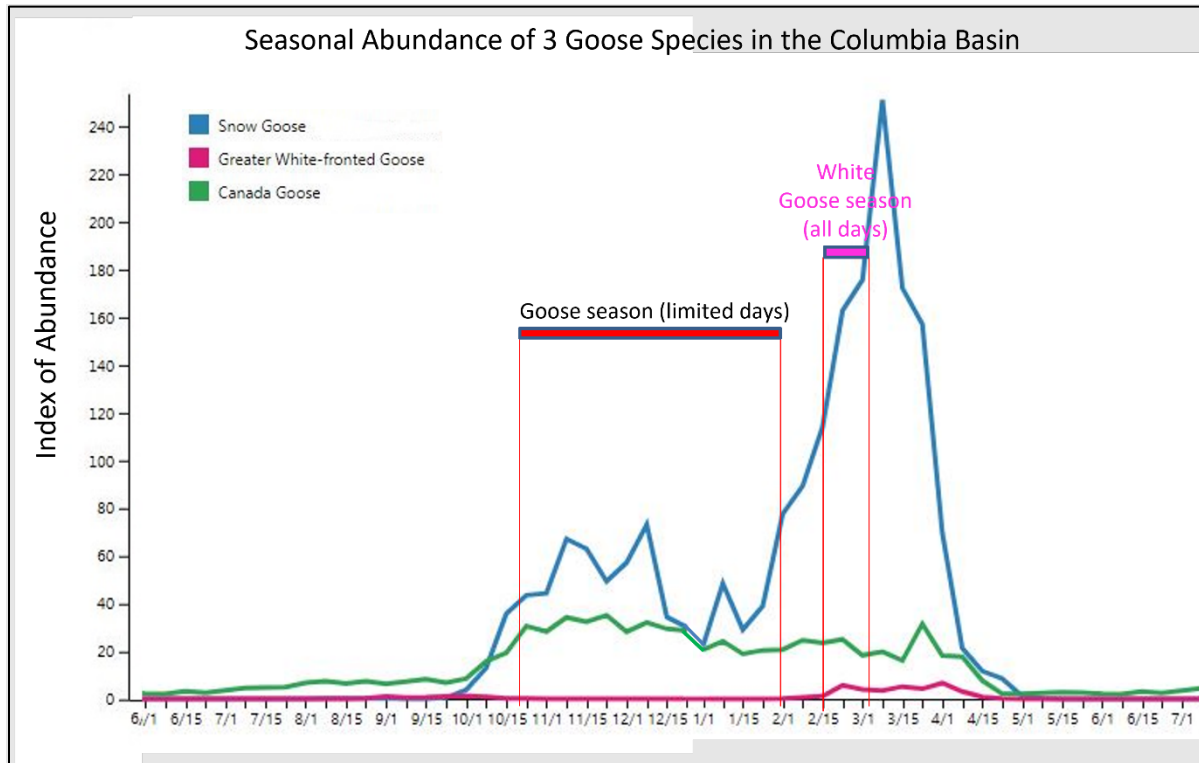
Figure 11. District 4 waterfowl harvest trends based on five-year running averages.



Resident Canada geese nest on river islands in the district as well as cliffs and man-made structures. In addition, thousands of migratory Canada geese arrive sometime in October or November. They can be pursued in the farm fields near the Snake and Columbia rivers. Most of the land is private property, so hunters will need to secure permission before hunting.

Statewide goose regulations have separate daily limits for snow and white-fronted geese in addition to Canada and Cackling (dark) geese. Whereas white-fronted geese and most snow geese usually pass through the district before and after the main goose season (Figure 12), an increasing number of snow geese have been present in the district during goose season, but peak in February/March. In response to this, WDFW set up an extended white goose season. The dates in District 4 (Goose Area 4) were expanded in 2020 for Snow, Ross’s, and “Blue” Geese from mid-Feb to early March (refer to [season summary](#) for dates). Snow geese are found in large flocks on farmland near the Snake or Columbia rivers, especially near Plymouth and McNary NWR, but are occasionally mixed in with large flocks of dark geese at any location.

Figure 12. Seasonal abundance of three goose species in the Columbia Basin relative to hunting seasons (illustrated dates approximate). Data source: eBird.org, 2024.



In the winters of 2017 and 2018, outbreaks of avian cholera occurred at the end of the hunting season in the Tri-Cities area, killing thousands of waterfowl. Botulism outbreaks (summer) and avian influenza (spring) are additional wildlife diseases impacting birds in our area. Fast response can contain outbreaks and hunters are encouraged to report groups of more than five sick or dead birds to WDFW using the link at the WDFW [wildlife diseases webpage](#).

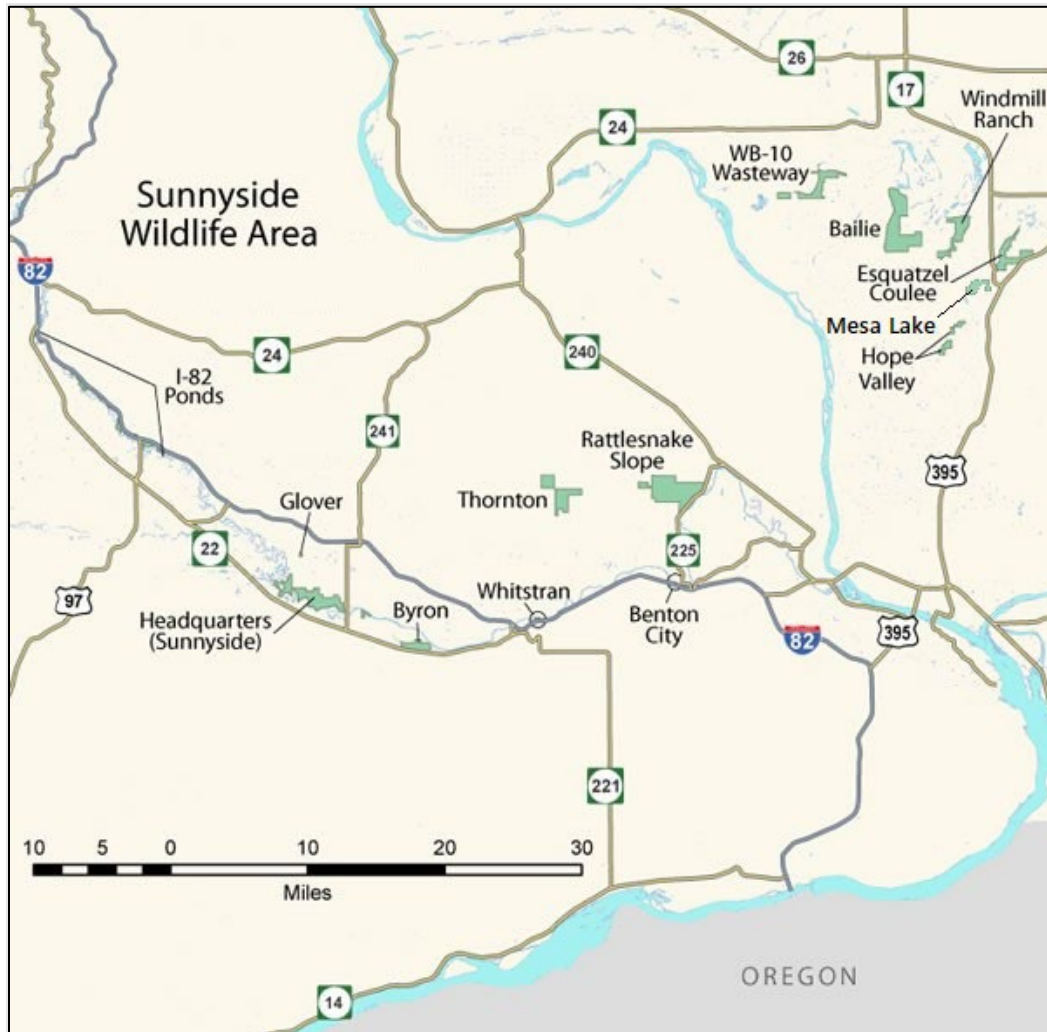
Major public lands

Hunting access in Benton and Franklin counties is more limited than in some parts of the state as much of the district is private property or federal land closed to hunting. However, quality opportunities on both public and private land exist, and WDFW is continually working to expand hunting access.

WDFW Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area

This wildlife area (Figure 13) comprises WDFW-managed land in the district and most parcels are open to hunting with specific restrictions at some units. Most of the units are managed specifically for wildlife, and enhanced hunting opportunities are possible through crop, habitat, and wetland management. For more information and maps please visit the [WDFW website](#).

Figure 13. Map of the Sunnyside Wildlife Area units.



Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The USFWS allows hunting on several units of this refuge complex, including portions of the Hanford Reach National Monument, the Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge, and areas within the McNary National Wildlife Refuge. Hunting lottery information, regulations, and maps can be found on [USFWS's website](#).

The Columbia and Snake Rivers

All islands, except privately owned islands, the Benton County shoreline below the high-water mark, Central Hanford Department of Energy property, and any peninsula originating on the Benton County shoreline between Vernita Bridge on Highway 24 downstream to the Richland city limits are designated as closed areas to hunting wild animals and wild birds. The only exception is waterfowl hunting, which is open below the high-water mark between the old Hanford townsite power line crossing (wooden towers) and the Richland city limits. These details are printed in the [Big Game Regulations](#). Several other closures and reserves impact river hunting in the district (Figure 14).

Other Public Lands

Each agency/landowner can enact their own weapon and area restrictions related to hunting. Obey all posted signs and contact the land manager with questions.

The DNR manages land that is open to hunting unless otherwise posted. Benton and Franklin counties have a large amount of DNR acreage, often leased for agriculture. While leased land is still open to hunting, hunters should always be aware that adjacent landowners are often managing DNR land as part of their business operations, and hunters should be respectful of property boundaries, which may not be signed. Consult a public lands map or [Hunt Planner Web map](#) for or more information (Public lands layer is the default base map).

BLM allows hunting on most of their land and highlights [several BLM properties for hunting](#) across WA, including the Juniper Dunes and Horse Heaven Hills.

The USACE and the Bureau of Reclamation allow hunting on most of their land, but each agency/landowner can enact their own weapon and area restrictions. Several USACE HMUs along the rivers are only open for shotgun and archery hunters. Refer to [HMU maps and regulations](#).

In Washington, it is NOT LEGAL to cross private or closed land without permission to access public lands. Therefore, access to some parcels of public land may not be available.

There are four main private land programs. Although each provides public, walk-in only access to private land, they function differently.

Hunt by Reservation

The Hunt by Reservation program requires hunters to [register online](#). In Benton and Franklin counties, multiple opportunities are available for both big game and bird hunting. **Opportunities are only listed online once they are available for reservation**, which is usually a few weeks prior to the season. [Hunt by Reservation Properties](#). Hunters are required to print out and carry their reservation permit.

Feel Free to Hunt

Feel Free to Hunt allows hunters walk-in access during specified hunting seasons without any prior approval. Most District 4 Feel Free to Hunt properties provide access for mule deer hunting, with some potential for upland bird hunting as well. [Feel Free to Hunt Properties](#).

Register to Hunt

Register to Hunt requires hunters to sign in at registration kiosks and carry their registration stub with them while hunting. No prior coordination is needed. District 4's Register to Hunt sites primarily provide waterfowl and upland bird hunting opportunities. [Register to Hunt Properties](#).

Hunt by Written Permission

Hunters are required to contact the landowner for access to Hunt by Written Permission sites. Landowners then issue permits at their discretion and hunters are expected to carry this permit while they hunt. **Landowner contact information can only be found on the yellow signs marking the site.** WDFW does not give out contact info online or by phone. You should try to contact the landowner weeks or months in advance of your season to increase your chance of gaining access. Hunt by Written Permission properties provide opportunities for both big game and bird hunting in District 4. [Hunt by Written Permission Properties](#).

Figure 15. Private Lands Access Program signs.



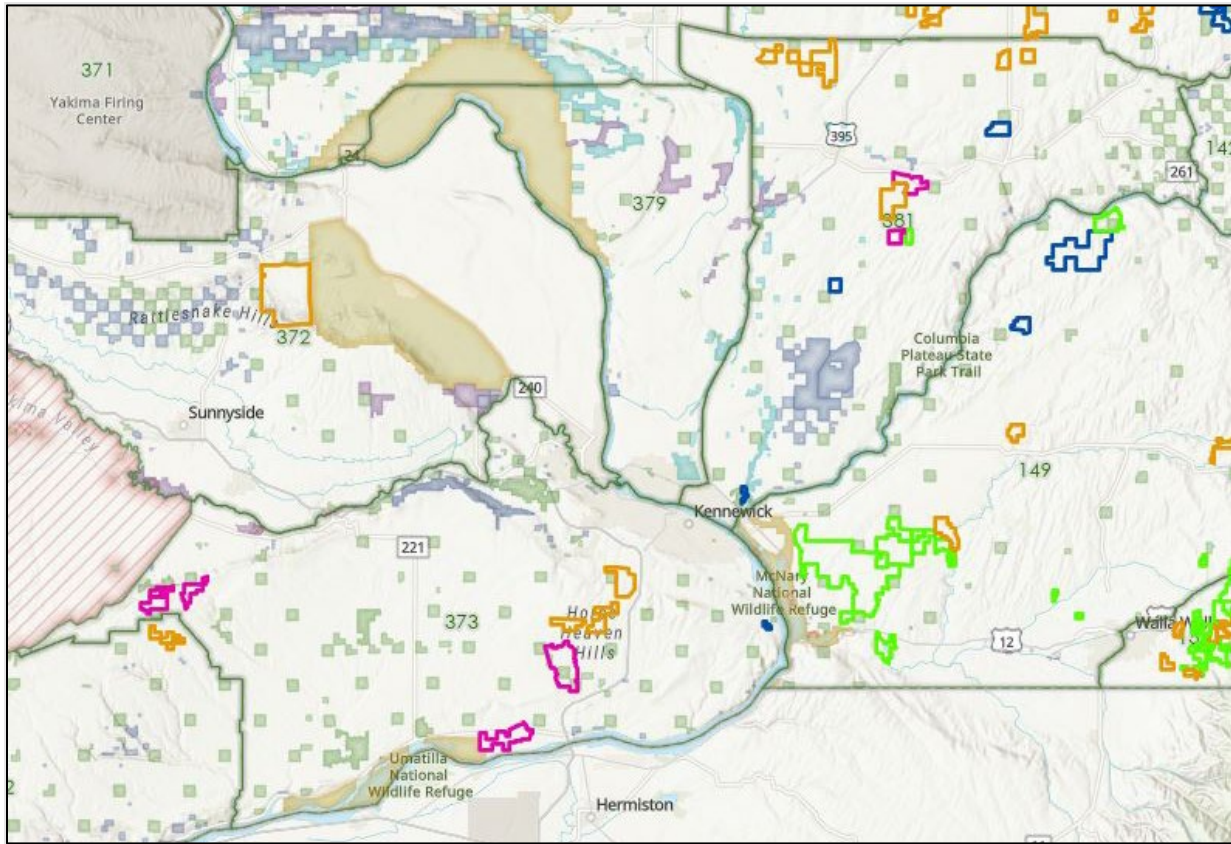
Online tools and maps

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permits for any GMU and Permit Hunt for all game species are online at [WDFW Hunting Game Harvest](#).

More details on game populations in the Columbia Basin and statewide can be found in WDFW's annual [Status and Trends reports](#).

WDFW has released a Hunt Planner Web Map to search for game seasons and private land access around the state: [WDFW Hunting Map](#). A good starting point for hunters looking for a place to hunt is the Web Map that provides hunters with information about public and private lands access points, GMU boundaries, hunting seasons, pheasant release sites, water access points, landscape features such as roads and topography, public lands, and much more (Figure 15).

Figure 16. Depiction of private lands access and public lands layers in District 4 from WDFW's Regulations Web Map. Pink, Green, Orange, and Blue bordered parcels are lands in the various public lands access programs.



Note: Figure for illustrative purposes only. Check the online map for up-to-date access and parcel information.

2024 District 8 Hunting Prospects

Yakima and Kittitas counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

August 2024

2024 District 8 Hunting Prospects

Yakima and Kittitas counties

Author

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Callie Wilson, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

Cover photo by WDFW.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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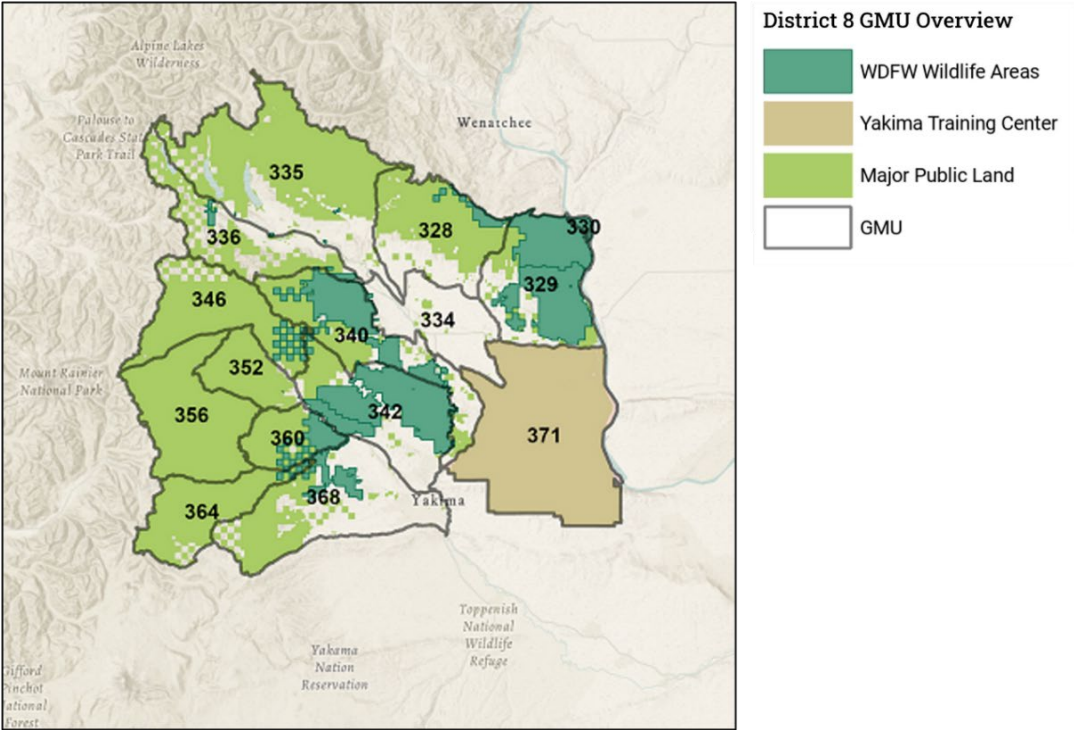
District 8 general overview

District 8 is in south central Washington and includes Yakima and Kittitas counties and game management units (GMUs) 328 (Naneum), 329 (Quilomene), 330 (West Bar), 334 (Ellensburg), 335 (Teanaway), 336 (Taneum), 340 (Manastash), 342 (Umtanum), 346 (Little Naches), 352 (Nile), 356 (Bumping), 360 (Bethel), 364 (Rimrock), 368 (Cowiche), 371 (Alkali), and part of 372 (Rattlesnake Hills).

Large blocks of public land dominate District 8, including more than 300,000 acres across the L.T. Murray, Colockum, Wenas, and Oak Creek Wildlife Areas. This land is interspersed throughout thousands of acres of Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and US Forest Service (USFS) lands. Another 327,000 acres south of I-90, along the breaks of the Columbia River, is the [Yakima Training Center](#), which is available for high quality hunting pending military training activities. Public land hunters can also access the 9,000 acres on the [Wild Horse Wind Farm](#), which facilitates access through WDFW's [Hunt by Reservation](#) system.

Hunters can choose a variety of habitats, ranging from lowland shrubsteppe to high elevation alpine wilderness which supports diverse game species. The district is best known for excellent elk hunting and multiple bighorn sheep populations. However, hunters also have expansive lands for enjoying small game and upland bird pursuits.

Figure 1. Game management units and associated available lands for public hunters and recreators within District 8.



Hunters in District 8 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations. To dig more into the dynamics of GMUs hunters are encouraged to check out harvest reports and harvest statistics online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). These reports are published annually and can shine light on areas where hunter success is high.

Road access

Together with the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and private landowners, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) cooperatively manages many roads within Yakima and Kittitas counties under the "Green Dot" system. This system provides access for camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, and ATV and off-road vehicle riding, while protecting sensitive habitat from damage caused by motorized vehicles.

Using the Green Dot system is easy: roads open to motor vehicle travel are marked with a round green reflector on a white route marker. These roads are shown in green on the area maps. In some areas, public roads (such as county or U.S. Forest Service roads) are used to access the Green Dot system and are shown in gray on the maps.

Any roads not designated as a Green Dot or public access road are off-limits to motor vehicles. Seasonal closures are also shown on the maps; check the map legend for more information. These roads are used by a wide variety of recreationalists. Please respect others and avoid driving on wet, soft roads in an effort to reduce damage.



Rainbow over the Yakima River from the Wenas Wildlife Area on a cloudy day. Photo by WDFW.

[Green dot maps](#) can be printed from home, downloaded onto smartphones, picked up at individual wildlife area headquarters, the WDFW Yakima regional office (1701 S. 24th Ave, Yakima, WA 98902), and the Washington DNR south east Regional (713 Bowers Rd, Ellensburg, WA 98926) office.

Wildfire effects on hunting success

As of the end of July 2024, there have been several significant fires in District 8 which will likely impact access and hunting opportunity this season. Hunters are encouraged to learn about the affected areas and scout prior to hunting, since wildfires can greatly impact hunting success due to drastic changes in available forage, predator-prey dynamics and animal behavior.

- [Black Canyon Fire](#) (GMU 340 & 342) >10,000 acres. Deer, elk, chuckar, grouse. Wenas Wildlife Area.
- [Retreat/Rimrock Fire](#) (GMU 360 & 364). >30,000 acres. Deer, elk, bear, chuckar, grouse. Oak Creek Wildlife area.

Hunter orange/pink requirements

State rules require hunters to wear a minimum of 400 square inches of fluorescent hunter orange and/or fluorescent hunter pink exterior clothing under specific conditions. This fluorescent clothing must be worn above the waist and be visible from all sides. A hat, by itself, does not meet this requirement. A combination of both colors may be worn to meet the 400 square inch requirement. Check out this [fact sheet](#) for more information.

Typically, hunters using a shotgun, muzzleloading firearm, bow and arrow, or falconry do not have to meet this requirement. However, there are many cases where hunter orange or pink is required because of the overlap with a modern firearm season in the area. It is the hunter's responsibility to learn and follow the specific requirements for their associated hunts.

Elk

District 8 is considered some of the best elk hunting area in the state. It contains two major populations, the Yakima and Colockum elk herds. The Yakima elk herd is one of the largest in the state, with greater than 10,000 animals roaming over 900,000 acres of public land. There are about 4,000 elk in the Colockum herd with coveted high-quality bulls. This reputation results in tough competition for special hunt permits and relatively high hunter presence throughout the hunting season.

The only antlerless archery **general season** permits occur in GMUs [334](#), [335](#), and [371](#). These GMUs are managed for minimal numbers of elk due to human-wildlife conflict issues in adjacent agricultural lands. This year's archery season runs from Sep. 7 through 19. Elk Area 3911 covers all GMU 334 and the lower portions of GMU 335, where most elk in these units reside. Master hunters can harvest antlerless elk using modern firearms from Aug. 1, 2024 through Jan. 20, 2025 in elk area 3911, so for safety, archery

hunters in this area **must** wear hunter orange or pink. In 2023, archers harvested 12 antlerless from GMU 335, and 2 antlerless elk from GMU 334. Overall, archery hunters find highest success in GMU 371, and have higher success rates in GMU 334 and 335 than modern firearm hunters (**Table 1**).



A collared bull elk on the Colockum Wildlife Area. Photo by WDFW.

Opening weekend is crowded, with hunters setting up camp early and heading home before the season ends. For those looking for a higher quality experience, consider hunting the last two or three days of the modern firearm season or opt to hunt during the quieter archery or muzzleloader seasons.

Generally, once seasons begin, hunters will find more elk at higher elevations and away from roads. The wilderness areas in the Yakima herd range can provide some of the better opportunities in the district for those willing to invest the effort to chase elk in the high country away from roads.

Table 1. Elk 2023 General Season hunter success rate (%) by GMU and weapon type for District 8.

GMU	Archery	Modern Firearm	Multiple Weapons	Muzzleloader
328	3.2	7.4	5.2	4.2
330	NA	NA	NA	NA
334	10	2.8	0	8.6
335	6.4	2.8	20	7.6
336	1.4	2.4	0	5
340	4.4	4	9	1
342	1	6	21	4.8
346	0	4.4	9	NA
352	1.8	3.8	0	1.6
356	3.6	3.4	0	3.2
360	NA	7.8	10.6	7.4
364	3.6	1.6	0	2
368	5	9.4	7.6	7.2
371	26.6	54.4	66.6	0

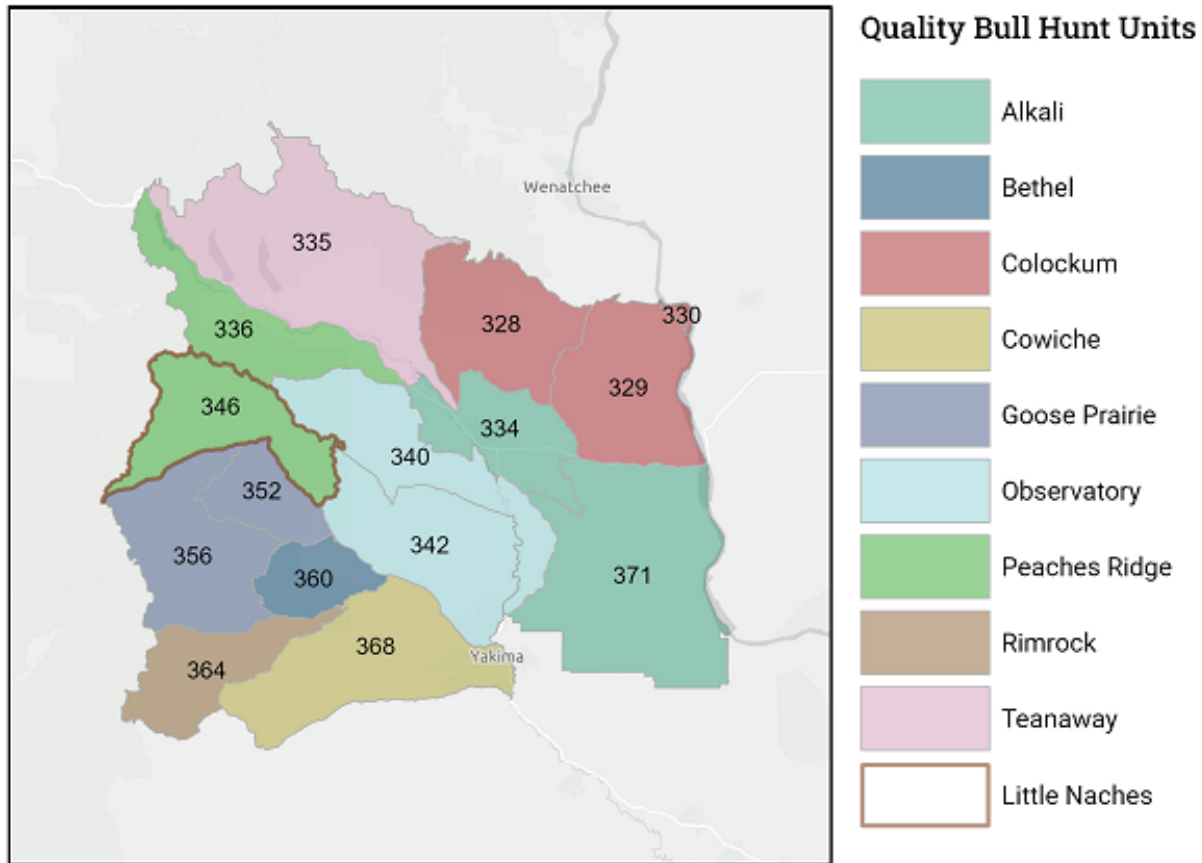
The open terrain of GMU 371 on the [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC) has good numbers of elk and boasts a hunter success rate of more than 50%, with 37 antlerless elk harvested last season. YTC is open to the public for various recreational activities. This includes hunting, bird watching, mountain biking, horseback riding, hiking, falconry, and archery target practice. All patrons wishing to access YTC lands for recreational purposes must have a [YTC Recreation Access Card](#).

Access to these lands is NOT under the control of WDFW and can change based on military training schedules.

Selecting a special hunt opportunity

Special hunt permits are available for quality bull (Figure 2) and antlerless special hunt opportunity (Figure 3). The 2023 winter survey of the Colockum elk herd estimated the bull to cow ratio at 24 bulls to 100 cows, exceeding objective range. Special bull permits were thus increased, nearly doubling in the Colockum hunt unit. The Yakima bull population is currently stable and permits remain consistent with previous years opportunity.

Figure 2. District 8 quality any bull hunt units across Game Management Units (GMU).



Hunters ready for a challenge should look at units with steeper terrain and higher forest cover/density (Teanaway, Peaches Ridge or Goose Prairie) where elk prefer to be in earlier seasons. The Colockum, Alkali, and Observatory units have higher proportions of shrubsteppe and more open-rolling terrain providing easier terrain to traverse and greater ability to glass large areas. Elk however are likely to be sparser in this habitat during the hunting season, seeking security within dense cover or near private lands. Hunters should focus on drainages that provide cover far from roads. Success is ultimately variable across units, refer to Table 1.

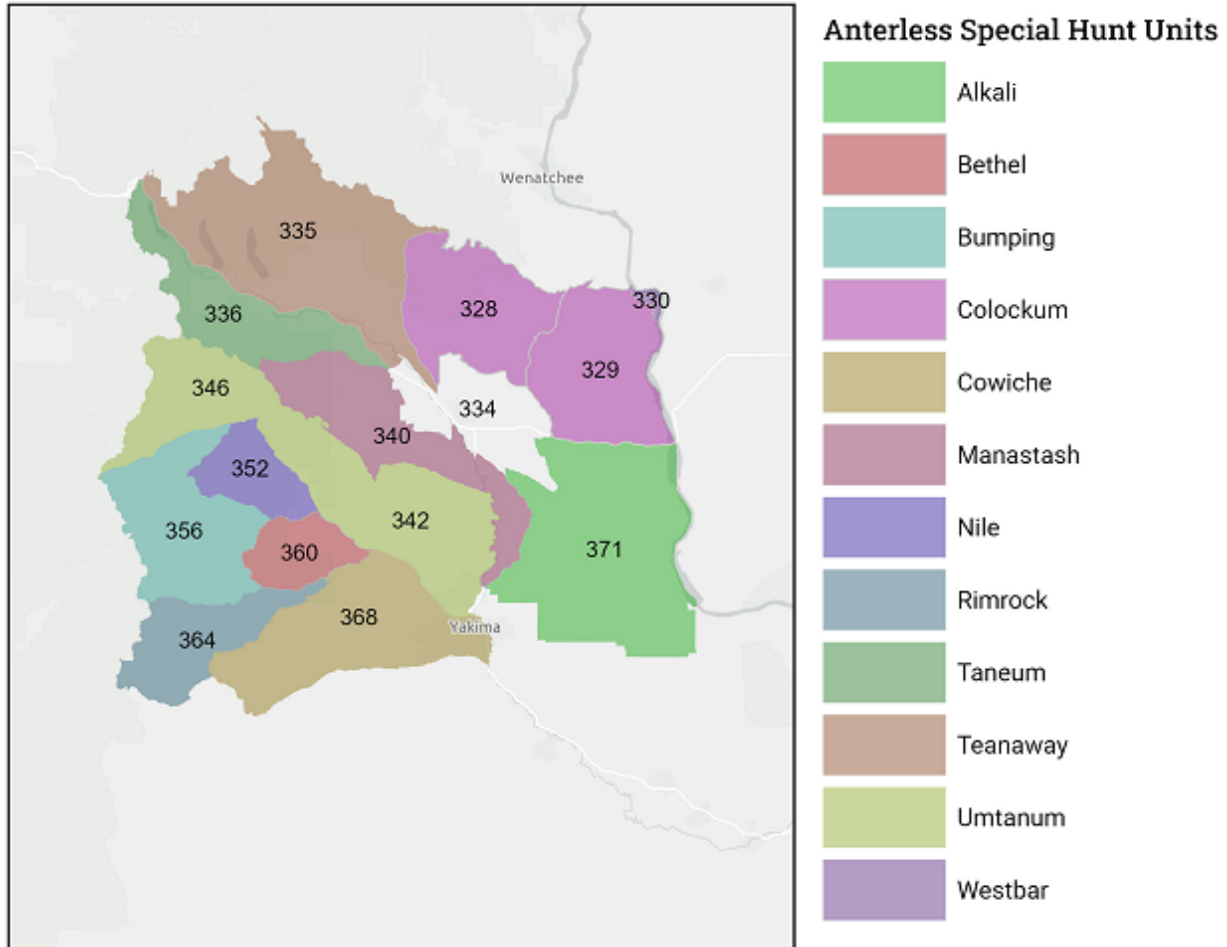
Hunt opportunity explained

WDFW utilizes multiple data sources to guide hunting regulations, season setting, and permit levels. When considering hunt opportunity, the health of the herd is prioritized. Annual or bi-annual post-harvest surveys of each of our elk populations are conducted to estimate the population size and ratios of calves and bulls to cows. These estimates provide critical data to evaluate trends in the population. Hunt opportunity fluctuates based on these status and trends of the population.

Each herd has an established population and ratio (calves to 100 cows and bulls to 100 cows) objectives that are used as guidelines for increasing or decreasing permit numbers. If a herd is within or exceeding the population objective or bull ratio then hunt opportunities (number of permits available) may be

increased. When a population is below objective or exhibits a declining trend, opportunities may be reduced in order to decrease pressure on the population and encourage stability and/or growth. Thus, we modify harvest to manage for “stable” populations across time, while trying to maximize opportunity for hunters.

Figure 3. District 8 Antlerless Special Hunt units across Game Management Units (GMU).

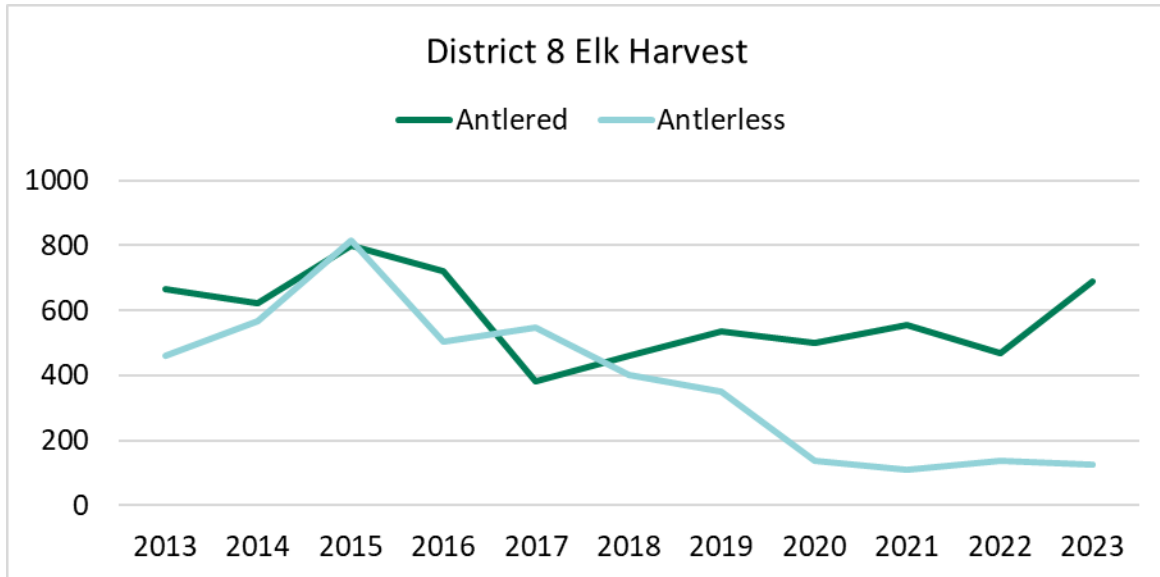


WDFW considers these key factors when determining the number of hunting permits:

1. **Population Status:** The current size and health of the elk population are assessed to ensure that hunting does not negatively impact the overall herd.
2. **Trend:** Population trends, whether the elk numbers are increasing, stable, or declining inform decisions to maintain a balanced ecosystem.
3. **Sex-Age Ratio:** The ratio of different sex-age groups (e.g., bulls to cows) helps determine which segments of the population can be sustainably hunted. This is crucial for maintaining reproductive capacity and population stability.

Figure 4, highlights trends in harvest in relation to population status. Elk populations began to decline in 2015 following a harsh winter and continued to decrease through 2017. This decline prompted a reduction in opportunity and harvest. As populations recovered from 2018 to present, opportunity has increased and has remained stable. More information can be found in the Status and Trend reports published each year on our website.

Figure 4. Combined general season and special permit harvest trend of antlerless (cow) and antlered (bull) elk within District 8.



For more information on hunting season setting and rule making process visit our website, [Hunting season setting and rule making process](#).

Elk hoof disease (Treponeme-associated hoof disease)

District 8 has had positive occurrence of treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD); however it is still considered uncommon. WDFW works with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit the [WDFW elk hoof disease webpage](#). Additional details on TAHD and this incentive program can be found on pages 65 and 66 of the [2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). Please keep any abnormal hooves and report your observations of lame or limping elk to the nearest [WDFW regional office](#). WDFW will work with you to submit the hooves for diagnostic testing. You can use this link to learn more about [TAHD and WDFW's TAHD online reporting tool](#).

Deer



A doe with her two fawns during fall in Region 3. Photo by WDFW.

All District 8 GMUs are managed using mule deer hunting regulations. However, the area boasts a combination of mule deer, mule-black-tailed hybrids, and black-tailed deer. This species diversity makes hunting especially interesting since these species all use slightly different elevations and habitat types. Deer harvest in District 8 hit its lowest levels in 2017 and 2018 and has since rebounded slightly (Figure 5). The 2024 harvest is hard to predict, but in the past a decreased deer harvest was linked to widespread drought across eastern Washington. In contrast it appears that the two consecutive harsh winters in the area did not appear to increase the mortality of radio collared individuals.

Hunter numbers have declined with the reduced deer population. Many of the remaining modern firearm hunters now set up camp and claim their favorite spot for elk season. If you are looking for relatively low hunter densities, consider the higher elevations of District 8. Harvest and hunter numbers are typically highest in GMUs 335 (Teanaway), 328 (Naneum), 340 (Manastash), and 342 (Umtanum). Hunter success rate by GMU and weapon type can be seen in Table 2. Harvest increased from 2022, with higher harvest of 5-point buck compared to recent years (Figure 6).

Figure 5. General seasons harvest success by method in District 8 from 2013 through 2023.

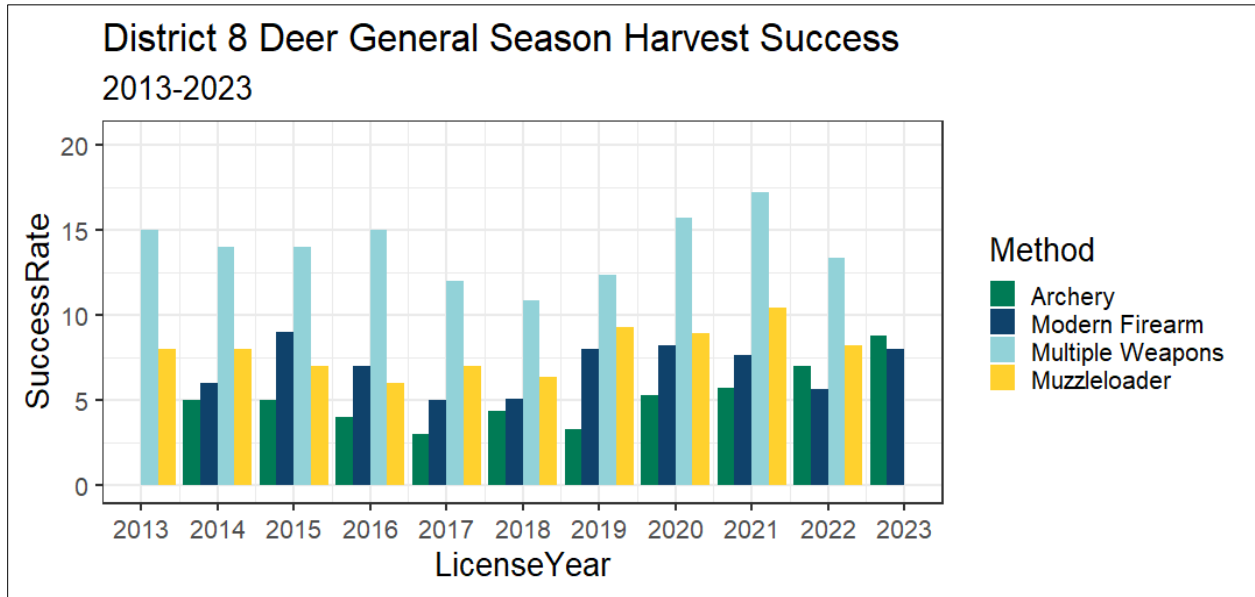
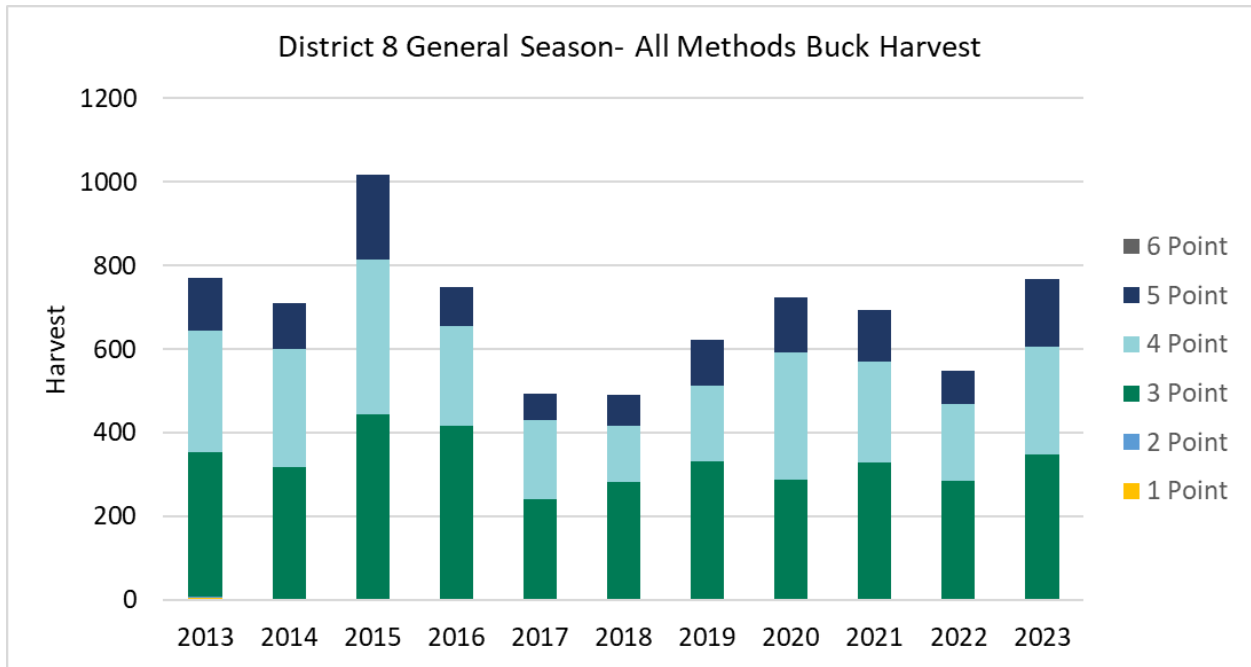


Table 2. Mule deer 2023 season hunter success rates by GMU and weapon type in District 8.

GMU	Archery	Modern Firearm	Multiple Weapons	Muzzleloader
328	8.2	7.4	20.6	17.2
330	NA	28.6	0	100
334	34.8	9.4	38.4	52
335	6.4	14.4	27.6	23
336	6.8	4.4	13.8	6.4
340	4.4	5.4	8.8	11.4
342	10	6.8	12.8	13
346	10.2	6	8.4	NA
352	5.4	5.4	21.8	0
356	4.6	1.4	0	0
360	0	2	7.6	6.8
364	2.6	3.4	5.8	0
368	11.2	6.2	17.8	4
371	NA	NA	NA	NA

Figure 6. General seasons buck harvest by point in District 8 from 2013 through 2023.



Bighorn sheep



A group of young rams from the Cleman Mountain population. Photo by Ralph Owen.

District 8 contain three hunted populations of bighorn sheep. These include Cleman Mountain, Selah/Umtanum and Quilomene bighorn sheep; and is also home to more than 70 percent of the bighorn sheep in Washington. While drawing a permit to hunt sheep is still challenging, bighorns can add enjoyment to a hunting trip in District 8. **Rams are in rut from mid-October through November** when many hunters travel through the area. There are populations of bighorns that can often be easily viewed along Highways 821 (Yakima River Canyon) and 410 (Clemans Mountain, north of the US Highway 12 junction).

Mycoplasma Ovipneumoniae (Movi) impacts to hunting

Movi is a bacterium that can cause fatal pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn sheep. All three populations of bighorn sheep in District 8 have tested positive for Movi, with severe fatal outbreaks in Cleman Mountain and Umtanum/Selah Butte populations. In an attempt to control Movi outbreaks, harvest was increased, and lethal removals were conducted of visibly infected sheep prior to 2022. As a result, both populations are well below historic abundance and had consistent low lamb recruitment. In winter 2022 through 2023, the Department initiated a three-year study to investigate the efficacy of Test and Remove methodology for “cleaning” Movi from infected populations. The study focuses on capturing, testing, and removing infected sheep that are positive for Movi for two consecutive years in the Test population (Selah/Umtanum) and comparing results with the control population (Cleman Mountain).

The combination of the population impacts of fatal outbreaks and the on-going Test and Remove study has results in several changes to hunting opportunities in these herds.

1. No harvest opportunity is available in Umtanum/Selah Butte. Mature rams have significantly declined in the Umtanum/Selah Butte precluding sustainable harvest of rams.
2. Ewe harvest has been temporarily suspended in Cleman Mountain.

In addition, hunters should note that a significant number of ewes and rams have GPS collars and marked with ear tags. Collared or marked sheep are not protected if they are legally harvestable. WDFW requests that hunters avoid damaging the collar and to return it to the Department.

You can help the Department with our effort to reduce Movi impact on the population by reporting sick or dead bighorn sheep to WDFW.

Hunt opportunity overview

Table 3. An overview of bighorn sheep hunt areas within District 8 including the terrain, sheep visibility, access notes and current hunt opportunity.

Hunt Area	Terrain Type/Sheep Visibility	Access Notes	Current Opportunity
Cleman Mountain	Shrubsteppe. Open rolling to steep hills. Sheep are typically visible glassing from the road or ridge top.	Foot trails available from Waterworks Canyon and Oak Creek Bighorn feed site. Road access is possible through the Wenas Wildlife Area.	Ram only. No ewe hunts are currently available due to the impacts of Movi on the population and current Test and Remove study.
Quilomene	Shrubsteppe and rocky cliff sides. Sheep can often be glassed from the river.	Best approach is by boat on the Columbia River to foot trails. Limited road access.	Ram only.
Selah/Umtanum	Shrubsteppe with rocky cliffsides, steep difficult terrain in southern sections. Sheep can typically be glassed from the highway the hillsides, along the rim or in drainages.	Road access is available on SR 821, ATV access is available from the Wenas Wildlife Area green dot roads.	No hunts are currently available due to the impacts of Movi on the population and current Test and Remove study.

Mountain goats

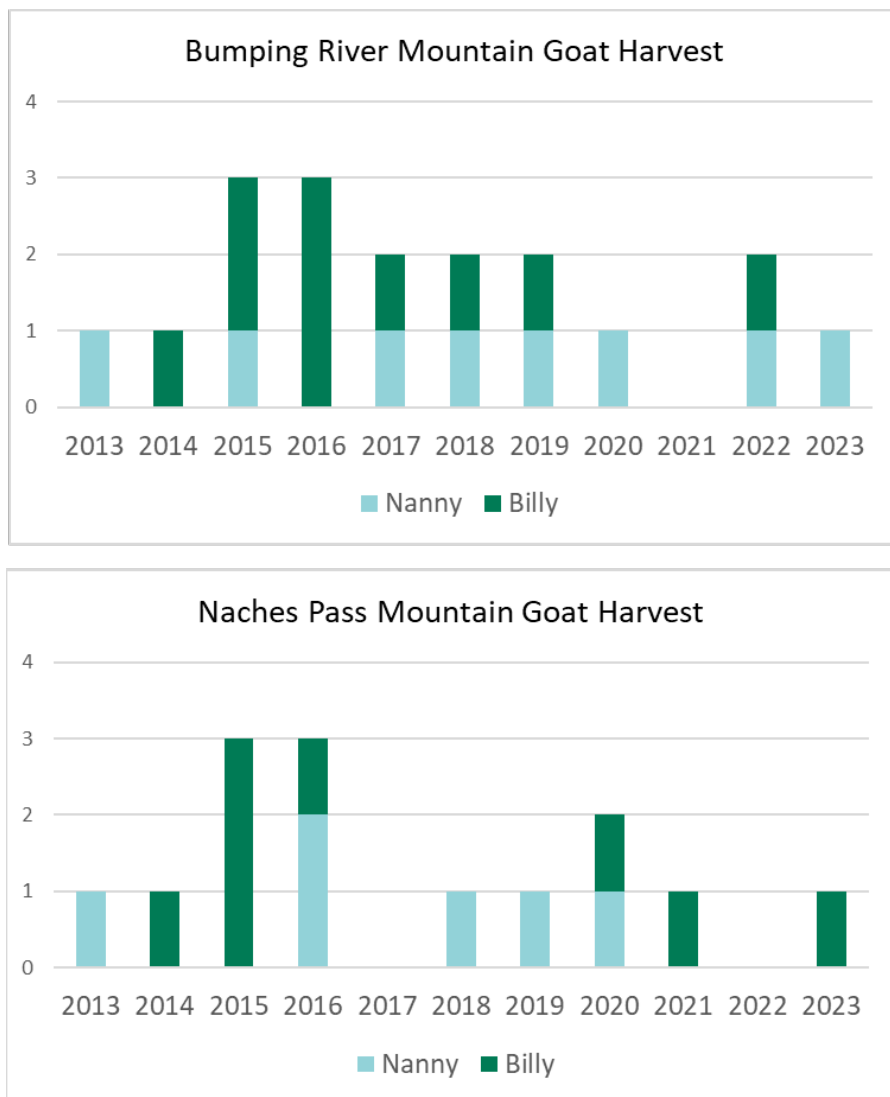


A nanny with her kid during spring in Region 3. Photo by Ralph Owen.

District 8 contains three hunted populations of Mountain Goats: Bumping, Blazed Ridge, and portions of Goat Rocks East. Hunt opportunity is extremely limited with often a single permit offered per unit and over 4000 applicants for each hunt unit annually. Hunter success is high, with nearly 100% success rates across hunt units for this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Significant population declines have been observed in multiple mountain goat populations throughout the state, including populations within District 8. Within District 8 boundaries, from license year 2013 through 2023, over 35% of harvested goats have been nannies (Figure 7). Harvest trends of nannies in combination with unknown impacts from climate, human disturbance, land use change, and disease is likely negatively impacting sustainable harvest opportunity of mountain goats. Harvest opportunity has thus been limited in recent years and likely will continue.

Figure 7. Harvest trends of mountain goats from 2013 through 2023 in the Bumping River and Naches Pass hunt units.



Nannies have accounted for over 35% harvest in District 8. Mountain goats are long-lived species with slow reproductive growth rates. Harvesting of nannies can severely impact populations over time.

Hunters should NOT harvest nannies to help reduce pressure on populations with declining population trends.

Black bear



Black bear traversing a hillside. Photo by WDFW.

Black bears live in diverse forested habitats throughout the state, from coastal rainforests to the dry woodlands of the Cascades' eastern slopes. They are found in hardwood and coniferous forests, meadows, alder thickets, burns, clear cuts, and sub-alpine parkland. Core bear habitat can occur in all of Washington's vegetative zone except the shrub steppe, which is considered fringe habitat. Good habitat typically includes water or wetlands. Black bears tend to move to higher elevations in the fall, following the progression of seasonally available foods; so when scouting, look for food items such as huckleberries and other berry-producing plants or acorns which occur in some areas of Yakima County. Recent wildfires have impacted bear habitat in several places throughout the District. While these areas cannot currently support a large bear population, as the habitat recovers, it will be better suited for bears and other wildlife.

Harvest Opportunity

Fall black bear season begins Aug. 1 and runs through Nov. 15. In District 8, black bears are at higher abundance in the forested areas in western and northern units of the district. Hunters have higher success in GMU 329 and GMU 334 (Table 4). **Hunters are strongly urged not to shoot a female black bear with cubs.** During the fall females may be accompanied by cubs (weighing 30-50 lbs.) which tend to lag when traveling, so please observe and be patient before shooting.

If you plan to hunt bear in any of 12 game management units (GMUs) in Washington state, you must successfully complete the WDFW [Bear identification program](#) test or equivalent test from another state and carry proof of successful completion. Those GMUs include 101, 105, 108, 111, 113, 117, 203, 204, 209, 215, 418, and 426.

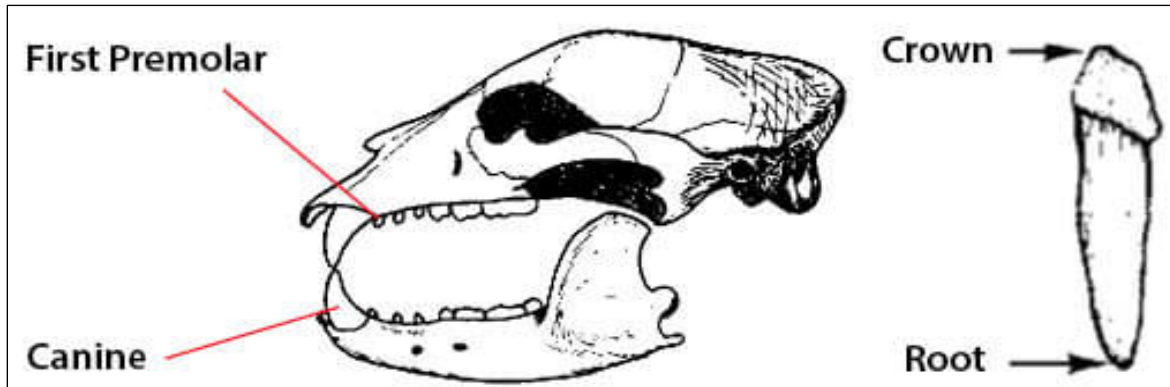
Table 4. Black bear harvest, hunter effort, and success rate in District 8 by GMU for 2023 license season.

GMU	Total	Female	Male	Success rate	Hunter days	Hunters
328	5	2	3	1.6	2043	313
329	12	8	4	13.4	510	90
330	0	0	0	0	12	2
334	0	0	0	0	155	35
335	50	17	33	9.4	3278	535
336	4	2	2	1.4	1968	276
340	5	2	3	2	1943	246
342	4	0	4	4.4	590	91
346	2	2	0	0.8	1388	232
352	3	0	3	2.6	702	114
356	0	0	0	0	708	129
360	6	2	4	3.6	1213	167
364	0	0	0	0	1257	173
368	15	6	9	3.8	2923	393
371	0	0	0	0	5	2

All successful fall black bear hunters statewide **must** submit a black bear premolar tooth (Figure 4) per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department within five days of harvest or by Dec. 1, 2024. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw (Figure 8). Tooth envelopes are available at all

WDFW offices. Biologists use this information to better monitor black bears, make management decisions, and evaluate the impacts of harvest on the population. In addition, black bear hunters that submit a tooth can find out the age of their harvested bear by entering their Wild ID into WDFW's [tooth age lookup tool](#). Just be aware that it takes about six months after the close of all bear seasons to receive the ages back from the lab, so there is a delay in this information being available.

Figure 8. The location of a black bear's first premolar required tooth submission to WDFW.



Population Trends

In 2023, WDFW biologists conducted a population monitoring effort in GMUs 352, 356, and 360 to obtain a more accurate population density estimate for this area. Using hair snare corrals, biologists collected more than 600 hair samples. These samples are being processed and will be sent to a lab for genetic testing. With this information, an estimate of the number of bears per 100 km² for the GMUs will be calculated. This, coupled with the harvest reports and age data obtained from premolar teeth, will improve local estimates of age and sex ratios and population size and trends that guide bear harvest guidelines. Most recent monitoring efforts produced a median age of District 8 harvested bears as 3.5 for males and 5 for females, which is consistent with the statewide numbers.

Cougar



An adult cougar peers from behind a snow-covered tree. Photo by WDFW.

District 8 is a popular area for hunting cougar due to the expansive public land. Cougar hunters are likely to be more successful going early after fresh snow fall, when fresh tracks are most apparent. Most cougars in the district are harvested by deer and elk hunters who opportunistically cross paths with a cougar during general deer and general elk seasons and have a cougar tag. A hunter who wishes to harvest a cougar must possess a valid big game license, including the cougar species option, before harvesting a cat. The primary prey for cougars in the district is mule deer, so hunters who spend time in areas with more deer will increase their chances of seeing and harvesting a cougar. Independently, cougar hunting is a fun and challenging experience.

Cougar harvest increased in 2023 after a slight decline during 2021 to 2022 (Figure 9). Harvest has remained relatively evenly distributed among age and sex class. While formal surveys are not conducted to assess cougar abundance within District 8, cougars are routinely detected during regular field activities on game cameras and road track surveys.

Where to hunt cougar

Male cougars are territorial and use a broader range when deer and elk are dispersed in summer and early fall. Deer and elk typically migrate back to the winter range by mid-November. Cougars will follow, and the highest densities can be found in lower elevations in late fall and winter. One popular cougar hunting technique is to use calls. This is most successful when snow is on the ground and tracks can be found. Rather than following the cougar hoping to find it, hunters call, trying to get the animal to come to them. Several calls work. During deer and elk seasons, hunters might consider a fawn bleat call, which typically won't spook deer or elk. Without snow, it can be challenging to know where to start. Rather than working large blocks of timber, consider timbered stringers. Cougars inhabit open terrain but prefer cover. Cougars hunting open shrubsteppe will likely hide in timber stringers during the day. Cougars inhabit nearly every portion of the district, but some online hunting groups post where cats have been seen recently. Checking those sites may improve your success.

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually <80 lbs.) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. Hunters should be aware of how to identify young from adults by consulting the [cougar brochure](#) prior to hunting. Females can have dependent young throughout the year. Since cougars are solitary, observing multiple tracks suggests a female with offspring. However, smaller kittens may not be visible to hunters so please observe and be patient before shooting.

Notable changes

The cougar hunting season structure has changed starting in 2024. Here are the main points and steps hunters need to follow before hunting cougars:

- **Hunting season:** Sep. 1 through March 31, or until the cap is reached.
- **Before hunting:** Call the Cougar Hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 2) or visit [WDFW's website](#) to check if Cougar Hunt Areas are open.
- **After a successful hunt:**
 1. Report the harvest within 72 hours to the cougar hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 3). Provide your name, WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill.
 2. Present the unfrozen hide and skull for sealing and sample collection by WDFW within five days of the kill. Leave proof of sex attached.
- **Reporting:** All hunters with a cougar tag must report their hunt activity (successful or unsuccessful) via the WILD system by March 31, 2025. Note: Agency inspection/sealing must be within 5 days of the kill. The hotline reporting is separate from sealing.

After a harvest, hunters must call the closest Regional Office to schedule an appointment with a biologist for a tooth extraction and hide sealing. The skull and hide **cannot** not be frozen when presented for inspection.

Small game, upland birds, and waterfowl

The public land provides plenty of upland bird hunting opportunities in District 8, but populations have fallen on hard times and aren't likely to rebound. Wild pheasants are almost extinct, and nearly all species have declined to near historic lows. Bird hunters wanting to wander over large areas have many options in District 8. Along the breaks of the Columbia River, the Yakima Training Center consists of 327,000 acres south of I-90, while there are 9,000 acres on the [Wild Horse Wind Farm](#), which utilizes the [Hunt by Reservation](#) system. A motivated upland bird hunter with a good dog could pursue grouse, chukar, partridge, quail, and pheasant on the same day.

Harvest overview

District 8 boasts a variety of hunt opportunities for small game, upland birds and waterfowl. Harvest and hunter activity between Kittitas (Table 5) and Yakima counties (Table 6) are shown below. Harvest trends reflect the diversity of WLA opportunities within each subregion. Numerous watershed across Yakama County, such as Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area provide abundant duck hunting. Expansive shrubsteppe habitat of the Colockum and Wenas wildlife areas make for excellent chuckar hunting. Forested areas of the L.T. Murray and Oak Creek wildlife areas offers excellent forest grouse opportunity.

Table 5. Kittitas County reported small game, upland bird, and waterfowl harvest and hunter activity during the 2023 through 2024 license season.

Species	Harvest	Hunters	Days
Duck	4428	342	2310
Chukar Partridge	2324	337	2011
Forest Grouse	1266	1040	5877
Mourning Dove	520	36	108
Late Goose	511	120	559
Hun	392	62	727
September Canada Goose	255	32	70
Pheasant	234	140	429
Quail (All Species)	218	126	373
Cottontail Rabbit	28	42	140
Snowshoe Hare	18	27	69
Snipe	4	7	6

Species are listed in order of highest to lowest harvest levels.

Table 6. Yakima County reported small game, upland bird, and waterfowl harvest and hunter activity during the 2023 through 2024 license season.

Species	Harvest	Hunters	Days
Duck	24096	1283	11566
Mourning Dove	6918	412	1689
Quail (All Species)	6845	657	4411
Late Goose	3363	496	3526
Pheasant	2085	695	4179
Forest Grouse	1378	896	5353
Chukar Partridge	1114	208	900
Cottontail Rabbit	403	94	2171
September Canada Goose	153	45	72
Hun	103	44	340
Snowshoe Hare	32	30	169
Snipe	8	13	11

Species are listed in order of highest to lowest harvest levels.

Figure 9. Yakima County harvest, hunters, and hunter days for reported small, upland, and waterfowl game.

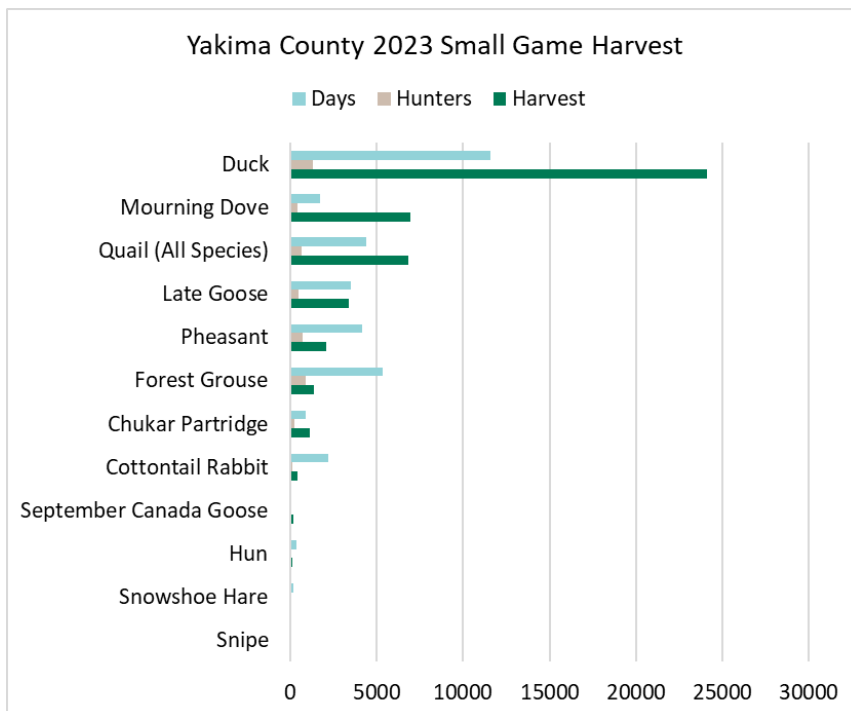


Figure 10. Kittitas County harvest, hunters, and hunter days for reported small, upland, and waterfowl game.

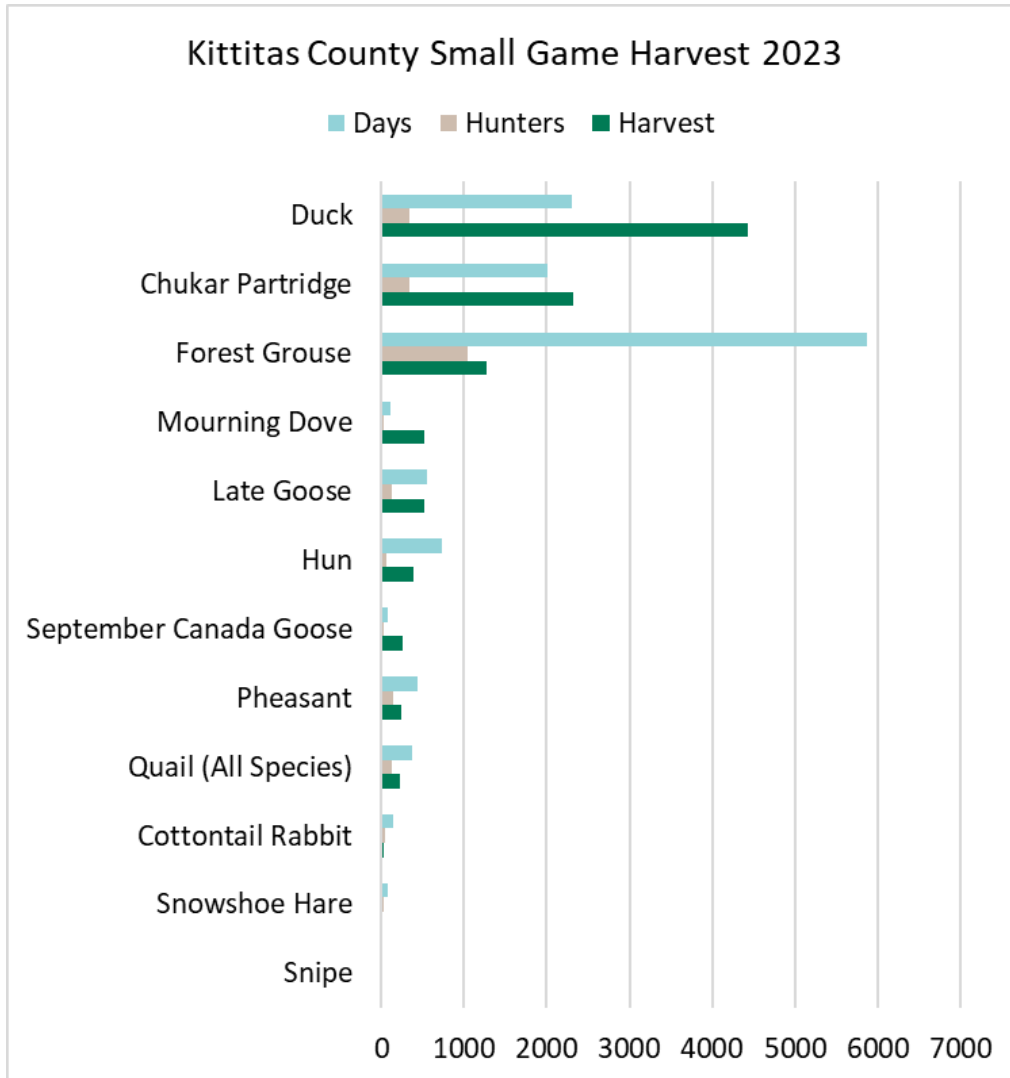
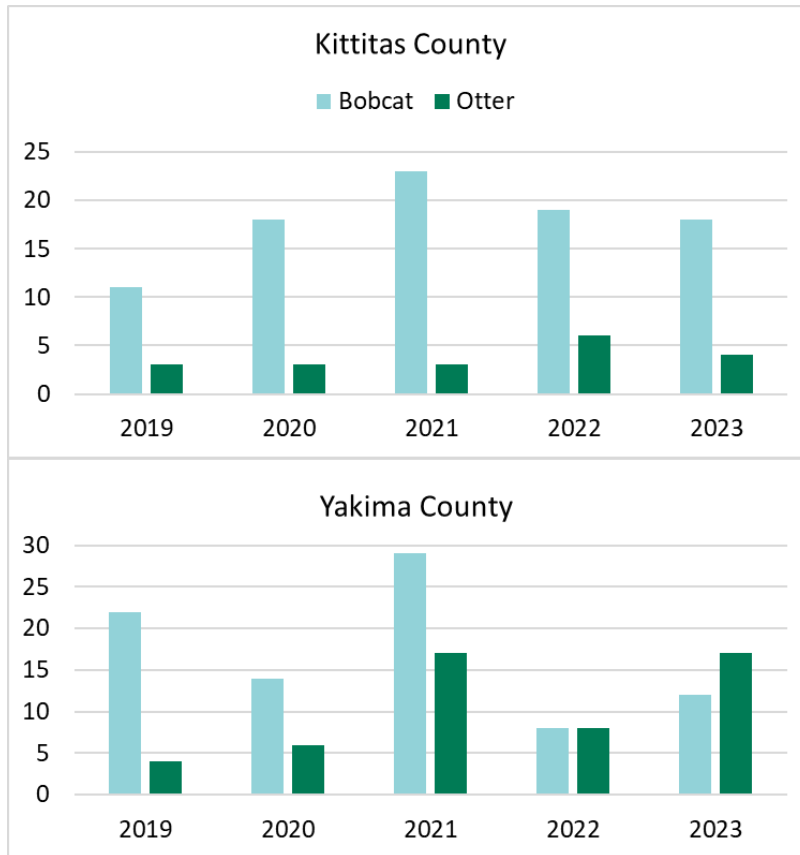


Figure 11. Bobcat and otter harvest trends from 2019 through 2023 in Kittitas and Yakima Counties.



Ducks

In District 8, fall and winter populations of waterfowl have been declining. Total harvest peaked at around 50,000 birds in 2012 and has declined to roughly 20,000 in recent years. During the 2022 through 2023 and 2023 through 2024 season, harvest exceeded the ten-year average (29,693 birds) but did not exceed the 20-year average (33,038 birds).

Band returns suggest that locally produced ducks tend to stay in the Yakima Valley, and that early season success is likely tied to regional production. Late season success is likely influenced by weather and the naive northern migrants it pushed south. The USFWS surveyed northern areas this year, but population estimates won't be published until August. The first cold wave is typically around Thanksgiving. Once ponds and sloughs freeze over, the Yakima River can be productive. For the best late-season hunting, watch for significant weather changes. If there is a quick thaw and rain, new ducks enter the valley, and can result in a week or so of good hunting before the birds move into the safety of private land and reserves. A freeze and thaw may also fill wetlands that had been dry earlier in the year.

Refer to the [Washington 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information about migratory waterfowl and upland game hunting. There are some bird hunting opportunities that get underway in September, so hunters can start making plans now by checking out

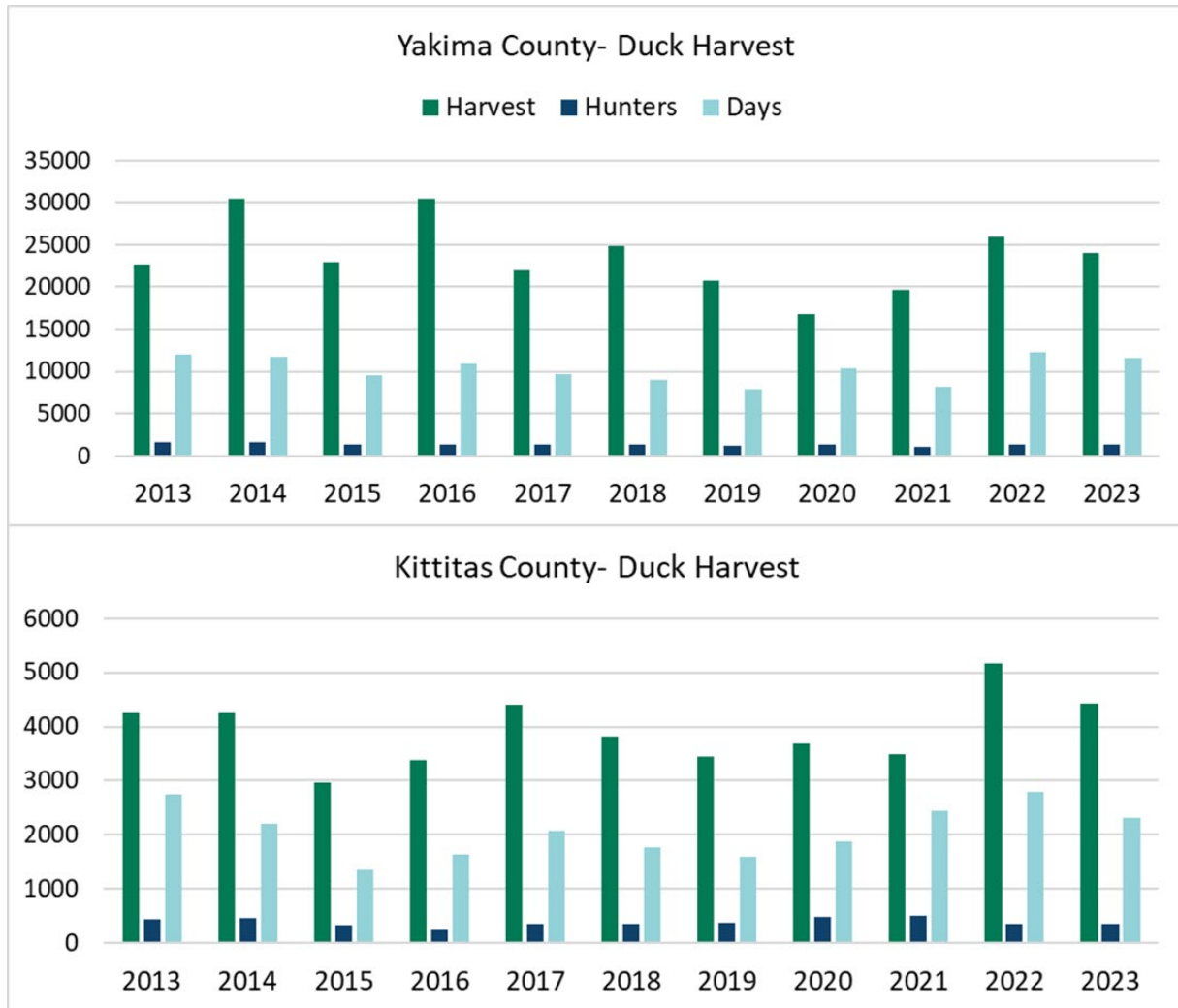
the upcoming seasons. Additionally, an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting in Washington can be found on the WDFW's [Let's Go waterfowl hunting webpage](#).

Where to hunt?

The best waterfowl hunting is in the lower Yakima Valley, especially on Yakama Nation (YN) lands. The Yakama Nation is working to increase waterfowl hunting opportunities along the Yakima River every year. Review their [Feel Free to Hunt map](#) annually, use Google Earth to pre-scout, and don't be afraid to explore. YN's Satus Wildlife Area is the most popular and is open to hunting Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays. The Satus Wildlife Area is very popular due to relatively easy access. Hunting can be just as good on Mosebar ponds and the northern areas of Satus.

Public hunting can be found on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) (SSWA) and [Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge](#). The Sunnyside Unit of the SSWA has several managed wetlands which include the Rice Paddy Wetlands, Johnson Wetland, and the North and South Haystack Ponds. There are three blinds on the SSWA, all of which require the use of waders while putting out decoys. The blinds offer mostly duck hunting with a rare flock of geese passing by. These are first-come first-serve, with ADA hunters having priority if the blind is occupied one-and-a-half hours prior to daylight. Infrastructure problems in recent years have left one or more blinds dry. For information on which blinds have water and to obtain the combination to the lock, call the SSWA at 509-545-2028. The wildlife area also has several agriculture fields with small grains that can also provide some field hunting opportunities. Harvest and hunter days on Sunnyside have been low and are likely influenced by the challenging nature of managing dense vegetation and low water levels during drought years.

Figure 12. Duck harvest estimates in Yakima and Kittitas Counties for hunting seasons from 2013 through 2023.



Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge has also had difficulty filling wetlands, especially in October. Water can only be pumped from Toppenish to fill wetlands in the Robins Unit if flows exceed 30 cubic feet per second. The Pumphouse wetlands depend on Toppenish Creek side channels to fill at higher creek levels. Flows in those side channels have been unpredictable in recent years. At a gauge height of three feet, the channels should fill. Hunters can check flow/levels at the [USGS website](#). Summer flows in Toppenish Creek are always low. Significant fall rain is needed, which usually doesn't come until November. A private hunt club due east of the refuge that attracted large numbers of ducks to the area was abandoned a few years ago. Few ducks were seen leaving the reserve and flying over the Toppenish Refuge last year. Before making a trip to Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge, calling the refuge at 509-865-2405 for conditions would be best.

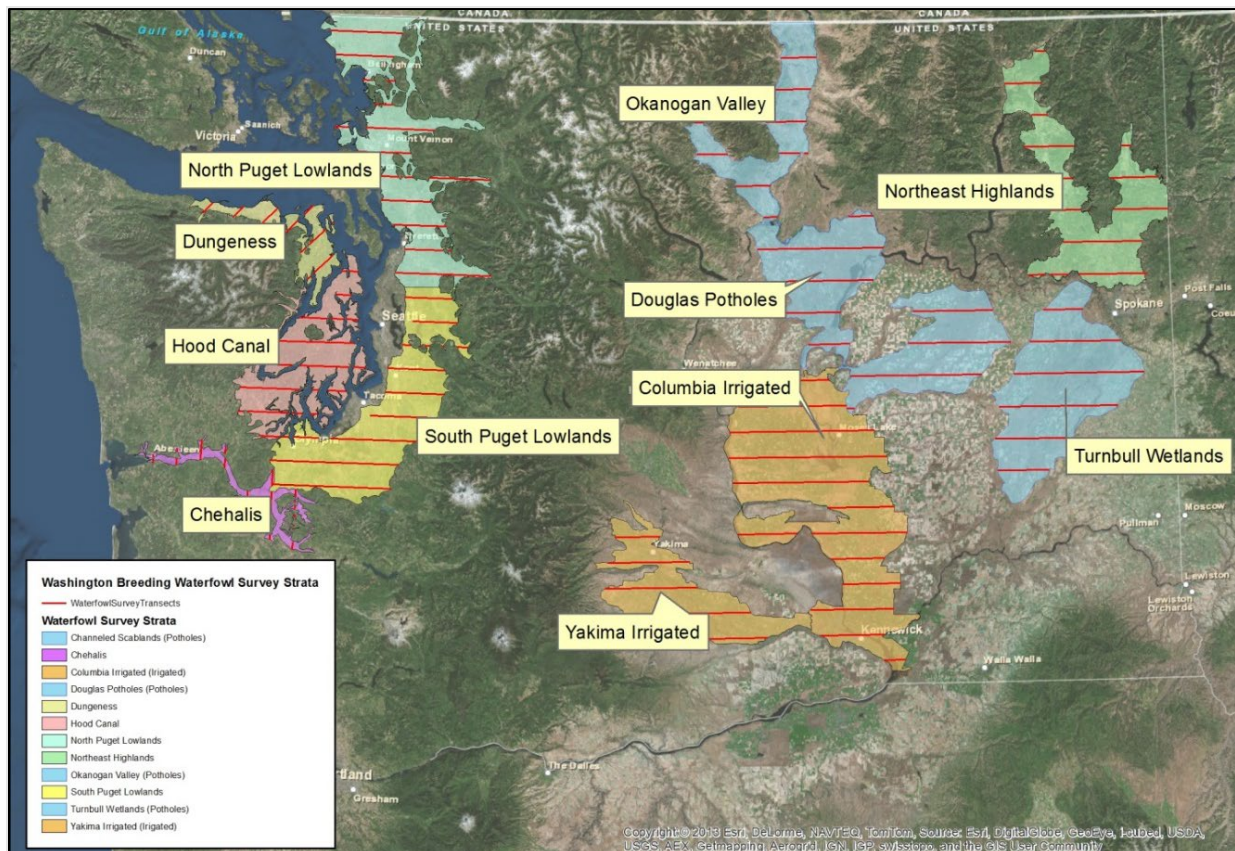
Population monitoring

The Washington Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey is conducted yearly and is an index of breeding abundance since all areas of the state cannot be sampled. This year's survey was conducted May 6 through 10 in eastern Washington. Parts of the district are within the Yakima and Columbia Irrigated survey stratum (Figure 14).

Mallards are the most abundant breeding and wintering waterfowl species in Washington. Unsurprisingly, the estimate of breeding mallards in the spring of 2024 in eastern Washington was 43,135 birds, which was a mere 136 birds above the 2023 estimate (42,999) but was 5% lower than 2022 and 26% lower than the long-term average. This was the first year that western Washington had a higher mallard estimate than eastern Washington.

Ultimately, ducks need water, and the extreme drought throughout the west and prairie potholes negatively impacted populations in the past four years.

Figure 13. Washington State breeding waterfowl strata and long-term Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey transects and survey strata.



Turkey

Turkey hunting can be one of the most exciting and shareable hunts. Adequate scouting and preparation are important for hunter success. Finding where birds roost at night and sneaking into a spot nearby before sunrise is a common tactic used by die hard turkey hunters in both spring and fall. Because the hunting season aligns with the spring breeding season, male turkeys respond well to calls and decoys. They are trying to attract a mate at this time, so males will strut to display their dominance and will occasionally fight with other males often resulting in a very entertaining and memorable hunt. A great resource for new turkey hunters is [The Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) document released by WDFW’s Hunter Education Program.

The best hunting early in the spring is on private lands in the lower elevations of GMU 335, which is why most of the District 8 harvest comes from GMU 335 (Table 7). However, this GMU sees 40% of the district’s hunter days spent afield. By May, some birds will move into higher elevations which opens opportunity on the Teanaway Community Forest. The remainder of GMUs yield a harvest of fewer than 30 birds. The 2022 season saw the highest hunter success rates in GMU 346 (25%), 336 (23%), and 340 (19%). Healthy populations of turkey can also be found along most of the Yakima River.

Table 7. District 8 spring turkey harvest by GMU for the 2019 through 2023 seasons.

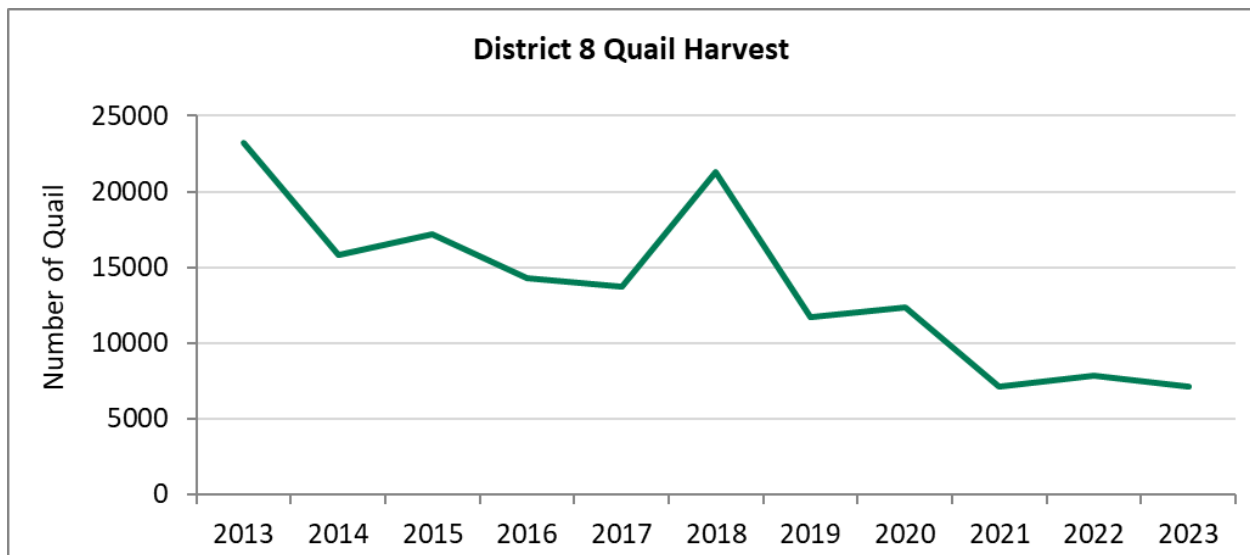
GMU	GMU Name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
328	Naneum	25	17	27	24	11
329	Quilomene	16	11	25	3	10
334	Ellensburg	17	14	20	20	6
335	Teanaway	70	59	112	84	74
336	Taneum	20	26	42	33	26
340	Manastash	16	9	32	25	37
342	Umtanum	16	18	17	13	10
346	Little Naches	0	0	2	3	3
352	Nile	3	0	3	0	0
356	Bumping	0	3	0	0	0
360	Bethel	0	2	3	0	2
364	Rimrock	0	0	5	0	0
368	Cowiche	10	4	10	9	3
372	Rattlesnake Hills	2	2	7	3	2
	Total	195	165	305	217	184

Quail

California quail can be found in most non-timbered portions of the district. The best habitat and highest number of quail are typically in the lower Yakima Valley. The trend has been declining total quail harvest for the last ten years (Figure 20). 2021 was the lowest harvest ever recorded and has since remained stable. A variety of factors, from deep snow (2016 through 2017), drought (2020 through 2022), and fires (annually) have reduced quail populations. Additionally, closures of public land because of fires in the 2021 and 2022 season may have had some effect on the decline in harvest.

Quail in riparian draws surrounded by sagebrush are getting hard to find. Most of the quail habitat in the Wenas Wildlife Area has burned in recent years. The best chance of finding good coveys will be near rivers and irrigated land. The best quail hunting opportunity in District 8 can be found along the lower Yakima River on the [Yakama Nation](#). WDFW has parcels along the river on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) (SSWA), but registration boxes show poor harvest. Roughly 87% of upland bird hunters are unsuccessful at harvesting quail on SSWA, and harvest averages 0.16 per day.

Figure 14. Harvest estimates for quail in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2013 through 2023.



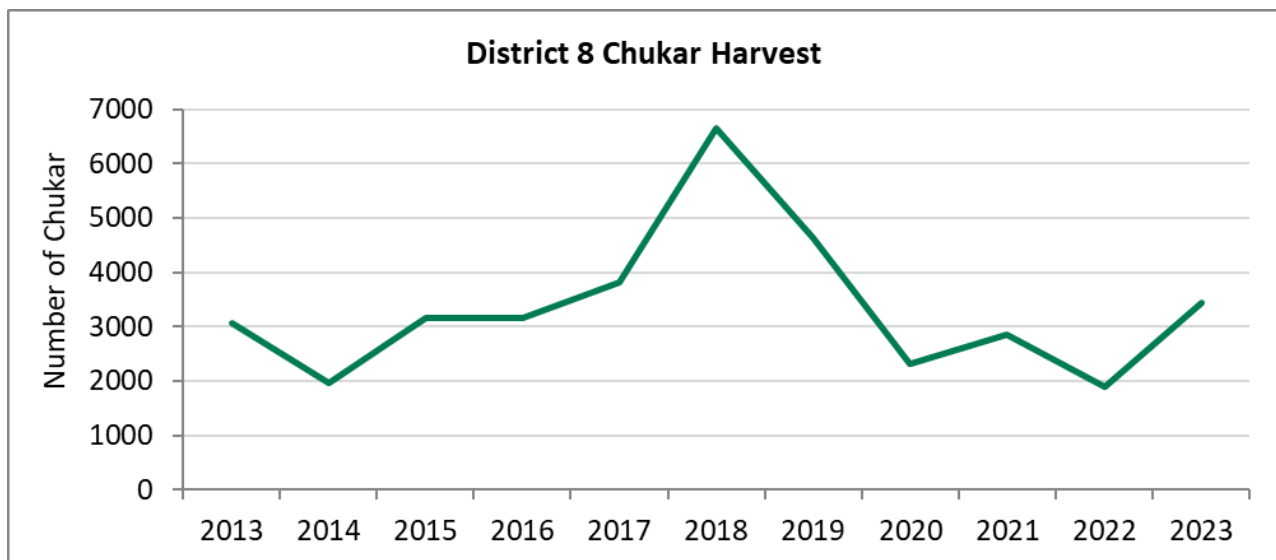
To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. Refer to the [Washington 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

Partridge (Chukar/Hungarian)

The best hunting in recent years has been on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#), [Colockum Wildlife Area](#), and the [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC). While the YTC is very popular with long-time chukar hunters, please note that access may be limited by military training activity.

Partridge harvest in the district has been decreasing since 2018 (Figure 17) with drier conditions. Abundant snow and a wet, cold spring increases available forage and has corresponded to increased in chukar abundance. Conditions from 2022 through 2024 have been favorable and populations are believed to have increased locally. Increase in harvest from 2022 through 2023 indicate an increase in opportunity; in combination with trends in population, hunters should anticipate a good season.

Figure 15. Combined harvest estimates for chukar and Hungarian partridge in District 8 from 2013 through 2023.



To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas.

Forest grouse

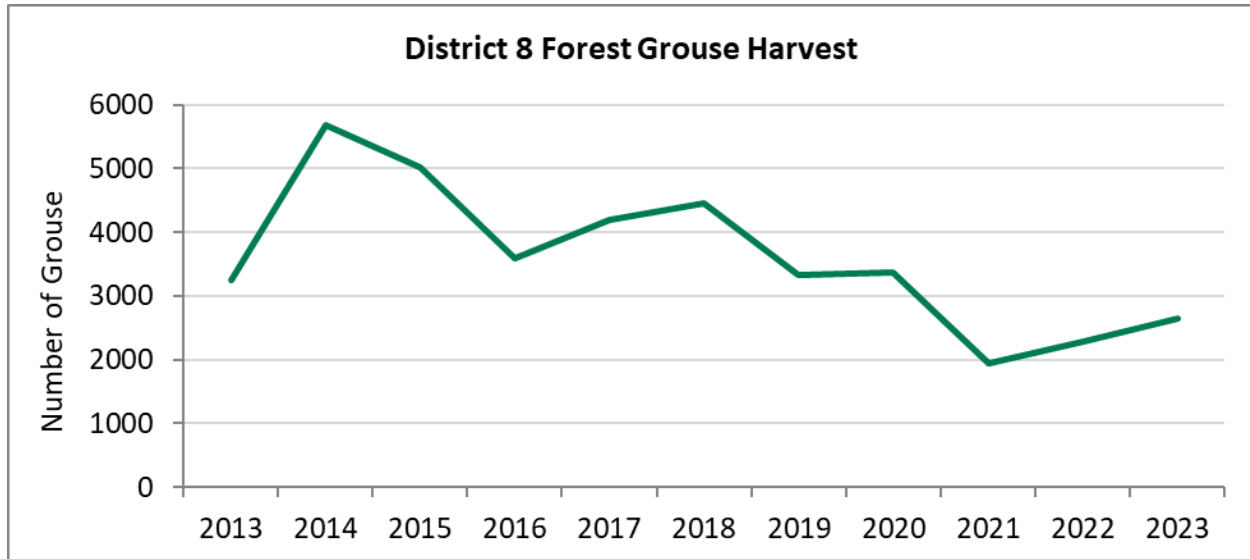
Traditionally, the harvest in District 8 was made up of primarily blue grouse. However, 45% of last season's harvest was made up of ruffed grouse. Around 30% of harvest was of blue grouse (sooty or dusky), and 5% spruce grouse. The remaining 20% of harvest was reported as unknown species. Grouse harvest in District 8 hit an all-time low in 2021 (Figure 18) but rebounded slightly during the 2022 and 2023 season.

A common tactic used by many grouse hunters is driving roads in the morning and evening, especially when the season first opens. Research suggests brood hens and young are most vulnerable in early September. During the 2021 through 2023 season setting rulemaking process, the WDFW Commission adopted a decision to delay the forest grouse season two weeks from the original opening date of Sep. 1 to the new season dates of **Sep. 15 through Jan. 15**. WDFW biologists recommended the rule based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. Setting the season back to Sep. 15 helps protect brood hens that are more vulnerable to harvest during early September. More information is [available in this 2021 blog post](#). Hunters serious about finding grouse should look for areas with low densities of open roads and hike morning or evening.



A lone grouse hiding in the understory. Photo by WDFW.

Figure 16. Harvest estimates for forest grouse in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2013 through 2023.



WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection

Biologists collect wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse throughout the season using designated collection sites. This collection effort contributes to a long-term statewide dataset that allows for a better evaluation of population trends and age-ratio data necessary for the local management of forest grouse species. Grouse hunters in District 8 can help with this effort by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse they harvest into one of our collection barrels located statewide ([WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection sites](#)). In District 8, collection sites are at the following locations:

- **Coleman Creek** - Coleman Creek Road at the entrance to Naneum State Forest.
GPS: 47.10453, -120.39865
- **Taneum Creek** - W Taneum Road, Entrance to L.T. Murray Wildlife Area.
GPS: 47.08702, -120.79056
- **Nasty Creek** - Junction of North Fork and Nasty Creek Roads.
GPS: 46.56476, -120.91966
- **Oak Creek Rd** - Junction of Oak Creek Road (1400) and Hwy 12
GPS: 46.72399, -120.81432

Please be sure to use the provided bags at the site and to fill out all necessary information. If these locations are inconvenient for hunters, we suggest looking through the statewide wing barrel site list on our website's [Forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) webpage or calling your local, [regional office](#) for information.



New grouse barrel style deployed in District 8. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasant

Released pen-raised pheasants are the District's main source of opportunity for hunters. Wild pheasants contribute little to the total harvest in the district. In Kittitas County (no wild birds), 480 pheasants were released, and harvest was estimated at 234 pheasants. Yakima county accounts for the majority of pheasants harvested in District 8. About 1,200 birds will be released at the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) and 500 birds at the Green Gate Entrance on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#) (also referred to as Whiskey Dick).

The best pheasant hunting in the district is around the irrigated farmland along the Yakima River in Yakima County. A large part of the irrigated farmland in Yakima County is located on the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation. Hunters interested in hunting on tribal lands should contact the office of the Yakama Nation (YN) at 509-865-5121. For maps of WDFW-owned and managed land along the Yakima River, contact the Yakima Regional office at 509-575-2740.



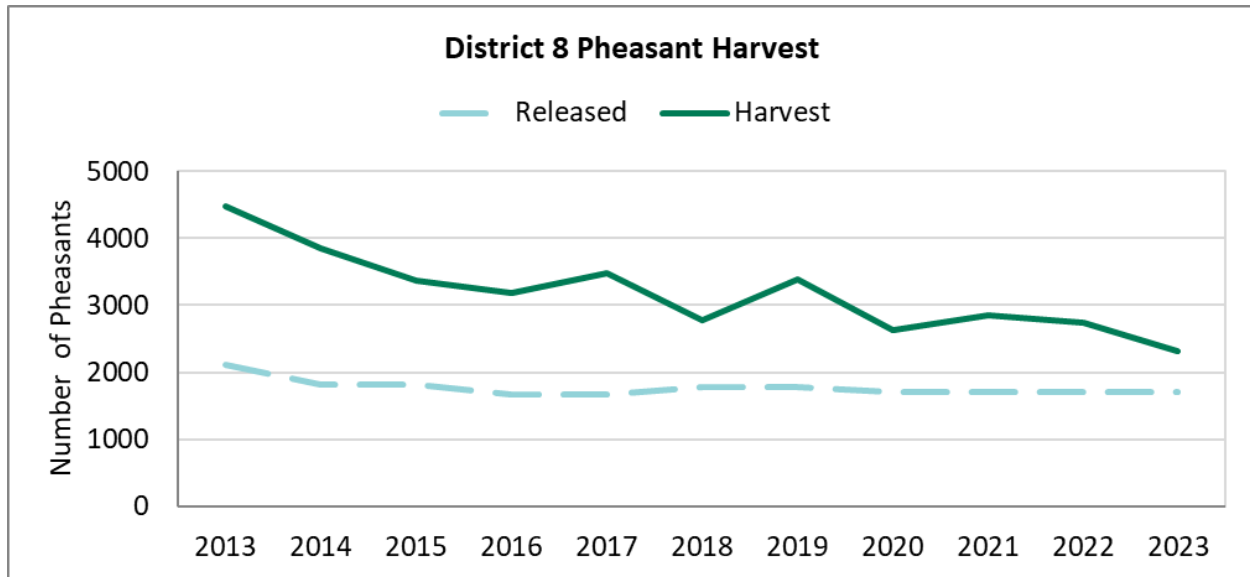
WDFW staff releasing pheasants at Whiskey Dick- Green Gate. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasant harvest in District 8 has declined about 50% over the last ten years and recently leveled out at very low levels (Figure 19). Habitat loss due to conversion from fallow land to crops has been identified as the reason for the decline as well as the decline of hunter participation.

To hunt pheasants in Eastern Washington a small game license is required. The small game license is \$40.50 or \$22.00 if purchased with any big game license. Youths under 16 can purchase the small game license for \$18.50, or \$8.80 with a big game license. Birds are released for youth and general season openers. To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, non-toxic shot is required for all upland bird, dove and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. More detailed information can be found in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) pamphlet.

If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). The use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. Refer to the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

Figure 17. The number of released pen-raised pheasants and harvest estimates based on hunter reporting from 2013 through 2023 hunting seasons.



Online tools and maps

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permits for any GMU and Permit Hunt for all game species are online at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-harvest.

Updated detailed information on population size, compositions, or trends of game species is available through annual [Game Status and Trend Reports](#). You can use the search tool on the online document to quickly find the species and population of interest.

WDFW has released a Hunt Planner Web Map to search for game seasons and private land access around the state: geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/. A good starting point for hunters looking for a place to hunt is the Web Map, which provides hunters with information about public and private lands access points, GMU boundaries, species area units, hunting seasons, pheasant release sites, water access points, landscape features such as roads and topography, public lands, and much more (Figure 20).

2024 District 12 Hunting Prospects

King County



Washington
Department of
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August 2024

2024 District 12 Hunting Prospects

King County

Authors

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Cover photo of snow-capped Mount Rainier peeking out from behind thick green conifer forests of Washington west-central Cascade Mountains. Photo by WDFW.

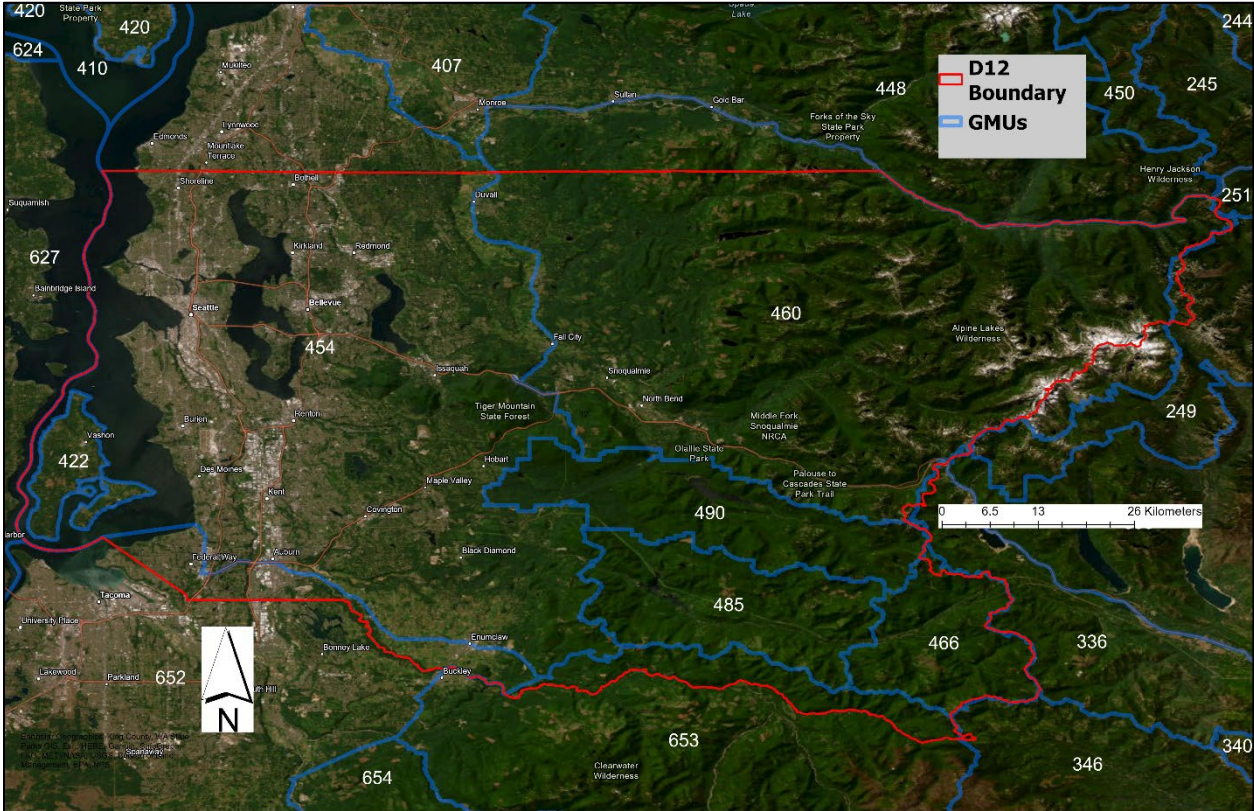
Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 12 general overview

Figure 1. Map of District 12 and associated Game Management Units (GMUs).



District 12 (King County) is comprised of six game management units (GMUs), including 422 (Vashon/Maury Islands), 454 (Issaquah), 460 (Snoqualmie), 466 (Stampede), 485 (Green River, open to appropriate deer and elk permit holders only), and 490 (Cedar River, currently closed to state hunters). Land ownership in the district is a checkerboard of private, state, and federal properties. The densest private (urban and suburban) developments are found in the Issaquah Unit (GMU 454), while private agricultural properties are primarily located in the northwestern part of the Snoqualmie Unit (GMU 460).

A great tool for determining property ownership and boundaries can be found using King County [iMap](#). We also suggest the [WDFW Hunt Planner webmap](#).

Tacoma and Seattle each own and operate municipal watersheds in southeast King County, totaling about 250,532 acres that supply drinking water for their cities. One is in the Green River drainage (GMU 485), one is in the Tolt River drainage (a portion of GMU 460), and the other is in the Cedar River drainage (GMU 490).

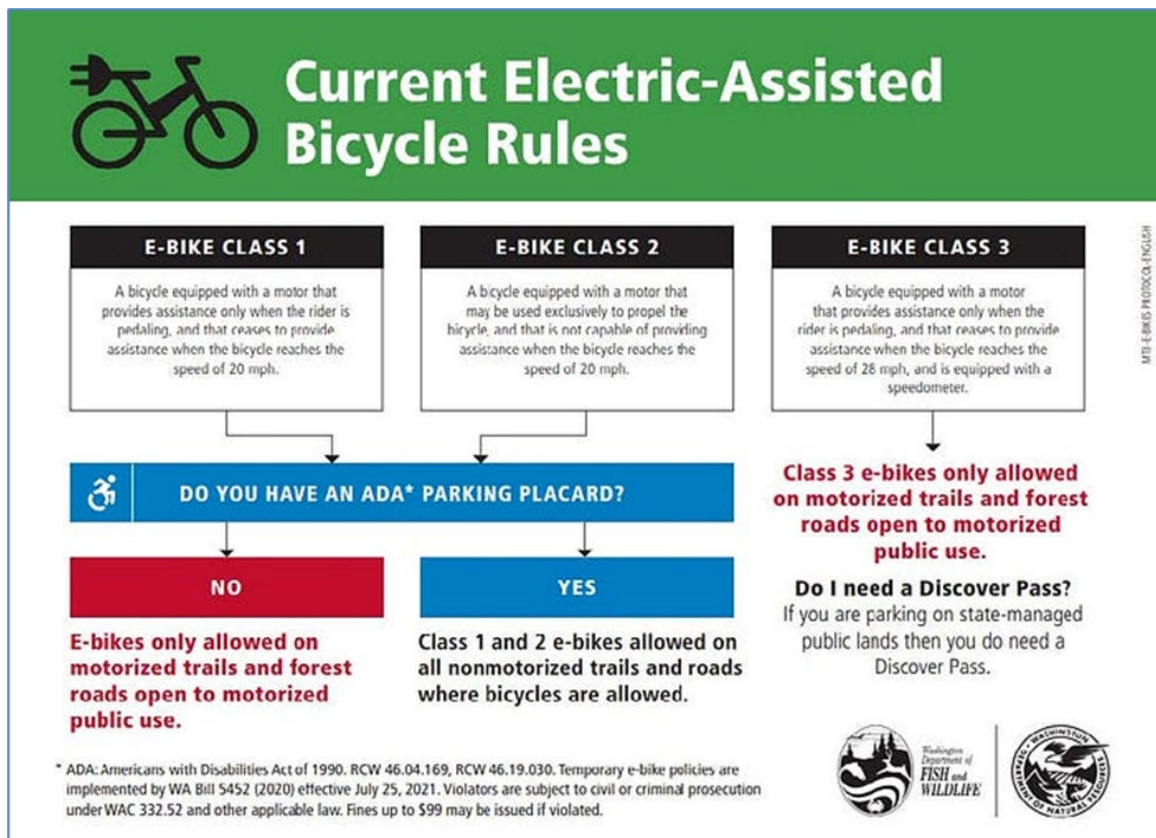
The largest huntable area is U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land, but industrial timber companies also have large properties in the district. Private, state, and federally owned lands are managed primarily to

produce timber. USFS lands are managed for multiple uses, including timber, recreation, and wildlife, with a current emphasis on growing and managing old-growth forests.

Approximately 2.3 million people reside in King County, making it Washington’s most heavily populated area. Hunters should expect to encounter others while hunting or scouting in many areas within this district. **Lands across District 12 are especially popular for a variety of year-round recreation activities. Always respect safety corridors and [No Shooting Areas](#). Remember to be a good hunting and outdoor steward.** Be courteous and respectful of others to support quality experiences for everyone. Hunt in a manner that seeks to avoid negative interactions with other users whenever possible, such as avoiding busy trails and hunting during early morning hours. Additional tips are available in [this WDFW blog post](#). Please pick up after yourself and don’t leave a gut pile out in the open – cover, bury, or hike it out and dispose of it properly. For the benefit of all fish and wildlife, strongly consider utilizing copper or non-toxic ammunition even in locations and for game species where it is not required. Similarly, shotgun shells with biodegradable wads are becoming more available and are less harmful to the environment.

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [WDFW](#) and Department of Natural Resources ([DNR](#)) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

Figure 2. Infographic of current e-bike rules for state public lands manage by WDFW and DNR.



Elk

Drive or hike deep into the Cascades Mountains and you'll be past most of the elk in this district. Hunters should place greater emphasis on riparian forest habitats and agricultural areas throughout the district, as well as public lands adjacent to such areas. Many of District 12's elk reside on private land, so make sure you have permission before you hunt.

Game Management Unit (GMU) 460 (Snoqualmie) provides good hunting opportunities in areas of the unit. Hunters are advised to scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated with restricted access. Many elk in the GMU are found (at least at times) on private property in valley bottoms (refer to Elk Area 4601 below), and elk density is much lower in the mountainous eastern portion of the unit. Hunters should network well in advance to gain access to hunt private properties. Please be mindful of residences, domestic animals (pets/livestock), and other non-target objects downrange when hunting these areas. Hunters should plan for safe shooting lanes. A map of [King County no shooting areas](#) is available online and a description of firearm restriction areas can be found on page 90 of the [hunting regulations pamphlet](#).

Elk Area 4601 is almost entirely comprised of private property and may hold half the elk in the Snoqualmie Unit. Elk Area 4601 was formed in 2009 and antlerless opportunity was added during permit seasons to help reduce the elk population in and around North Bend and Snoqualmie. Since 2014, general season archery and muzzleloader hunts in Elk Area 4601 have included opportunity for antlerless harvest as well. Antlerless opportunity was added to modern firearm in 2021 to allow property owners (and those with permission) to harvest without the need for special permits. In the interest of safety in this area, hunters are strongly encouraged to consider using muzzleloader or archery equipment during the modern firearm season.

Elk in GMU 454 (Issaquah) continue to be managed with liberal seasons designed to reduce vehicle/elk collisions and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly developed areas. Much of this unit is in private property. Pre-season planning and networking may be most important for hunters trying to gain access in this unit. Hunters should also be mindful of safety concerns and firearm restrictions in this unit. Bowhunters should have an advantage in gaining permission.

GMU 466 (Stampede) is a mix of private, state, and USFS lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). There are some old-growth stands on USFS lands, with second-growth timber dominating much of the unit. While elk are sometimes present here at higher densities than other mountainous areas in District 12, providing the chance for exceptional experiences, hunters should be prepared for up to a 2,500-foot elevation change and steep terrain in this unit. Though many forest roads exist, road conditions and access vary considerably. Early snowfall in the unit has the potential to strand hunters, but also the potential to aid in hunting success.

GMU 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled-access portion of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Elk are

managed with special permit hunts. During the 2024 season, eight (8) any bull, and two (2) youth any bull elk tags are available for hunters through the draw system.



Elk in GMU 460. Photo by WDFW.

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online on [WDFW's harvest report webpage](#).

Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the North Rainier elk herd range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009–2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, and western Lewis County. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including the North Rainier elk herd area.

All of District 12 is within the North Rainier elk herd range. WDFW has received sporadic reports of limping elk throughout District 12 for several years. However, the presence of TAHD has only been confirmed within District 12 from elk sampled in GMUs 454 and 485.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

More information is available on this webpage: [Elk hoof disease in Washington state](#).

How hunters and others can help

State wildlife managers are asking for your help to monitor and prevent the spread of TAHD in several ways:

- WDFW is implementing an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest elk with hoof disease (TAHD), thereby potentially reducing the prevalence of the disease over time. Learn more about TAHD hoof disease incentive permits and how you may be eligible at wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/elk-hoof/incentive-permits.
- WDFW will work with you to submit the hooves for diagnostic testing.
- **Report elk:** You can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of healthy or limping elk and dead elk with hoof deformities using this [reporting tool](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the spread the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes or tires before leaving the area.



Group of elk in King County. Photo by WDFW.

Deer

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has not conducted black-tailed deer population surveys for several years throughout District 12. However, anecdotal observations and annual harvest statistics indicate hunting prospects can be quite good where hunting is allowed on private and public lands.

Game Management Unit (GMU) 422 covers all of Vashon and Maury islands. Hunting access on Vashon and Maury islands is mostly on private agricultural and hobby farm properties. King County's [Island Center Forest](#) may open to public hunting during the modern firearm season (firearm restricted); please contact the county for details. Hunters must take time to network with communities and property owners for opportunity and access. More opportunities (incorporated in recent years) will continue in the second deer special permit category for GMU 422. Please refer to the current Big Game Hunting Regulations for updated listings of these opportunities.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife continues to manage deer in Game Management Unit (GMU) 454 (Issaquah) with liberal seasons designed to reduce vehicle/deer collisions and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly developed areas. More opportunities were recently added in the second deer special permit category for GMU 454 with the addition of Deer Area 4541 (North Issaquah). Please refer to the current Big Game Regulations for updated listings of these opportunities. This unit (and corresponding deer area) is about 90% private land and gaining permission for hunting access is often challenging. Success in this unit may well depend on getting to know your neighbors and raising

the subject of hunting as a means of protecting their fruit trees and vegetables. Firearm restrictions are in place because landowners are concerned about safety. Bowhunters should have an advantage in getting permission.



A group of black-tailed deer in King County. Photo by WDFW.

Game Management Unit 460 (Snoqualmie) has good hunting opportunities throughout most of the unit. However, hunters should scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated with restricted access. Forest management on these lands is favorable to deer and high-quality opportunities are available. Hunters should focus on early seral forests (less than 30 years old) next to mid (40-80 years old) or late-successional (greater than 80 years old) stands. Hunters should focus on riparian forest habitats that supply ample forage and cover. Backcountry hunting opportunities also exist in the eastern portion of the unit, including the High Buck Hunt within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Hunters here should be mindful of very high recreational presence. By reviewing maps and scouting, quality alpine experiences can still be found, especially in smaller basins not accessed by major trails.

Game Management Unit 466 (Stampede) is a patchwork of private, state, and U.S. Forest Service lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). It consists of second-growth timber, with some old growth on U.S. Forest Service lands. This unit has a lot of steep ground, with about 2,500 feet in elevation change. Though many forest roads exist, road conditions and access vary considerably. Be prepared for early winter snowfall, which has the potential of stranding hunters, but also the potential to improve hunting success.

Game Management Unit 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled access area of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water

supply. Deer are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2024 season, five any buck tags in the Quality category, three any buck tags in the Youth category, and two any buck tags in the Hunters with Disabilities category are available for state hunters through the draw system.

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found on WDFW's [Deer Harvest Reports](#) webpage.

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020. AHD was then found on Orcas and San Juan Islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart islands. In the fall of 2021, WDFW confirmed AHD on Whidbey Island. However, AHD has NOT been detected in District 12 at this time.

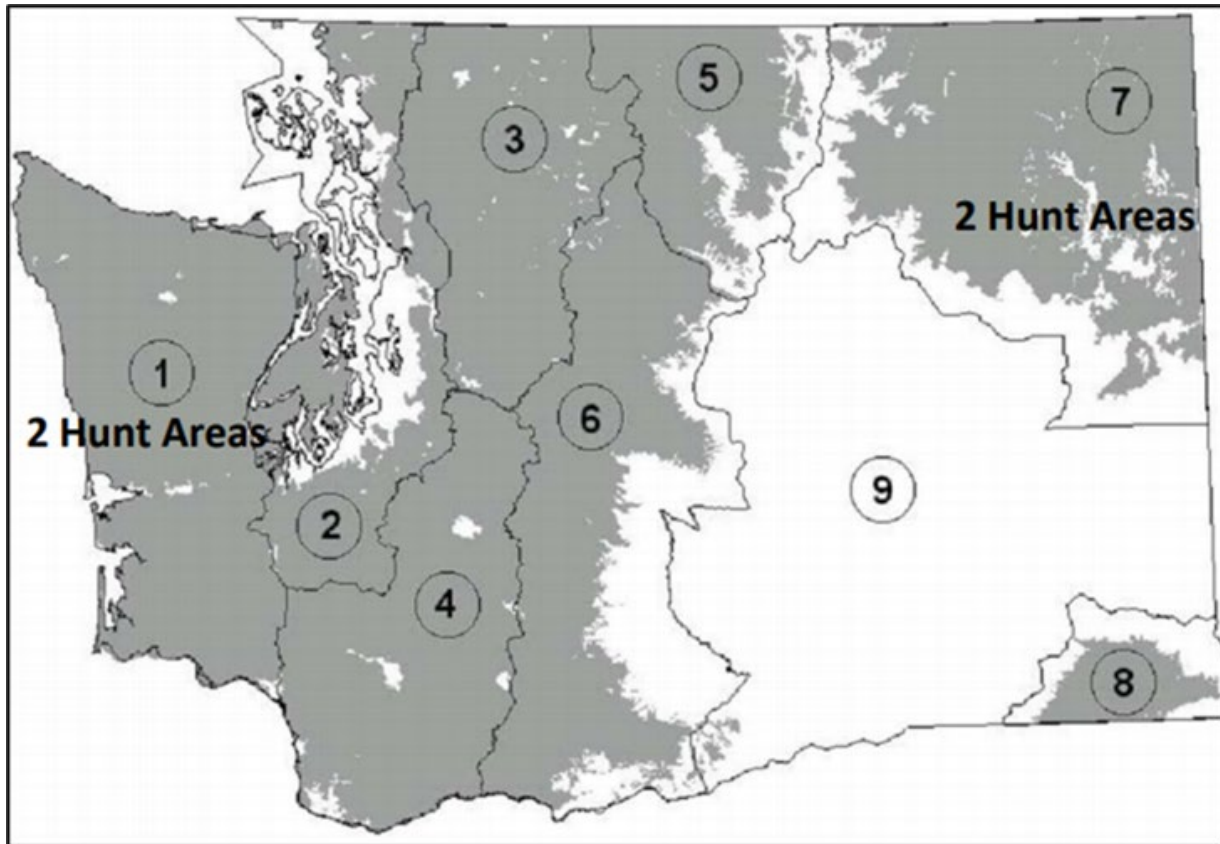
AHD is caused by a viral infection and is transmitted by direct contact between deer, either through bodily fluids or possibly airborne routes. This makes it more likely for the virus to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people – from contact or by consuming the meat. However, the use of disposable gloves is always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should use discretion before harvesting deer in AHD-impacted areas to avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer. AHD symptoms include rapid or open mouth breathing, foaming or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation. Should hunters in District 12 encounter live or dead deer with signs of AHD, please report them through the [Department's online reporting form](#). More information on AHD is available at [WDFW's Wildlife Diseases webpage](#).

Black bear

For management purposes, the state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMU). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions. Portions of three BBMUs are within District 12. GMU 454 is in BBMU 2, GMU 460 is in BBMU 3 and GMUs 466 and 485 are in BBMU 4.

Figure 1. Black bear management units (BBMU) in Washington.



All successful bear hunters must submit the first premolar tooth from their harvest within five days of harvest, or by December 1, 2024. Teeth should be sent using WDFW's pre-paid and self-addressed mortality envelope which can be obtained at any [WDFW regional office](#).

Prior to shooting, hunters are encouraged to observe bears for a time sufficient to determine they are not accompanied by dependent cubs that may be following behind (or in trees above).

Black bears inhabit much of District 12, but like elk, many are on private lands. Hunters should ensure they have permission to hunt where they're interested. Bears are often at lower elevations early on, including riparian areas, before they move higher as the season progresses, which can offer opportunities for hunters on public lands. Berry production has been good in the district this season. Scouting to locate berry patches and recent bear signs, then returning to monitor these areas during cooler morning and evening hours when bears are more active can be effective.

Hunters in District 12 harvested 97 bears during the fall season in 2023. The proportion of total hunters in each GMU that harvested a fall bear are as follows: Eighteen percent (45 bear, n=244 hunters) in GMU 454, 11% (44 bear, n=393 hunters) in GMU 460, 4% (4 bear, n=110 hunters) in GMU 466 and 100% (4 bear, n=4 hunters) in GMU 485 reported successfully harvesting a bear. Annual harvest reports and more harvest statistics can be found online at [Bear Harvest Reports](#).



A black bear and cubs in King County. Photo by WDFW.

Cougar

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently approved changes to cougar hunting seasons. Hunters should be sure to [review cougar hunting rules online](#). The new rule establishes the Washington cougar hunting season from Sept. 1 to March 31, sets a cap of 13 percent of each population management unit (PMU) using a specific statewide density, and includes all known human-caused cougar mortalities to determine when to close a PMU during the season.

The Commission incorporated an amendment in the cougar hunting rule to clarify that all known human-caused cougar mortalities contributing to the 13 percent cap will be counted between April 1 of the current year and March 31 of the subsequent year. Additionally, the Commission decided that in PMUs that reach the 13 percent cap prior to the cougar hunting season starting on Sept. 1, the cap would be increased to 20 percent of the population to provide hunting opportunity in those PMUs for the current season. The Commission also directed staff to initiate rule making for the 2025-26 cougar hunting season.

Waterfowl



Northern pintail ducks in GMU 454. Photo by WDFW.

Harvest opportunities should be good, dependent on weather conditions through the season. The best waterfowl hunting opportunities continue to be in the lower Snoqualmie Valley, with public access on WDFW's [Snoqualmie Wildlife Area](#) (Cherry Valley, Stillwater, and Crescent Lake units). Hunters can only enter and hunt units between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. during the pheasant season. More opportunities are in the Kent Valley. Hunters are encouraged to work with local private landowners to get access to one of District 12's many rivers and agricultural valleys and improve their waterfowl hunting success. Refer to the [Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Regulations](#) for season dates and hours.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, visit the webpage, [Let's Go Waterfowl hunting](#).

Forest grouse

Ruffed and sooty (blue) grouse are found throughout the public and private forests of District 12. Forest management in much of District 12 is still favorable for grouse. Hunters looking to harvest ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, early seral forests (5-30 years old) with ample berry crops in the understory, and riparian forest habitats. Sooty grouse hunters can expect the greatest success along trails and ridgelines above 2,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands with abundant huckleberries.

Adult female and juvenile grouse are especially vulnerable during early September. Beginning in 2021, grouse seasons have been adjusted to limit harvest of these individuals. More information [is available in this blog post](#). The season will be open Sep. 15, 2024, through Jan. 15, 2025.

WDFW collects wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse (spruce, ruffed, dusky, and sooty species) during the hunting season. The goal of this collection effort is to build estimated population trend datasets for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Other factors will also be evaluated, including wildfire and weather patterns that may contribute to changes in harvest and overall populations at the species level.

Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse harvested into wing collection barrels placed around the state or by bringing them to the closest WDFW district or regional office. Visit the WDFW [forest grouse collection webpage](#) for more information and collection barrel locations.



A male sooty grouse displaying in King County. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasant

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will release game farm pheasants this fall on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. Site maps are available in the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Pamphlet](#). Hunters must use non-toxic shot on all pheasant release sites, see the [Non-toxic shot requirements webpage](#) or Game bird and small game [hunting regulations](#) for details.

Hunting hours for pheasant in Western Washington are from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. This includes the Stillwater, Cherry Valley, and Crescent Lake units of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. For the rest of the hunting season, normal hunting hours (a half-hour before sunrise to half-hour after sunset) will apply.

Quail

There are few quail in District 12.

Eurasian collared dove

Although not a managed game species, Eurasian collared doves (an exotic species) are now in District 12. People can hunt Eurasian collared doves year-round with a big or small game license. The best way to hunt them is to seek landowner permission in lowland agricultural areas that have a barnyard setting where birds roost in trees but go to the ground to feed. Hunters should be sure they are hunting in compliance with any firearm restrictions and a manner compatible with existing infrastructure (buildings, farm equipment, or power lines).

Turkey

Wild turkeys are rare in District 12, without predictable concentrations of birds. Harvest prospects are low even with considerable effort. Hunters must use #4 shot or smaller to hunt turkey.

Additional information

King County firearm restriction areas

Centerfire and rimfire rifles are not legal for hunting west of Highway 203 (Monroe-Fall City), the Fall City-Preston Road to I-90, I-90 to Highway 18, Highway 18 to I-5, and I-5 to Pierce-King County line. They are also not legal for hunting on Vashon and Maury islands. For more information, refer to page 90 of the [eregulations.com/assets/docs/resources/WA/24WAHD_LR6.pdf](https://www.wa.gov/regulations/assets/docs/resources/WA/24WAHD_LR6.pdf). There aren't many shooting areas in King County per county ordinances. Please contact your local sheriff for specific locations.

2024 District 13 Hunting Prospects

Snohomish, San Juan, and Island counties; Skagit County islands



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2024 District 13 Hunting Prospects

Snohomish, San Juan, and Island counties; Skagit County islands

Author

Kurt Licence, District Wildlife Biologist

Cover photo by Harold Abell of a young waterfowl hunter with two mallard ducks.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 13 general overview

District 13 contains all of Snohomish, Island, and San Juan counties, along with some islands of Skagit County (Figure 2). This includes most of Game Management Unit (GMU) 448 (Stillaguamish), the southern section of GMU 450 (Cascade), and the southern section of GMU 407 (North Sound) in Snohomish County. The San Juan Islands and Island County are divided into several GMUs including 411 (Orcas), 412 (Shaw), 413 (San Juan), 414 (Lopez), 415 (Blakely), 416 (Decatur), 417 (Cypress), 419 (Guemes), 420 (Whidbey), 421(Camano), 423 (Henry), and 424 (Stuart). GMU 410 contains all other San Juan County islands not already listed above.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) District Wildlife Biologist Kurt Licence was welcomed to the district in 2022. Kurt studied Animal Physiology and Behavior at Arizona State University and has managed a variety of game and non-game species in Arizona, Oregon, and Washington. He enjoys serving all hunters of District 13, so please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions or just want to say hello at 360-503-1086. Additionally, if you have photos of harvested or free-ranging wildlife in the district or have contacts to share regarding potential hunting access opportunities in District 13, please send them to kurt.licence@dfw.wa.gov.

The [WDFW Hunt Planner web map](#) is also a great resource finding hunting access and reviewing GMUs and hunting regulations.

The 2023-24 winter trended warmer than average and differed from the previous two winter outlooks consistent with a transition from La Nina to El Nino conditions. Warm, dry weather and snowpack in the North Puget Sound Region remained below 100% of the 30-year median. As such, an increased risk of wildfires earlier in the summer and into the fall is predicted and supported by the evidence of numerous fires in Washington as of August 2024. Hunters should pay close attention to all rules on public lands and watch for any closures that might be implemented at the last minute if fire dangers get too high. If this happens, notices may be posted at property gates and on land manager/incident management websites including [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Fire Management](#), [InciWeb](#), [Washington DNR Wildfires](#), [WDFW wildfire information](#).

Remember to be a good hunting and outdoor recreation steward. Be respectful of others. Don't hunt areas where there is heavy, regular recreation use. Expect to encounter outdoor recreationists and others on public lands. Tips for sharing state lands are available [in this WDFW blog post](#).

Please pick up after yourself and don't leave a gut pile out in the open – cover, bury, or hike it out and dispose of it properly, especially if using lead ammunition to avoid secondary poisoning of scavengers.

For the benefit of all fish and wildlife, strongly consider voluntarily utilizing non-toxic ammunition even in locations and for game species where it is not required. Similarly, shotgun shells with biodegradable wads are becoming more widely available and are less harmful to the environment. Also avoid using natural deer/elk urine scent lures to limit the spread of communicable wildlife diseases like [Chronic Wasting Disease \(CWD\)](#). Although CWD has not been detected in western Washington, natural deer/elk scent lures could be a source of CWD entry into the state. CWD is spread through infected animal body

fluids and natural scent lures can be produced from high-risk sources (commercial cervid facilities in CWD positive areas).

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting for various species and game management units are available online at [Game Harvest Reports](#).

[WDFW's Private Lands Access Program](#) partners with landowners to provide the public with hunting access on private property. District 13 Private Lands Access Program sites are focused on providing waterfowl hunting opportunity through the Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program, and deer hunting access in District 13. We are continuously seeking to increase deer hunting access to private properties in San Juan and Island counties. WDFW will post sites as they become available online. Hunters interested in waterfowl and deer hunting access should check the website regularly for updates.

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please refer to [WDFW](#) and [Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

Figure 1. Infographic of current e-bike rules for state public lands managed by WDFW and DNR.

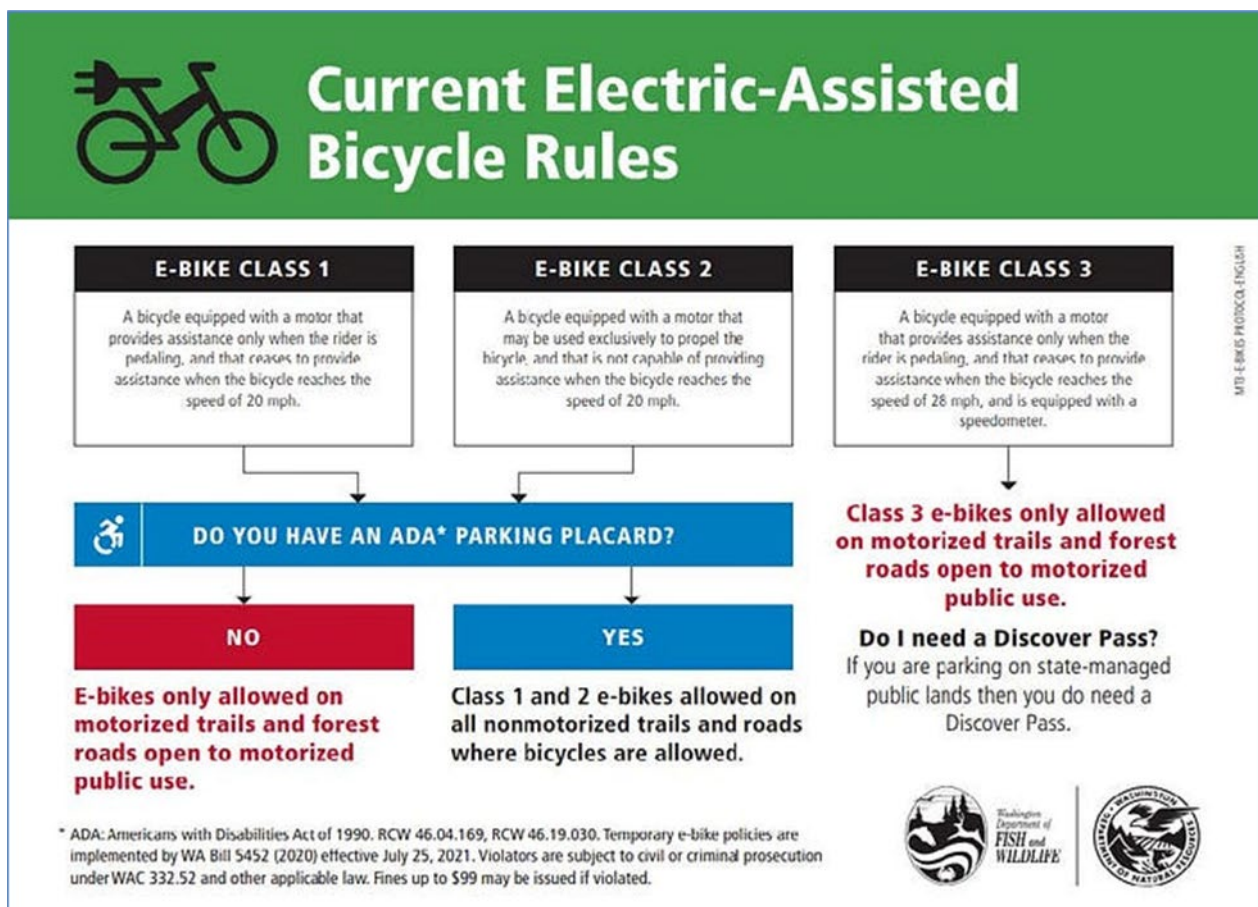


Figure 2. District 13 in Washington.



Snohomish county

In Snohomish County, a great online mapping tool called [SCOPI](#) can help hunters determine property ownership and boundaries.

Much of the eastern part of District 13 is public land, managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Two USFS ranger districts will have information on [road and trail conditions](#) for GMUs 448 and 450: the Darrington Ranger District (360-436-1155, north county) and the Skykomish Ranger District (360-677-2414, south county). Many roads have been decommissioned or are not maintained regularly; visitors should check the status of roads before heading to the National Forest. Trail conditions also vary, and information on specific trails, as well as many useful maps, is on the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Recreation webpage](#). Be aware there is currently a closure order in effect on the USFS RD 26 at the Downey Creek trailhead due to wildfire activity.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Northwest Region (360-856-3500) manages much of the rest of the open public land for hunting in Snohomish County. Hunters should be aware that many access roads to DNR lands have gates, and they should contact DNR to get the latest information about gates, available access routes, and road conditions. DNR land at Ebey Hill near the Jim

Creek Naval Station is surrounded by private property and therefore, is largely inaccessible to the public. Hunters can find additional information about this site on the [DNR Recreation webpage](#).

Several private industrial timberland owners also manage land in GMU 448 (Stillaguamish). Their ownerships are shown on the Snohomish County Assessor's maps (SCOPI). Many roads are closed to motorized vehicle traffic, but some allow free walk-in or bike-in access. Hunters should scout areas early and be aware that parking at access gates may be very limited. Never block gates or drive beyond any open gate unless you are certain the gate will stay open until you return. Active logging is happening in some areas, so gates may be open in the morning, but closed and locked later in the day. Some access gates on private industrial timberlands will have signs that specify ownership and the rules that apply to the property. Hunters should follow all "No Parking" signs, as local landowners will tow vehicles found on their property.

Industrial timberlands in Snohomish County previously owned by the Weyerhaeuser Cooperation were sold to Hampton Lumber in 2021. Hunters should visit the [Hampton Lumber website](#) for more information regarding access to these lands.

Much of the Snohomish County portion of GMU 407 (North Sound) is dominated by homes on small acreages or farms. Hunters should secure permission from landowners to hunt on private land and should be mindful of where houses, livestock, outbuildings, and high human use areas are in relation to where hunting will take place. Portions of GMU 407 west of Highway 9 and Highway 203 are under firearm restrictions. Hunters should research land ownership and understand firearm limitations prior to hunting. A complete description of firearm restricted areas is on page 90 of Washington's 2024 [Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). Snohomish County provides a map showing [no shooting areas and shotgun only areas](#) within the county.

San Juan and Island counties; Skagit county Islands

Very little public land exists within San Juan or Island counties or the islands of Skagit County, and firearm restrictions are in place in each jurisdiction. Ownership maps for San Juan County are available online from the [county assessor's office](#).

Hunting within San Juan County requires written permission from the landowner by county ordinance. In the San Juan Islands, access to islands not served by the Washington State Department of Transportation ferry system is by private boat or commercial water taxi. Private boat owners should check in advance on ownership and rules that may apply to docks and landings within the San Juan Islands, as most are privately owned. San Juan County owns and maintains eight docks with floats and eight boat ramps, and leases two outer island moorage docks. The San Juan County Visitor's Bureau provides a variety of road and dock maps [online](#).

Small groups of feral mouflon sheep have moved to Stuart Island. Mouflon are classified as harmful exotic wildlife ([WAC 220-640-200](#)). European rabbits occur on Orcas, San Juan, and Lopez islands. European rabbits are feral domestic mammals and thus are not under the authority of WDFW. WDFW does not regulate hunting mouflon or European rabbits.

Ownership maps for Island County are available through the [Island County assessor's office](#). Ownership maps for Skagit County islands are available [online](#). One exception to otherwise mostly private land ownership is Cypress Island, much of which is DNR-managed land. While public boat-in access is available, hunting here is challenging and at times crowded.

Elk



Island County Bull Elk. Photo by WDFW.

District 13 does not have an established elk (*Cervus canadensis*) herd within GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) or GMU 450 (Cascade) boundaries. Individual elk are seen occasionally in Island County and the eastern part of Snohomish County. Small bands occur infrequently along Highway 2 at the south end of GMU 448. These groups typically range between the towns of Baring and Grotto, but sometimes move as far west as Sultan.

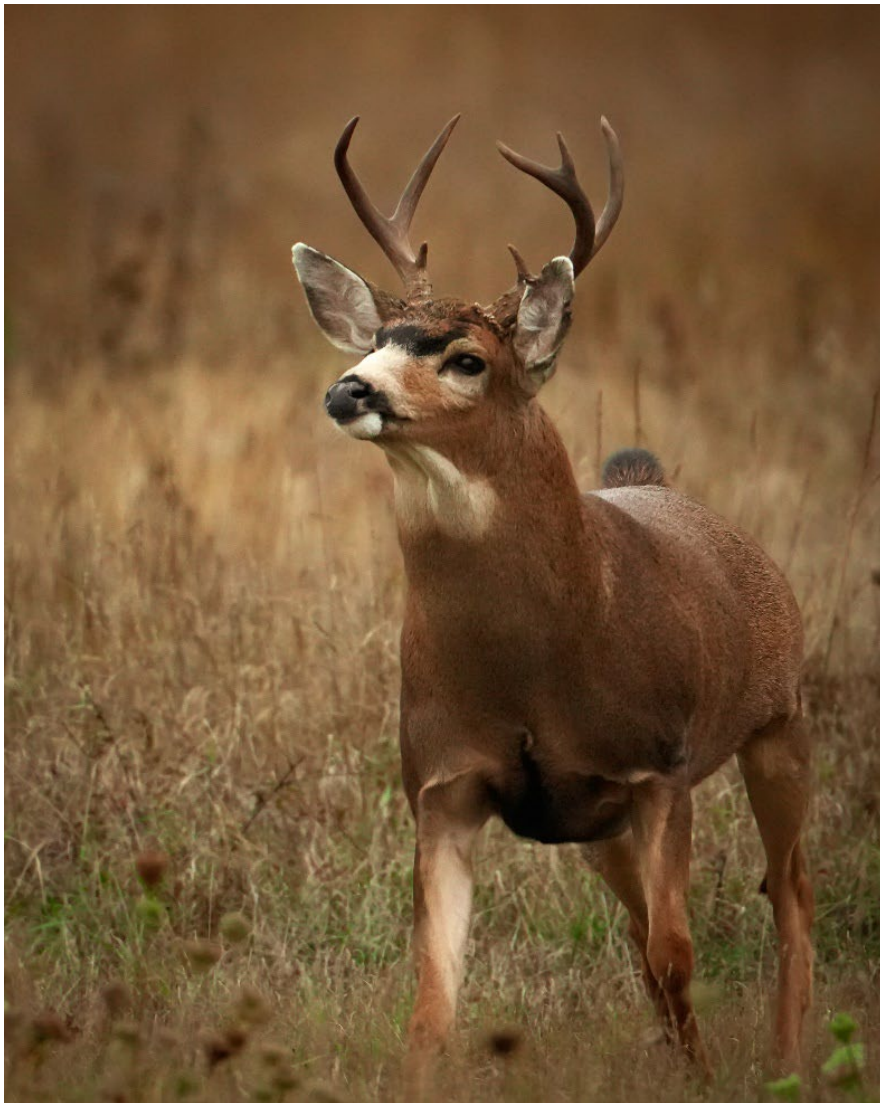
Elk sometimes travel south of GMU 437 (Sauk) onto the Sauk Prairie and areas west of Darrington and east of Highway 9 in the north end of GMU 448. However, their presence is occasional and unpredictable. Elk harvest in GMU 448 is restricted to three point minimum, bull only.

Thirty-two hunters reported hunting in GMU 448 in 2023, but no elk were harvested. The last elk harvested in this unit were in 2018. Hunters planning to hunt in GMU 448 should plan on careful scouting and be aware that elk in the unit are presumed to be tied to the North Cascades elk groups to

the north and the North Bend groups to the south and are thus only present sporadically in areas of GMU 448 within District 13.

Island County, San Juan County, and GMU 450 are not open for elk hunting due to the low number of animals present. Small groups may spend some time at the higher elevations found in GMU 450, most likely in summer months.

Deer



Whidbey Island black-tailed deer. Photo by Chad Morrison.

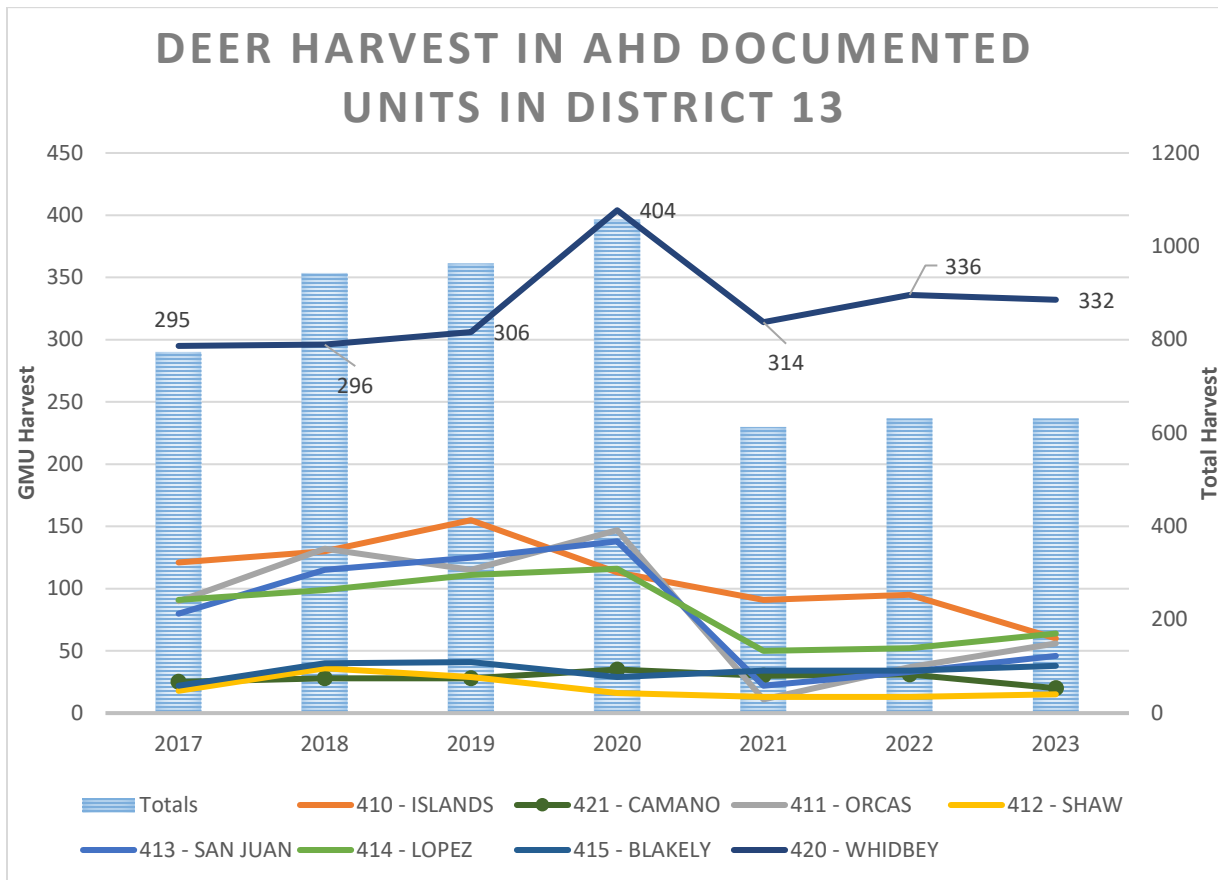
Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease

As of late July of 2024, Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) has not been detected in District 13. In 2021, an AHD outbreak impacted black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) in several of the district's GMUs. AHD is caused by a viral infection and is transmitted by direct contact between deer, either through bodily fluids or possibly airborne routes. This makes it more likely for the virus to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

AHD was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020. AHD was then found on Orcas and San Juan islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart islands. In the fall of 2021, WDFW confirmed AHD on Whidbey Island.

Deer populations in impacted areas may appear noticeably smaller in some GMUs and unchanged in others compared to previous years. For example, deer harvest success on San Juan and Orcas islands dropped significantly (84% and 93% respectively) between 2020 and 2021, while harvest on Blakely Island increased slightly (Figure 5). In 2023, harvest increased slightly or stayed the same for all GMUs previously documented to have AHD except GMUs 410 and 421, both of which noted a decrease in harvest. Total deer harvest stayed approximately the same across GMUs in District 13 between 2022 and 2023. Deer have historically been overabundant in the San Juan Islands and on Whidbey Island creating wildlife management concerns associated with habitat degradation and disease dynamics. As such, reduction in deer abundance in these areas continues to be a district goal. WDFW will therefore be maintaining all scheduled deer hunting seasons in AHD-impacted areas for the 2024 hunting season.

Figure 3. Deer harvest in AHD impacted GMUs in District 13 2017-2023.



AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people from contact or by consuming the meat. However, the use of disposable gloves is always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should use discretion before harvesting deer in AHD-impacted areas to avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer.

AHD symptoms include rapid or open mouth breathing, foaming, or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation. For more information on AHD, please visit the WDFW [website](#). If you suspect AHD in a deer you've encountered, please [report your sightings](#). To limit further transmission of AHD, potentially infected carcasses should be disposed of by checking with local municipalities for disposal locations and methods, or by burying the carcass. Please do not haul the carcass to a different place on the landscape and dump it, as it risks spreading the disease to new areas. Feeding of deer should also be avoided.

Black-tailed deer GMUs 407, 448, 450

District 13 includes GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) and portions of GMU 450 (Cascade) and 407 (North Sound). In 2023, 1,034 people reported hunting during the general deer seasons in GMU 448 and had a 12% success rate for a total of 128 harvested animals. Hunters who take the time to scout and learn the area

will increase their likelihood of success. Hunters should plan and familiarize themselves with local conditions, including weather well in advance of hunting season.

Parking and walk-in access to DNR and private forest land is available at the intersection of Menzel Lake Road and the P-5000 Road. This gate is 4.6 miles south of the intersection of Alder Place and Menzel Lake Road in Granite Falls. Parking may be limited at other gated access areas in this general area. Hunters need to obey “No Parking” signs, as these signs are on private property and owners may tow vehicles found on their property.

At the south end of GMU 448, walk-in access is off the Sultan Basin Road. This area has mixed public and private ownership, and hunters should pay close attention to signs showing areas where discharging firearms is prohibited. Access to DNR lands requires a Discover Pass, as noted on signs and most DNR properties are gated.

Vehicle access is available on USFS roads throughout Snohomish County, but hunters should consult the [USFS website](#) for information on road conditions and closures.

GMU 450 includes portions of Districts 13 and 14. In 2023, 80 people reported hunting in the unit, and only two deer were harvested. Both deer were harvested using modern firearms. GMU 407 includes portions of Districts 12, 13, and 14. Most of the unit is private land, and some areas are firearm restricted. Hunters should consult page 90 of Washington’s 2024 [Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#) for more details on firearm restrictions in Snohomish County. [The Snohomish County map](#) shows county ordinance no shooting areas and shotgun-only areas.

Black-tailed deer Island units

Beginning in 2013, WDFW divided GMU 410 into several new units assigned to individual islands to provide more accurate harvest information and assist with developing management strategies for each island. GMU 410 now includes those few remaining islands that were not assigned an individual unit number. Islands in GMU 410 are not accessible by ferry, some do not have deer, and others are privately owned and prohibit public hunting. The GMU numbers for each island are as follows:

- GMU 411 – Orcas Island
- GMU 412 – Shaw Island
- GMU 413 – San Juan Island
- GMU 414 – Lopez Island
- GMU 415 – Blakely Island
- GMU 416 – Decatur Island
- GMU 417 – Cypress Island
- GMU 419 – Guemes Island
- GMU 420 – Whidbey Island
- GMU 421 – Camano Island
- GMU 423 – Henry Island

- GMU 424 – Stuart Island

Although accurate reporting for the island GMUs is improving, some hunters continue to misreport their hunt unit. This makes it extremely difficult to assess accurate harvest numbers for each island. We ask that hunters carefully review their harvest reports prior to submitting them. Accurately reporting the correct GMU will advance our understanding of harvest on each island so that we can improve deer management. For more information on island Columbian black-tailed deer populations on Blakely island and associated habitat impacts consider reviewing this recent publication from [Long et al. 2024](#).

Game Management Units 410-419



Blakely Island black-tailed deer. Photo by Eric Long.

Public access within the San Juan Islands (San Juan and Skagit counties) is extremely limited, especially on Shaw, Blakely, Decatur and Guemes islands. Deer on the islands have historically been plentiful but typically smaller than their mainland relatives. Most hunting occurs on private property. In San Juan County, by county ordinance, written landowner permission is needed to hunt on private property.

WDFW is negotiating hunting access on some islands and will post properties as they are enrolled. We anticipate having at least seven properties available between Orcas, Lopez, and San Juan islands in 2024. More properties may be enrolled by the beginning of the season, check the WDFW Private Lands Access Program website for updated information. Enrolled properties will be open for the modern firearm

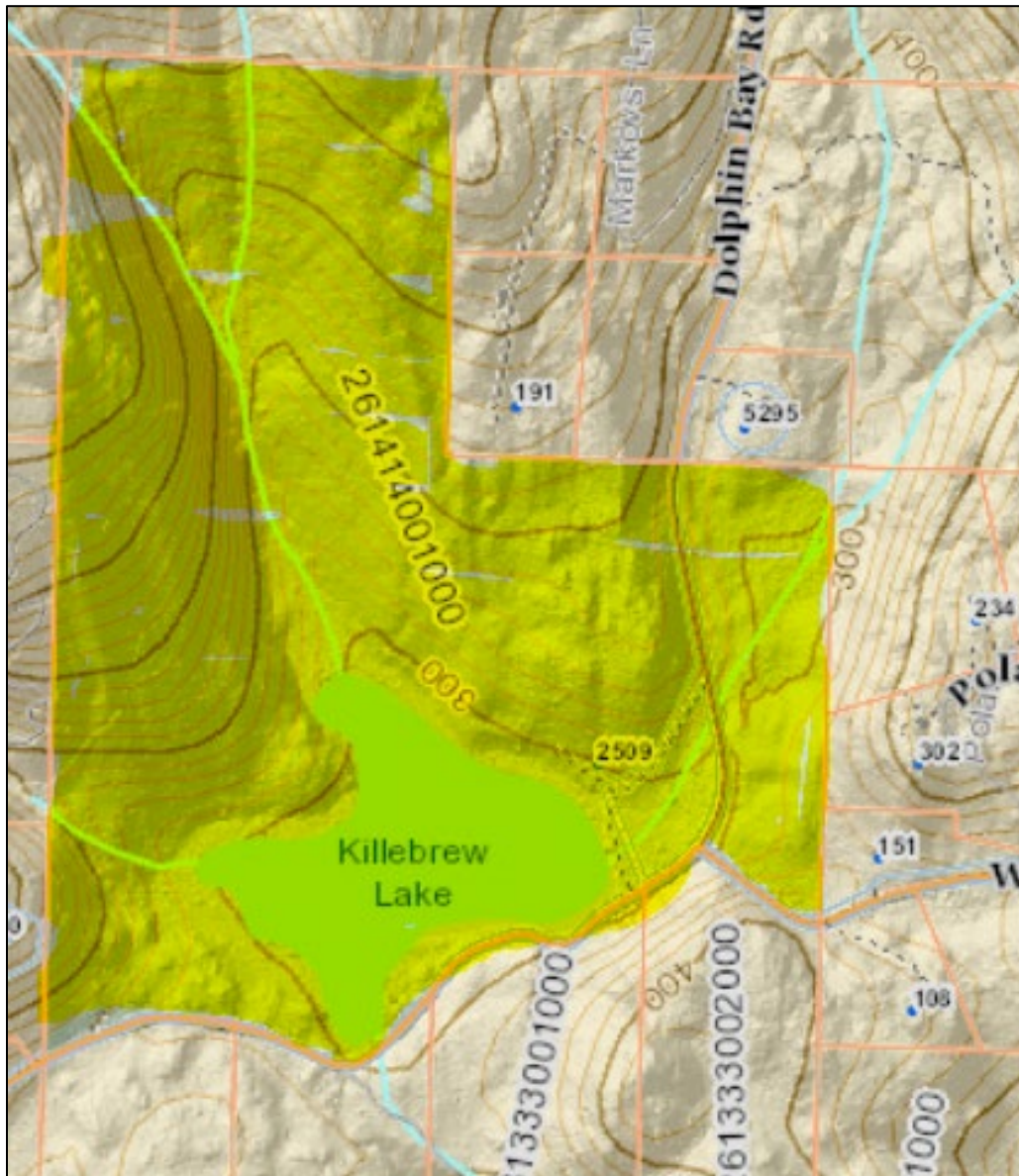
season and run through the end of the year. Available sites will be posted by mid-September. Sites will include Mt. Grant on San Juan Island, owned by the San Juan County Land Bank. The Hunt by Reservation system offers a quality hunt experience by limiting the number of days a site is hunted while guaranteeing the site will be available to the reservation holder. To make a reservation and see available sites, visit the WDFW hunting access link, create an account, choose a hunting site that is in the Hunt by Reservation category, and book the reservation. Reservations become available two weeks prior to the hunt day at 8 a.m. A fast internet connection improves the chances of securing a reservation. For questions about the Private Lands Access Program (PLAP), contact Brandon Roozen, WDFW Private Lands Access Program biologist, at 360-755-7608.

Small parcels of public land are open to hunting on Lopez Island (GMU 414) and Stuart Island (GMU 424) on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands within the San Juan Islands National Monument. Lopez Island properties at Iceberg Point and Point Colville are undergoing a transition of ownership from United States Coast Guard to BLM and until ownership is transferred to the BLM, they will not be open to public hunting. Hunters can learn more by reviewing the [Management Plan for San Juan Islands National Monument](#) approved on January 1st, 2023 or contact Monument Manager, Brie Chartier, at 509-220-5976 for more detailed information.

The San Juan County Land Bank manages Lopez Hill on Lopez Island, which continues to allow limited hunting. Lopez Hill will be open for hunting from Sept. 1 through Oct. 31. More information is on the [Lopez Hill website](#) and the [San Juan County Land Bank website](#). For questions and county-required written permission, contact Outreach Coordinator Tanja Williamson at tanjaw@sjclandbank.org.

WDFW manages about 157 acres around, and including, Killebrew Lake on Orcas Island (GMU 411). Much of the property is made up of the lake itself or associated wetlands. Hunting is allowed on this property, but hunters should be aware of property boundaries and stay within WDFW boundaries (Figure 8). Parking is limited to a small pull-off area on Killebrew Lake Road.

Figure 4. WDFW Killebrew Lake ownership highlighted in yellow.



Overnight camping is not allowed in the National Monument, at Lopez Hill, or Killebrew Lake. Please check [Washington State Parks](#) and [San Juan County Parks](#) for camping information.

Cypress Island (GMU 417) is mostly owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), but some parcels are privately owned. Deer hunting is permitted on the DNR-owned land but hunting for other species is prohibited. Also note that Cypress Island is in Skagit county and not included in the firearm restriction areas. Cypress Island is not serviced by a ferry. Boat moorage and camping is available at several DNR maintained sites. Additional information, including maps, trails and access rules, is available on [DNR's website](#). DNR also owns a relatively small parcel at Cattle Point on San Juan Island (GMU 413); hunting is prohibited at this site.

GMU 420 (Whidbey Island) and 421 (Camano Island)

Deer are abundant, but very little public land is available for hunting on either Whidbey or Camano islands. Hunters must get permission from landowners before hunting on private property. [The Island County Public Works Department](#) owns a few small parcels that make up most of the public hunting lands on Whidbey and Camano islands. Hunters should contact them directly for maps and restrictions at 360-679-7331.

WDFW partnered with Whidbey Camano Land Trust to allow deer hunting on the Trillium Community Forest property. The Trillium Community Forest is open to hunting for the modern firearm, late modern firearm, late archery, and late muzzleloader seasons. The Trillium Community Forest is closed to other recreational activities when it is open to hunting. Hunters should contact the [Whidbey Camano Land Trust](#) for additional information regarding maps and more information. A [map](#) that can be filtered to show properties open to hunting is also available on the Whidbey Camano Land Trust website.

Island County Parks manages several properties that allow hunting. These include Camano Ridge, Putney Woods, Portions of the Greenbank area, and the Kettles Trail area. Use the [Island County Parks webmap](#) and filter by hunting available to view these areas. Be very careful with property boundaries, especially at Kettles because the western boundary is shared with Fort Ebey State Park where hunting is not allowed.

Deer hunting at Naval Air Station Whidbey (WNAS) is open for archery only to military personnel. All hunters need to buy the installation hunting permit (\$13) and pass a background check. This is the required authorization for access and to carry a firearm. For more information, contact WNAS Biologist John Phillips at 360-257-4024.

Black bear



A large black bear. Photo by Greg Greene.

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) can be found throughout Snohomish County and hunters can pursue a range of hunting experiences in the district during the long season. WDFW encourages hunters to carefully observe bears prior to shooting to ensure there are no dependent cubs with the targeted bear. **Successful bear hunters must submit an upper premolar tooth from the harvested bear to WDFW by Dec. 1, 2024.** The Department uses the collected tooth samples to determine the age of harvested bears which helps inform bear harvest management. Hunters can also [look up the age of their harvested bear](#). Tooth collection envelopes are available at all [WDFW regional offices](#). Additional information on black bear hunting regulations and tooth submission requirements can be found on page 68 of Washington's [2024 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet](#).

Black bears spend most of their time in heavily forested areas, however, most harvests occur in open areas such as logging clear-cuts and alpine meadows. Harvest opportunities in these open areas are often driven by berry production which can vary annually by location and elevation. In lower elevations, successful hunters often access gated timberlands on foot or by mountain bike where they focus on clear-cuts and decommissioned logging roads. Hunters also find success and memorable experiences pursuing black bears in high elevation alpine meadows by targeting bears feeding on huckleberries.

Black bear harvest and success rates were below the previous year during the 2023 season in GMUs 407, 448, and 450. During the 2023 season, 359 hunters harvested 22 bears in GMU 407 (6% success), 514 hunters harvested 62 bears in GMU 448 (12% success), and 59 hunters harvested 15 bears in GMU 450 (25% success). This is in comparison to the 2022 season where 264 hunters harvested 26 bears in GMU 407 (10% success), 556 hunters harvested 66 bears in GMU 448 (12% success), and 76 hunters harvested 24 bears in GMU 450 (32% success). Male black bears comprised over 71% of the harvest in the three GMUs combined in the 2023 season, an over 10% increase from the 2022 season.

Cougar



Cougar. Photo by WDFW.

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently approved changes to cougar hunting seasons. Hunters should be sure to [review cougar hunting rules online](#). The new rule establishes the Washington cougar hunting season from Sept. 1 to March 31, sets a cap of 13 percent of each population management unit (PMU) using a specific statewide density, and includes all known human-caused cougar mortalities to determine when to close a PMU during the season.

The Commission incorporated an amendment in the cougar hunting rule to clarify that all known human-caused cougar mortalities contributing to the 13 percent cap will be counted between April 1 of the current year and March 31 of the subsequent year. Additionally, the Commission decided that in PMUs that reach the 13 percent cap prior to the cougar hunting season starting on Sept. 1, the cap would be increased to 20 percent of the population to provide hunting opportunity in those PMUs for the current season. The Commission also directed staff to initiate rule making for the 2025-26 cougar hunting season.

GMUs 448 and 450 are hunt areas with harvest caps of 11 (13%) to 17 (20%) cougars (*Puma concolor*) for 2024. The harvest cap for each Hunt Area is set at the intrinsic cougar population growth rate of 13%. Once the assigned cap is reached for each Hunt Area, the Hunt Area will close to cougar harvest. Each cougar hunter must verify if the cougar late hunting season is open or closed in GMUs 448 and 450 by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline at 1-866-364-4868 or visiting the Department's [website](#). The hotline and website will be updated weekly.

Mountain goat

Due to declines in annual mountain goat (*Oreamnos americanus*) population estimates, special permits are no longer available for the 2024 hunt season in the Boulder River North goat hunt area, which is within the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. All goat permit holders in the nine years the unit was open were successful, except the last two years. In 2018, 2019, and 2020 hundreds of [mountain goats were moved from Olympic National Park and released into the North Cascades](#). Most of these translocated mountain goats did not survive to current day and low survivorship is suspected to be closely associated with weather and climate conditions among other factors ([Harris et al. 2023](#)). WDFW and tribal co-managers are investing heavily in monitoring and research to benefit mountain goats in the north cascades and beyond.



Mountain goat in Snohomish County. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasant

Pen-raised pheasants will be released this fall on release sites, which are mapped in the [Western Washington Pheasant Program booklet](#). In Snohomish County, public pheasant and waterfowl hunting is available on the Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units of the [Snoqualmie Wildlife Area](#). There are two access sites on the Ebey Island Unit (Figure 4). The primary access site is off Home Acres Road just off Highway 2 (marked 'Main Parking Lot' below). The west side of the property can be accessed through the WDFW parking lot near the intersection of Home Acres Road and 43rd Street SE. Pheasants will be released on both the west and east parcels of the unit. The middle portion is open for hunting, but a motorless watercraft is required. The public is not allowed on the dike. This is private property owned by Drainage District 1.

The Crescent Lake Unit has two parking areas along Crescent Lake Road. The Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units will each get 35-45 birds. They will be released on Friday and Saturday evenings, and on a varied schedule for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings. All pheasant release sites on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area will be open and follow the 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. hours. Early entry and late exit are not allowed. The Ebey Island Unit has limited public access during the non-hunting season and bird dog training is not permitted. Dogs are not allowed except while hunting. Bird dog training is allowed on the Crescent Lake Unit at designated sites.

Figure 5. Parking and pheasant release areas available at Ebey Island.



In Island County, pheasant release sites on Whidbey Island include Bayview, Outlying Field (OLF) Coupeville, and Sea Plane Base (SPB) sites. WDFW partners with private landowners to provide pheasant release sites at Bayview, Arnold Farm and Zylstra Road. Hunters can check the [Department's website](#) for the location of specific sites. Fifteen to 20 birds will be released on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings, except for Bayview, where releases will be Saturday and Sunday mornings. The Bayview pheasant release site is only open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays.

The SPB (Upper and Lower Game Ranges) and OLF Coupeville on the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station will be open this year. Access to the SPB pheasant release site is open to all hunters. All hunters (military and civilian) need to buy the installation hunting permit (\$13). This is the required authorization for access and to carry a firearm. Check in at the Torpedo Road gate and sign in and out of the logbook for the Sea Plane Base and at the logbook in the parking lot for OLF Coupeville. Civilian hunters will need to submit to a background check before hunting Navy property. As a result, people should plan well in advance and all hunters should check with WNAS Biologist John Phillips at 360- 257-1009 for updated rules and requirements and to be sure that no sites are closed for safety and security reasons during the pheasant season.



Region 4 Pheasant and dog. Photo by Chris Nguyen.

Band-tailed pigeon

Hunters can harvest band-tailed pigeons (*Patagioenas fasciata*) Sep. 17 through Sep. 25 in the 2023-24 hunting season. A migratory bird authorization card is required, and the daily bag limit is two birds. The birds are often found in managed forest lands, coastal shorelines, and alpine habitats with mixed conifer

age classes that provide feeding areas next to roosting areas. These types of habitats are often on private timberlands, federal forests, or DNR lands so expect the same gated conditions described above. Band-tailed pigeons have strong affinities for the same areas, so scouting before your hunt is important. Mandatory harvest reporting deadline for band-tailed pigeon is Sep. 30, 2024.



Band-tailed pigeon perched on a water fountain. Photo by Kendra Gallagher.

Grouse

Ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) is the most common grouse species in District 13, with sooty (blue) grouse (*Dendragapus fuliginosus*) typically found at higher elevations. Ruffed grouse are found at elevations below 2,500 feet. Both species favor mixed timber habitats, often near water and ridgelines. Hunters should look for mixed conifer and hardwood areas, especially in riparian areas, to find grouse. Abandoned or low use logging roads are good places to look for grouse as well. Focusing on habitat edges like clear-cuts, creek bottoms, mountain meadows, lake shores, and ridgelines can be fruitful.

In 2019, WDFW's North Puget Sound Region (Region 4) began collecting the wings and tail fans of harvested grouse. From the collected wings and tail fans, biologists can infer the sex, age, and species of the harvested grouse. This information will increase our understanding of grouse harvest trends and will be used to inform future grouse management decisions. Hunters are encouraged to voluntarily submit wings and tail fans at collection sites (Photo 8). Collection site locations are listed on WDFW's [website](#).

Grouse season dates for the 2024 season will open on Sep. 15 and will remain open until Jan. 15, 2025. This adjustment to season dates was made to limit the harvest of adult female and juvenile grouse

which are especially vulnerable during early September. More information is [available in this WDFW blog post](#).



Grouse wing collection site. Photo by WDFW.



Sooty grouse. Photo by Chuck Rondeau.

Waterfowl

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, refer to WDFW's [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting webpage](#). WDFW recently published a [web map application](#) depicting the abundance of marine birds

throughout Washington's Salish Sea waters. The application also details abundance trends for game and non-game focal species. Hunters may find the application valuable when planning future outings.



Drake northern pintail (*Anas acuta*). Photo by Jim Ives.

Annual breeding waterfowl surveys were completed this year and conditions were generally drier than average. Surface feature and mallard counts were slightly higher than average in the Northern Puget Lowlands this year, signaling that local breeding conditions and productivity were favorable. As always, weather conditions during the fall and winter will influence where birds congregate and how the waterfowl migration progresses. Waterfowl hunting in District 13 should be productive if weather conditions are favorable. Typically, we see a slow start to the hunting season. During mild winters, ducks tend to stay in more northerly areas of British Columbia. However, as colder fronts move in and conditions become colder and wetter, hunters can expect increasing numbers of waterfowl to arrive in District 13.

Avian Influenza

Avian Influenza (bird flu) is a viral illness commonly found in birds. Wild birds can carry several avian influenza viruses, many of which do not seriously affect them. Several different bird flu strains have been identified around the world, including Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) strains. During

spring of 2022, HPAI spread quickly in all four flyways, including the Pacific Flyway which includes District 13. This strain of HPAI has been found in backyard poultry flocks, commercial poultry, wild waterfowl, wild and captive raptors (hawks, falcons, etc.) and even mammals.

The risk to human health from avian influenza strains is believed to be minimal. However, it is important to note that there have been no known cases of humans contracting the HPAI virus from healthy, free-flying wild birds anywhere in the world. Also, there is no evidence that properly cooked waterfowl (or domestic poultry) can sicken people. While it is unlikely that hunters could contract HPAI from wild birds, bird hunters who have domestic poultry or other birds at home, or who may visit domestic poultry markets or exhibitions (such as fairs), are asked to take special precautions to ensure that all equipment (boots, clothes, vehicles, dogs, etc.) are cleaned and disinfected to prevent the spread of diseases like HPAI.

If you observe sick or dead wild birds, report it on [WDFW's online reporting tool](#). Hunter harvested birds will be tested during fall hunting seasons. Please cooperate with biologists if they should ask to test your harvested birds and refer to page 32 of the [2024-2025 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information.

Snohomish County

Public waterfowl hunting is available on the Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. There are two access sites for the Ebey Island Unit. The first access site is off Home Acres Road near Highway 2, known as the Main Parking Lot. Access the west side of the property by using the WDFW parking lot near the intersection of Home Acres Road and 43rd Street SE (Figure 4). During pheasant hunting season, waterfowl hunters and all other users may only enter and hunt the Ebey Island and Crescent Lake units from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Early entry and late exit are not allowed. The Crescent Lake Unit has two parking areas along Crescent Lake Road that provide access. The Ebey Island Unit has limited public access during the non-hunting season. Bird dog training is not permitted, and dogs are not allowed at the Ebey Island Unit during the nonhunting season. Bird dog training is allowed on the Crescent Lake Unit at designated sites.

The Spencer Island Unit of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area is accessible by boat and walk-in access. Parking for the Spencer Island Unit will be a quarter mile back from the bridge to the island near the sewage treatment facility buildings. Parking is not allowed on the road or areas near the bridge. There is a 15 shot (on person) limit per hunter in this unit.

Smith Island Estuary Restoration site is owned by Snohomish County who has partnered with WDFW to provide waterfowl hunting access to the intertidal 270 acres. The parking lot has seven spots available, and the site is "Register to Hunt" to track the amount of use at the property. Please be mindful that the property is tidally influenced, and water levels can change dramatically. A small hand launch is available. Please check the [WDFW Private Lands website](#) for more detailed information about the property.

The [Legue Island Estuary Restoration Project](#) was completed during the fall of 2019 and the unit is open again for waterfowl hunting. Hunters with small boats that can be hand-launched can access the unit

from the western parking lot south of SR 532 along Davis Slough. There is an additional parking lot and walking path along Eide road on the eastern edge of the unit for hunting access. Be sure to observe the “No Shooting Safety Area” along the eastern walking path and be courteous to the variety of users in this area. The City of Stanwood completed building an additional boat launch at Hamilton Landing Park that now provides access to the unit for larger boats.

At this time, we have tentative agreements with landowners for five Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program sites, located primarily in the Stillaguamish Delta. These sites are all found on private lands enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program sites will be either “Hunt by Reservation” or “Register to Hunt”. More sites may be added in the fall. More information about individual sites, including maps and access rules, are on the [WDFW Hunting Access website](#). Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program sites on private lands will open as crop harvests are completed and other conditions are met, so not every site will be available on opening day. We expect all sites will be open by mid-November. For questions about the Private Lands Access Program (PLAP), contact Brandon Roozen, WDFW Private Lands Access Program biologist, at 425-725-7206 or brandon.roozen@dfw.wa.gov.

Robust numbers of snow geese coming into Washington are likely this winter. In addition to the traditional high concentrations in the Stanwood area, snow geese are expanding in Snohomish County, and we expect that at least 5,000 to 10,000 birds will spend some time in the Snohomish River system. The 2024-25 snow goose season is Oct. 12 – Dec. 1; Dec. 14 – Jan. 26; and Feb. 8 – 18. That portion of Snohomish County east of Interstate 5 will be open Oct. 12 – 24 and Nov. 2 – Jan. 26, 2025. The Port Susan Game Reserve, which restricted Canada goose hunting, was eliminated in 2016. Hunters should consult page 26 of the Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game pamphlet for additional closures on state-managed lands and should check the WDFW Hunting Access website for potential additions to snow goose sites that may be added to the Private Lands Access Program.

Port Susan Bay

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) allows hunting over tidelands under their ownership at Port Susan Bay. However, the restored area and a 150-yard buffer around it is off-limits to hunting, and there is no hunting access from TNC property (Figure 5). For further information regarding hunting TNC ownership, contact the TNC Puget Sound Stewardship Manager at 415-517-8942 or washington@tnc.org.

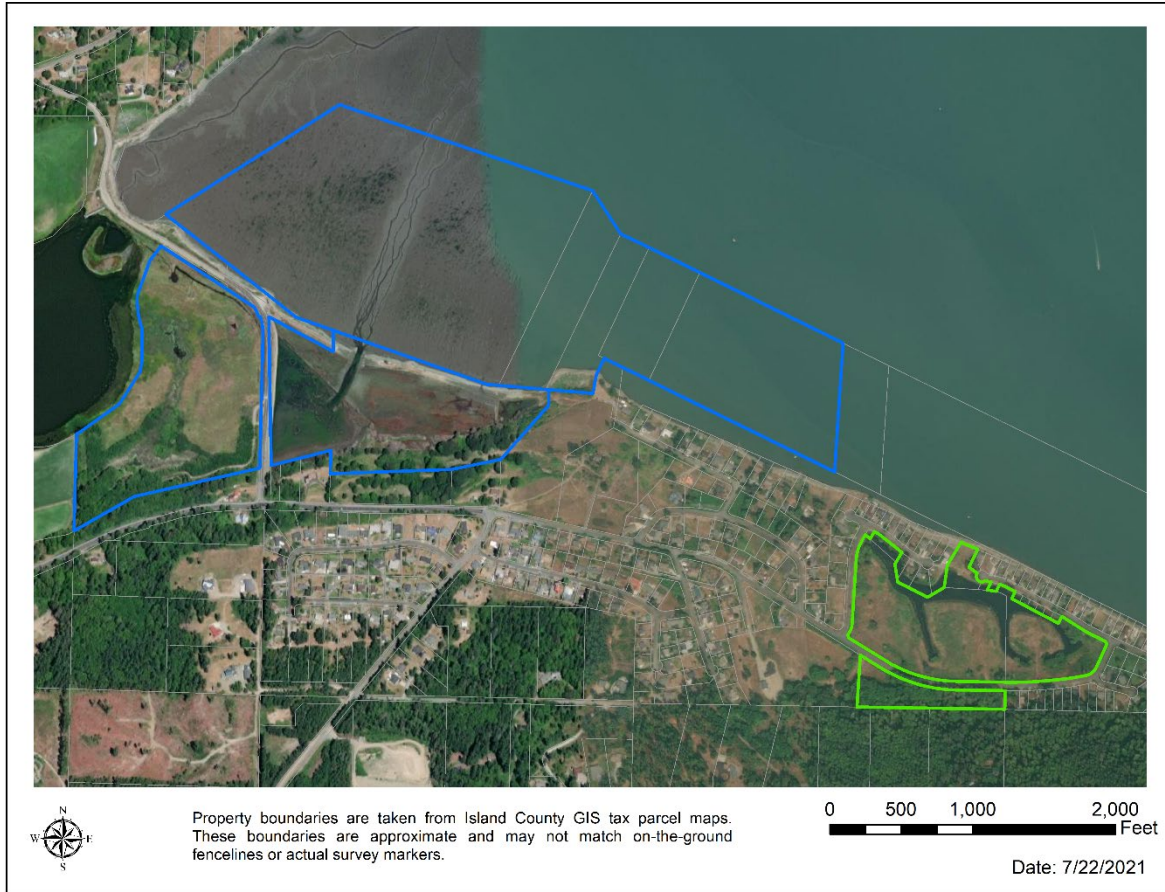
Figure 6. Restricted hunting area owned by The Nature Conservancy.



Whidbey Island

Access to public lands on Whidbey Island is extremely limited. Hunters should be aware that Deer Lagoon is closed to hunting by a county ordinance that restricts the discharge of firearms. The Whidbey Camano Land Trust owns parcels at Crockett Lake and Dugualla Bay, and their ownerships are closed to hunting. Land Trust Dugualla Bay parcels are shown in Figure 18 below. Hunters should contact the [Whidbey Camano Land Trust](#) with any questions about boundaries and ownership at Crockett Lake.

Figure 7. Whidbey Camano Land Trust (blue) and Dugualla Community (green) parcels closed to hunting at Dugualla Bay.



Waterfowl hunting on Naval Air Station Whidbey Island is open to military personnel and their guests. All hunters (military and civilian) need to buy the installation hunting permit (\$13). This is the required authorization for access and to carry a firearm. Access the duck blinds by entering the Sea Plane Base (SPB) gate. Non-military guests must be in the same vehicle as the military hunter. For more information, contact WNAS Biologist John Phillips at 360-257-4024.

Camano Island

Iverson Spit Preserve is managed by Island County Parks, within the Island County Public Works Department (Figure 19). Hunting is allowed at Iverson Spit outside of the dike in the intertidal area. Questions about the preserve should be directed to the Island County Public Works Department at 360-679-7331.

Figure 8. Iverson Spit Preserve Park boundaries.



The tidelands near English Boom County Park on the north end of Camano Island include some privately-owned parcels. Hunters wanting to access tidelands in this area must obey all signs showing private ownership, no trespassing, or no hunting. These signs are legitimate, legal, and show which parcels are privately owned and therefore not open to the public.

2024 District 14 Hunting Prospects

Skagit and Whatcom counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

August 2024

2024 District 14 Hunting Prospects

Skagit and Whatcom counties

Author

Robert Waddell, District Wildlife Biologist

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Cover photo: flock of snow geese in flight by Robert Waddell.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 14 general overview

District 14, comprised of Skagit and Whatcom counties, is the most northwestern in the state. The district's western extent is associated with the marine waters of Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia and features a vibrant and varied agricultural land base. The lowlands of the Skagit Flats and western Whatcom County support abundant wildlife species and populations. Most notable are the diverse and large flocks of resident and wintering waterfowl species, offering world-class hunting opportunities.

The Skagit and Nooksack rivers are the two primary river systems in the district. They are fed by the Cascade Mountains and flow into Puget Sound. Most lower elevation forested uplands within these watersheds are owned or managed by private timber companies and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). These lower-elevation working forests provide reasonable to excellent big game hunting opportunities for elk, black-tailed deer, black bear, and cougar. Federally owned public lands, such as the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park, comprise many higher elevation forest lands within the district, including the Ross Lake National Recreation Area, where hunting is allowed. These federal lands are associated with the North Cascade Mountains and support game species such as mountain goats, black bears, and black-tailed deer.

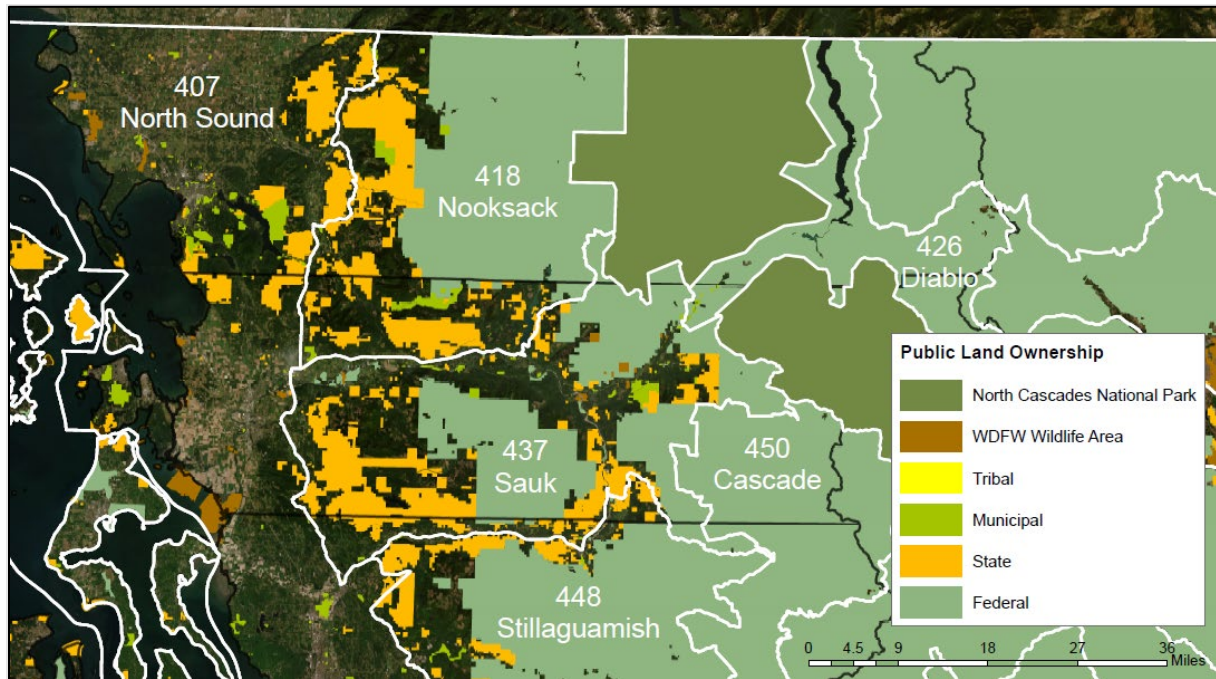
We suggest the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) [Hunt Planner web map](#) for access information and e-scouting.



Photo 1: View of Mt. Baker in Whatcom County. Photo by Robert Waddell.

From north to south, the core game management units (GMUs) that comprise District 14 are Nooksack and Diablo (GMUs 418 and 426), which are mainly in Whatcom County, and Sauk (GMU 437), which is almost entirely within Skagit County. Portions of North Sound, Stillaguamish, and Cascade (GMUs 407, 448, and 450, respectively) also fall within the district boundaries (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Game Management Units (GMUs) in Skagit and Whatcom counties.



Among the many hunting opportunities within this district, perhaps the most notable are:

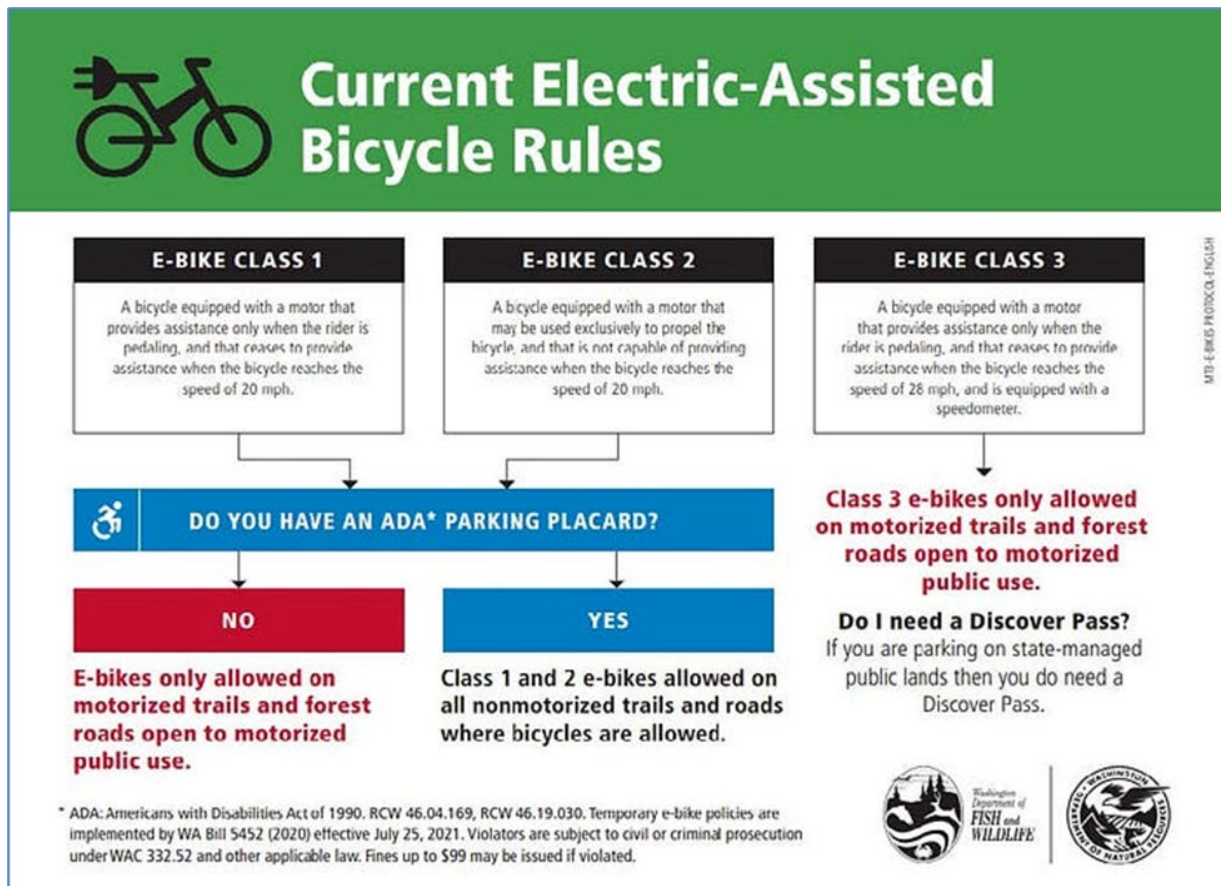
- Both saltwater and inland waterfowl hunting opportunities with the highest harvest of ducks and geese in Western Washington. Statewide, it boasts the second-highest duck and goose harvest.
- Some of the state's most diverse waterfowl species hunting opportunities include hunts for lesser snow geese, Canada geese, Pacific black brant, long-tailed ducks, and scoters.
- Extensive walk or bike-in access to public and private forest lands that do not currently charge an access fee for hunting big game and/or forest grouse.
- Special permit only, quality bull elk hunts within the North Cascades elk herd, with liberal season dates and the potential for trophy quality animals.
- Once-in-a-lifetime mountain goat harvest opportunities for six Mt. Baker Wilderness Area permit holders.



Photo 2: Johannesburg Mountain looming over the Cascade River Valley. Photo by WDFW.

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each public or private landowner to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [Electric-assisted bicycles on WDFW-managed lands](#) for the most recent information about e-bike use on state public lands managed by WDFW and DNR.

Figure 2. Infographic of current e-bike rules.



Current Species Status

The primary big game species in District 14 are elk, black-tailed deer, cougar, black bear, and mountain goat. Each species remains open for hunting with restrictions, as outlined in the [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). Over-the-counter tags for cougars are available for the entirety of District 14. Over-the-counter tags are also available for elk (GMUs 407 and 448 only), black-tailed deer, and black bears. Elk hunts in GMUs 418 and 437 and all mountain goat opportunities are managed as special permit-only hunts. Tag availability is based on the sensitivity of each species and their populations to hunting. For elk, the population estimate for the North Cascades elk herd remains below the population objective, and mountain goats have low reproductive rates that limit harvest opportunities in most North American populations.

Like most of Western Washington, District 14 does not host native upland game bird populations (other than forest grouse) and is not managed for these species. However, WDFW will continue implementing a pen-raised pheasant release program in Skagit and Whatcom counties during the 2024–2025 hunting season. District 14 has healthy populations of forest grouse, including ruffed, dusky, and sooty (formerly blue) grouse. Hunters after forest grouse enjoy a liberal season from September 15 – January 15.

Due to high overall population sizes and stable reproductive rates of waterfowl, states within the Pacific Flyway will continue to enjoy a liberal hunting season structure for most species with ample hunting days and bag limits. Northern pintail's decrease to a one-bird daily bag limit still applies this season in response to population estimates for this species falling below established threshold limits. Other restrictions for sea ducks will continue into this season.

Thirty-eight Harlequin duck permits will be available to eligible applicants through a lottery-style drawing. Visit [WDFW's Harlequin Duck Hunting Permit webpage](#) or review page 20 of the [2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting regulations](#) for more details. Electronic calls are ONLY allowed during white-goose only season segments in Goose Management Area 1 from Feb. 8-18, 2025.

All waterfowl hunters must apply for and possess a special migratory bird authorization when hunting lesser snow geese, Pacific brant, and sea ducks. The species of sea ducks include long-tailed ducks; surf, white-winged, and black scoters; and common and Barrow's goldeneye. Additionally, a harvest report card must be submitted by each hunter by March 20, 2025, regardless of harvest success. Please reference page 26 in the [Washington 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information on the required Authorization and Harvest Record cards.

Elk

The North Cascades (Nooksack) elk herd (NCEH) appears to be stable and is found in forested uplands and valleys in GMUs 407, 418, 437, and 448, including agricultural areas where elk-related crop damage can occur. The most recent post-hunt survey conducted in March 2023 resulted in an estimated population of around 1,600 elk within the herd's core area. The survey estimated a bull-to-cow ratio of 18 bulls per 100 cows, within the WDFW objective of 12 to 20 bulls per 100 cows. The calf-to-cow ratio was estimated at 22 calves per 100 cows. A calf-to-cow ratio of 40 calves or greater per 100 cows is considered excellent calf recruitment. For more information on elk management within this herd, visit the [WDFW North Cascades Elk Management webpage](#).



Photo 3: Successful hunter with a mature bull in GMU 418. Photo by Brad Richard.

The WDFW population objective of approximately 2,000 elk has yet to be met. Since establishing a very limited hunt of this population in 2007, hunting opportunities have been limited but have increased to the current levels that have been in place for several years. The current harvest strategy provides some recreational and damage-related harvest while allowing the population to continue to grow.

Archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm hunters fortunate enough to draw one of 50 available bull permits have the chance to harvest a bull elk in GMUs 418 and 437 (29 permits in GMU 418 and 21 permits in GMU 437). Securing applicable access permissions and sufficient scouting are essential for a successful hunt.

Due to limited hunting pressure and lengthy seasons, the annual harvest success rate since 2007 has been relatively high, ranging up to 100% depending on the hunt method type. During the 2023-24 season, the harvest success rate in GMU 418 for all hunt method types combined was 57%, with 17 of 30 permit holders (raffle hunter also hunted in GMU 418) harvesting a bull elk. At least 13 of these bull elk had antlers with five points or better (five bulls had antlers with six points or better). In GMU 437, 10 of 21 permit holders harvested a bull elk for a 48% success rate for all weapon types combined. At least eight of these bull elk had antlers with five points or better (six bulls had antlers with six points or better).

The [WDFW Private Lands Access Program](#) has partnered with Sierra Pacific Industries to provide access to their properties within GMU 418 for all GMU 418 elk special permit holders. WDFW will provide information about access to these lands to permit holders before the 2024 hunts. Within GMU 418, hunters looking for the highest chance of success should focus most of their efforts within the core elk area that includes: a northern boundary from Acme due east to Baker Lake, an eastern boundary along the western shorelines of Baker Lake, and Lake Shannon to Highway 20, a southern boundary along Highway 20 to its juncture with Highway 9, and a western boundary of Highway 9 from Sedro-Woolley to Acme. However, hunters may find pockets of elk, including some high-quality bulls, outside this core area. For those hunters interested in U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands, consult the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions](#) map for current conditions.

Hunters who draw a special permit in GMU 437 will find the most elk in the northern third of the GMU, with many in Skagit Valley on private property. Therefore, securing access to private property in the valley and islands in the Skagit River can increase your chances of success in this GMU.

Youth, senior, and disabled hunters who draw one of the 15 permit opportunities for antlerless elk should consider securing access to private lands within Skagit Valley, where opportunities are likely to be best. In 2023, nine of 15 permit holders harvested a cow elk for a 60% success rate. All special permit holders for GMU 437 will be mailed a letter with tips regarding hunting on private land in Skagit Valley before the 2024 hunts.

General season harvest opportunities for any elk in GMU 407 (North Sound) in Skagit and Whatcom counties and bulls with a three-point minimum in GMU 448 (Stillaguamish) in Skagit (District 14) and Snohomish (District 13) counties exist on both private and state lands. However, elk densities in these two units are low, and hunting pressure may push elk into adjacent GMUs that remain closed to general harvest. In 2023, seven cows and 13 bulls were reported harvested in GMU 407. No elk were reported harvested in GMU 448 during the 2023 season. Hunters seeking public land access opportunities for these general season elk hunts should visit the [WDFW Hunt Planner web map](#) for more information.

GMU 407 tends to have greater numbers of elk than GMU 448, but access to private property may be vital to getting a real opportunity. Most elk in GMU 407 occur in and around Acme Valley, with a few elk found west of the South Fork Nooksack River or north of the community of Van Zandt along Highway 9. The public area most likely to yield success for hunters in GMU 407 is the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Van Zandt Dike property northeast of Acme and just east of private property in Acme

Valley. Though hunting pressure can be high, hunters who scout, do their homework, and hunt away from roads are likelier to harvest an animal. When hunting Van Zandt Dike, hunters should know the DNR property boundary and not trespass onto private property without permission or enter GMU 418.

Interested parties can find annual harvest reports and harvest statistics online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). Hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the [WDFW Hunt Planner web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington since 2008, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the North Cascades elk herd area. Several conditions can result in limping or hoof deformities. However, research conducted by WDFW and a panel of scientific advisors from 2009–2014 found that hoof abnormalities in this region were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria. This bacterium is known to cause a hoof disease in cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis.

Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington, where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is less prevalent in elk herds further away from the core affected area, like the North Cascades elk herd in District 14. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are apparent:

Vulnerability: The disease is highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, including young or old or male or female elk.

Hooves only: Tests show the disease is limited to an elk's hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and hunters practice good hygiene during harvest, processing, and cooking, it is considered safe to eat.

No treatment: There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven ways to treat it in the field. Similar conditions in livestock have been successfully treated by cleaning and bandaging hooves and giving them foot baths, but this is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

More information is available on the [WDFW elk hoof disease webpage](#).

How hunters can help

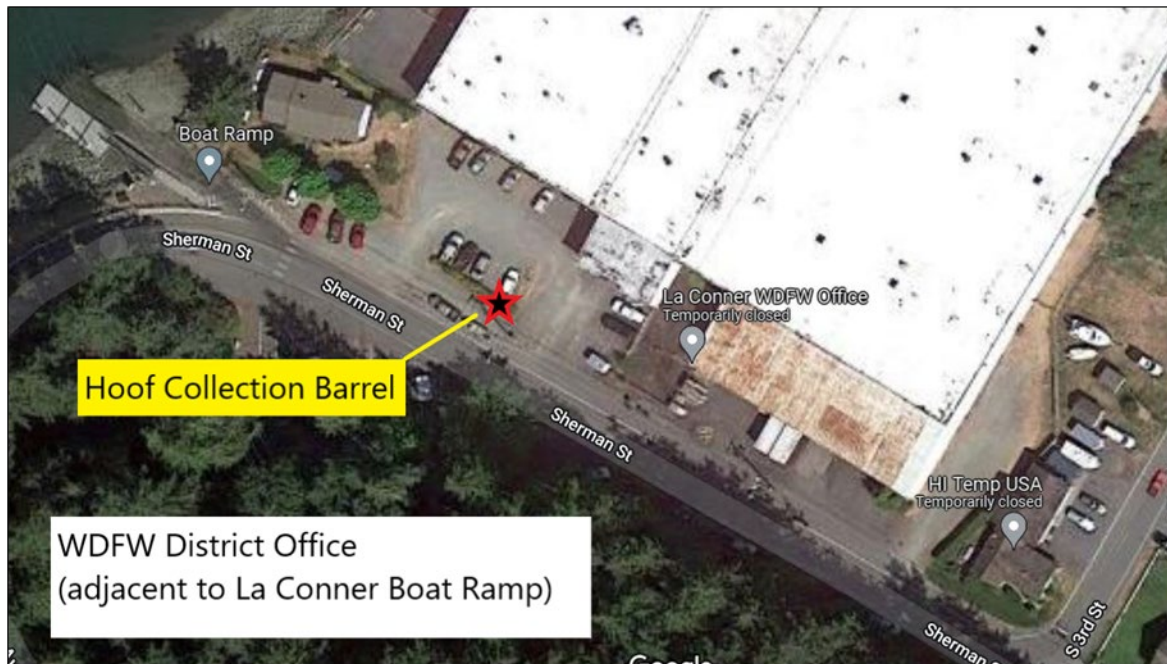
WDFW has implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage westside (400, 500, and 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing the prevalence of the disease over time. This program aims to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest rather than

increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in Western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington will be awarded with Sep. 1 – Dec. 31 season dates. Additionally, all participants will receive a waterproof license holder.

So, what can hunters do to help?

- **Harvest a limping elk** from any 400, 500, or 600 series GMUs
- **Turn in your elk hooves** along with a [complete registration form](#) at one of several collection sites in Western Washington. In District 14, the collection barrel will be located at the following location: [WDFW La Conner District Office, 111 Sherman St., La Conner, WA 98257](#) (Figure 3). Please provide all four hooves, cut just above the dew claws, in a plastic bag with a registration form or a piece of paper with your name, GMU and date of harvest, and WILD ID. Place the registration form or piece of paper with your hunter and hunt information in a small plastic bag inside the larger plastic bag containing the four hooves.

Figure 3. WDFW District Office at 111 Sherman St, La Conner, WA 98257.



- **Report observations** of affected elk on the Department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires** after hiking or driving off-road in a known affected area to help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas. Remove all mud from shoes and tires before leaving your hunting site.

WDFW works with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, Tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit the [WDFW elk hoof disease webpage](#). Additional details on TAHD and this incentive program can be found on pages 65 and 66 of the [2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet.

Deer

WDFW is not conducting black-tailed deer surveys currently in District 14, primarily due to the difficulty in accurately surveying deer in dense, western Washington habitats. However, biologist observations and other anecdotal reports support the general notion that black-tailed deer population numbers and densities are down in GMUs 418 (Nooksack), 426 (Diablo), 437 (Sauk), and 450 (Cascade). In contrast, portions of GMU 407 (North Sound), the most urbanized GMU in the district, have high local deer densities that can cause damage to private property.



Photo 4: A black-tailed deer buck in District 14. Photo by Greg Green.

Hunters reported 755 harvested deer during the 2023 general season in the primary GMUs within District 14 (GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437). This harvest number is a slight increase over the 692 deer harvested during the 2022 season. From a hunting perspective, GMU 407 provides the best opportunity

to harvest deer successfully in the district. In 2023, 534 deer (69 does and 465 bucks) were harvested in GMU 407 during the general season hunts. The next best option for hunters is GMU 437, with 164 deer (19 does and 145 bucks) harvested during the 2023 general season. Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online at [Game Harvest Reports](#).

The drastic difference in harvest rates between GMU 407 and other GMUs within the district is related to the number of hunting days available, deer densities, and ease of access. GMU 407 provides hunting opportunities that the other GMUs do not, and hunters have learned to take advantage of them. Though some public land opportunities exist in GMU 407, the key to a successful harvest in this GMU is securing the appropriate permission to hunt on private land and scouting the area before the hunting season. Hunters who intend to hunt deer in developed areas should review page 90 of the [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet and check with local jurisdictions regarding firearm restrictions.

Modern firearm hunters in District 14 may apply for a permit only quality buck hunt during the late season in GMUs 418, 426, and 437. These quality buck tags provide some of the best opportunities for hunting bucks during the rut. Permit hunter success rates during the 2023 season were 12% in GMU 418, 20% in GMU 426, and 12% in GMU 437 for hunters who participated. A total of 60 tags were issued in the three GMUs, and hunters reported harvesting eight bucks for a 13% success rate overall.



Photo 5: A young black-tailed deer. Photo by Stephanie Pelham.

WDFW negotiated access to Sierra Pacific properties for six of the 25 permit holders in GMU 418 during the 2023 season and will likely provide the same opportunity for 2024 hunters. Hunters who draw a quality buck tag for GMU 418 will be provided details by mail about how to be included in a lottery-style drawing for one of six available chances to win access to Sierra Pacific properties in the GMU.

For those seeking a more remote and rugged trophy black-tailed deer hunting experience, high elevation areas in the Mt. Baker Wilderness in GMU 418 and Glacier Peak Wilderness in GMU 450 are open for the High Buck Hunt from September 15 – 25. The “High Hunt” has become increasingly popular and it’s common to see numerous other hunters even after hiking five to ten miles. Hunters should also be prepared for thick and steep terrain and heavy concentrations of hikers and other recreationists during fair weather. Physical fitness, quality gear, and ample scouting are typically required to determine where deer are concentrated, as well as to avoid crowds. Smaller alpine basins and lightly forested ridges not accessed by main roads and trails can be productive. Visit the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail map](#) for current conditions. **Note that the Noisy-Diobsud Wilderness Area is NOT open to the High Buck Hunt.**

Within District 14, some hunting opportunities exist on private industrial timberlands and public property managed by Washington DNR and USFS. However, some areas may be gated due to timber theft, dumping, vandalism, etc. Many of these gated areas can be accessed on foot or with mountain bikes, allowing those willing to do the work an opportunity to hunt deer that do not receive as much hunting pressure.

Deer hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease

WDFW documented an Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease (AHD) outbreak in black-tailed deer in several island GMUs within District 13 and Skagit County in District 14 in 2021. AHD is caused by a viral infection transmitted by direct contact between deer, through bodily fluids or possibly airborne routes. This makes the virus more likely to spread in areas with high deer concentrations.

The disease was detected on British Columbia's Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island during the fall of 2020 and then on Orcas and San Juan islands during May and June 2021. The disease impacted deer on other islands in the San Juan Archipelago, including Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Shaw, and Stuart Islands. On Whidbey Island, WDFW responded to and investigated the deaths of several deer that displayed symptoms consistent with AHD. The disease was confirmed in Anacortes in Skagit County in July 2021. District 13 and 14 biologists continue to actively monitor for the presence of this disease in any island and mainland deer populations. As of July 2024, there have been no confirmed cases of AHD this year.

AHD does not pose a risk to livestock, pets, or people through contact with or by consuming the meat. However, disposable gloves are always recommended for handling any wildlife carcass. To reduce the risk of spreading AHD to new areas, hunters should avoid harvesting AHD-infected deer in AHD-impacted areas. Hunters should note that AHD symptoms in deer include rapid or open-mouth breathing, foaming or drooling at the mouth, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weakness, and emaciation.

This disease is fast acting, so a deer that dies from this virus does so within three to five days of contracting it.

If you see a deer displaying any of these symptoms, please report the location of the sighting on the [WDFW Sick, Injured, or Dead Wildlife reporting page](#). Please visit the [WDFW Adenovirus Hemorrhagic Disease \(AHD\) webpage](#) for more information on AHD.

Black bear

Black bears live in diverse forested habitats throughout the state, from coastal rainforests to the dry woodlands of the Cascades' eastern slopes. In general, black bears are strongly associated with forest cover, but they occasionally use relatively open country, such as clear-cuts and the fringes of other open habitats.



Photo 6: A large black bear. Photo by Greg Green.

Black bears are common in District 14, though formal estimates of the population in this district were unavailable until recently. In 2021, WDFW biologists conducted a population monitoring effort in GMU 418 (Whatcom County) to obtain a more accurate population density estimate for this area. Using hair snare corrals (Photo 7), biologists collected more than 1,300 hair samples from 92 individual bears (52

females and 40 males). They obtained an estimate of 28 bears/100 km² (i.e., 28 bears/39 mi²) in GMU 418. In addition, hunter harvest reports and age data obtained from premolar teeth submitted by successful hunters are used to determine age and sex ratios and infer population size and trends. This information helps WDFW set bear harvest guidelines.



Photo 7: One of the hair snare corrals used during the 2021 bear density estimation study in GMU 418. Photo by WDFW.

Hunters harvested 146 bears during the fall 2023 hunt in GMUs 407, 418, 426, and 437. This is a decrease from the 168 bears harvested during the 2022 season. Hunters experienced a 10% overall success rate in the four GMUs, with 59% of the harvest occurring in GMU 418.

District 14 hunters that choose to hunt in GMUs 418 and 426 will be hunting in a grizzly bear recovery area identified by the [Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee](#) (IGBC). This federal/state working group includes WDFW. **Before hunting bears in the recovery area, bear hunters must pass the annual WDFW [online bear identification exam](#) with a score of 80% or higher. Proof of successful exam completion or an equivalent test from another state must always be on your person when afield.** For information on the federal government's proposed North Cascades Ecosystem grizzly bear restoration effort led by the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), review [this WDFW statement](#) or [visit this NPS webpage](#).

Opportunities for harvesting a black bear in District 14 have more to do with access and berry production than does the previous year's harvest. Access behind gates may be available by walking or via mountain bike, providing hunting opportunities within abundant younger age class clear cuts that

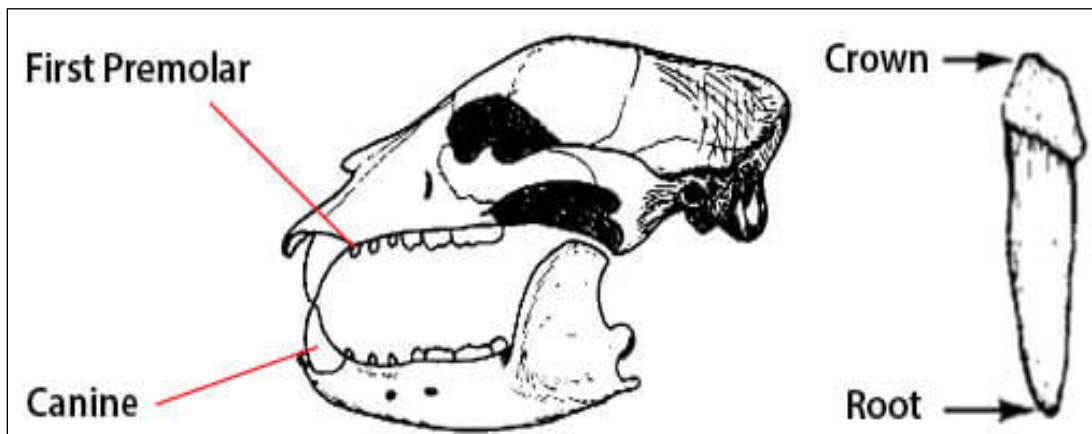
attract bears. Check with the appropriate public or private landowner to be certain that behind the gate access is allowed.

Hunters willing to pursue bears during the early season at higher elevations can hunt in classic alpine environments where bears forage on abundant huckleberries, increasing the potential for spot and stalk opportunities.

The WDFW Private Lands Access Program has partnered with Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) to facilitate vehicle access to a section of SPI lands on a reservation basis during August and September 2024 for bear hunting. This limited-entry section is nearly 15,000 acres and stretches from Highway 542 to the U.S. – Canada border. To reserve your spot, visit the WDFW [Hunt by Reservation](#) webpage and search for “Black Mountain”. Hunters must make a reservation for each date they hunt the property and for each party member. 50 reservation permits are available daily. The continuation of this opportunity depends on each hunter's understanding and following of all access rules.

All successful fall black bear hunters statewide MUST submit a black bear premolar tooth per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department within five days of harvest or by Dec. 1, 2024. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw. Tooth envelopes are available at all WDFW offices.

Figure 4. Location of a black bear's first premolar for required tooth submission to WDFW.



Bear hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

Cougar

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently approved changes to cougar hunting seasons. Hunters should be sure to review cougar hunting rules online. As detailed below, the new rule

establishes the Washington cougar hunting season from Sept. 1 to March 31, sets a cap of 13 percent of each population management unit (PMU) using a specific statewide density, and includes all known human-caused cougar mortalities to determine when to close a PMU during the season.

The Commission incorporated an amendment in the cougar hunting rule to clarify that all known human-caused cougar mortalities contributing to the 13 percent cap will be counted between April 1 of the current year and March 31 of the subsequent year. Additionally, the Commission decided that in PMUs that reach the 13 percent cap prior to the cougar hunting season starting on Sept. 1, the cap would be increased to 20 percent of the population to provide hunting opportunity in those PMUs for the current season. The Commission also directed staff to initiate rule making for the 2025-26 cougar hunting season.

Cougar hunting opportunities in District 14 are opportunistic, with most cougars harvested by hunters that happen upon them while pursuing other game animals. The primary prey for cougars in the district is black-tailed deer, so hunters who spend time in areas with more deer will increase their chances of seeing and harvesting a cougar.

A hunter who wishes to harvest a cougar must possess a valid big game license, including the cougar species option, before harvesting a cat. The use of dogs to recreationally pursue and harvest cougars is illegal statewide.

Cougar hunting season and regulations have changed some for the 2024-2025 hunting season. See page 69 of the [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet. The new changes are as follows:

- The cougar season is from September 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025.
- Instead of a harvest guideline, GMUs 418, 426, and 437 (combined) are under a 13 percent cap, based on a 13% intrinsic growth rate, of 13 total cougars. This cap will include all known human-related independent-aged cougar mortality, including harvested cougars, cougars killed in response to conflicts, and any other form of human-caused mortality. Cougar mortality is documented beginning April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025.
- GMU 407 will have no cap on cougar harvest during the 2024-2025 season.
- If combined cougar harvest in GMUs 418, 426, and 437 reaches 13 cougars prior to the recreational season, the cap will be increased to 20 percent (or 20 total cougars) to provide hunting opportunity. However, once mortality for 20 independent-aged cougars is documented, the season will close in all three GMUs. If closure of the season occurs, it will do so within 72 hours of the cap being reached.
- It is each cougar hunter's responsibility to verify if the cougar hunting season is open or closed in hunt areas with a harvest cap by calling the toll-free cougar hunting hotline (1-866-364-4868) or visiting the WDFW webpage for [Cougar Hunting Area Openings and Closures](#).
- As in previous years, all successful hunters must: (1) Report their harvest within 72 hours to the cougar hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 3 after greeting) and state name, WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill; (2) present the unfrozen hide and skull for mandatory sealing and

sample collection by WDFW within 5 days of the kill (please leave proof of sex attached); and (3) report their kill in the [WDFW Wild system](#).

Cougar hunters in District 14 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on Washington's 2024–2025 hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more.

Mountain goat

Mountain goat hunting in this state is a once-in-a-lifetime harvest opportunity and a limited-entry tag only a few lucky individuals draw in any year. Drawing a goat tag is a commitment to spend a fair amount of time in rugged, high-elevation terrain that can be as treacherous as it is awe-inspiring. To increase the success and enjoyment of the hunt, hunters should anticipate spending time researching online and scouting the unit in person before the season opener. This hunt is physically and mentally challenging, so prospective hunters are encouraged to determine if they are up to the challenge before applying for a permit.



Photo 8: Two mountain goats in the North Cascades. Photo by Greg Green.

In 2024, seven special permits were issued for the three mountain goat hunt areas in District 14: Chowder Ridge (1 permit), Lincoln Peak (3 permits), and Avalanche Gorge (3 permits). A seventh permit

was issued for Mt. Baker (instead of the usual six) due to an error involving software from a third-party vendor used to conduct the draw. See the [WDFW Director's statement](#) for more information.

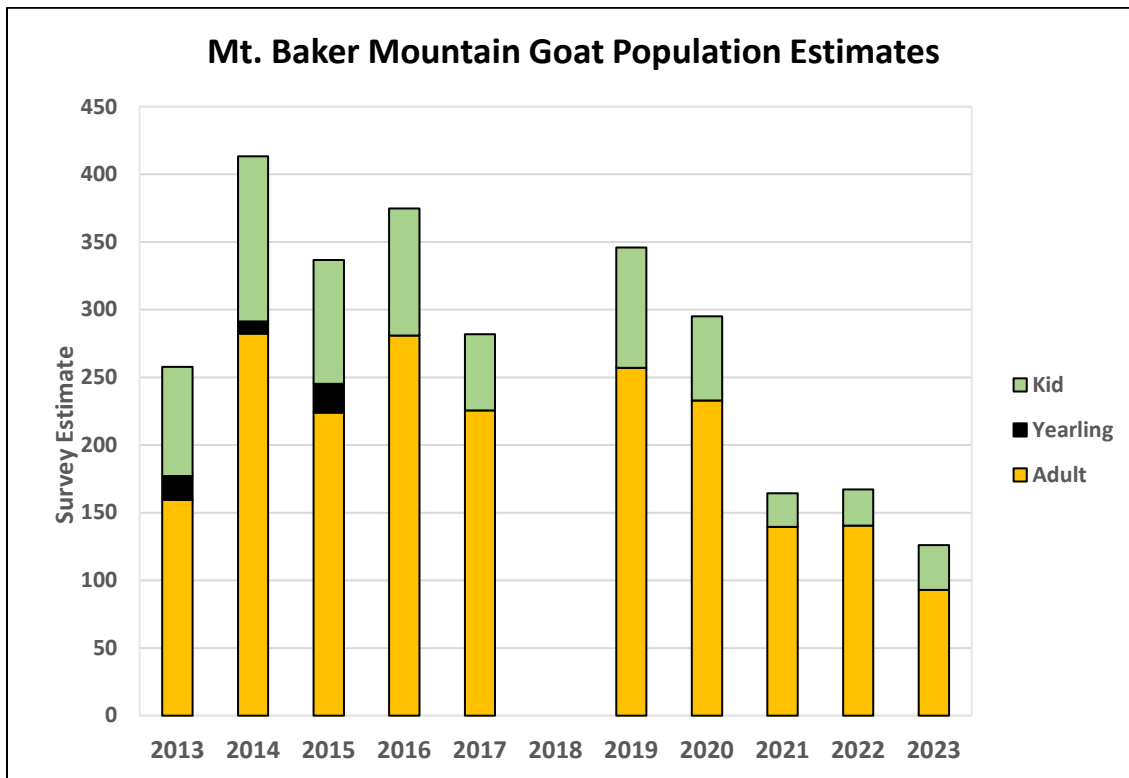
Although permit holders can legally harvest a female mountain goat (nanny), WDFW and most state wildlife agencies **strongly encourage each hunter to only harvest a male mountain goat (billy)**, since mountain goat populations are very sensitive to the harvest of nannies. This is because goats are slow to reach sexual maturity (three years) and have a slow production rate (do not produce young every year). Thus, a goat population's health is reliant on the number of mature females in a population, since they have a better chance of producing young that will survive.

Mountain goat hunt applicants drawn for a permit can only purchase their license after completing the WDFW online mountain goat gender identification training. Additionally, hunters who draw a permit must review provided educational material and make all efforts to harvest a male (billy). **This is crucial given documented declines in goat populations statewide.**

Harvest success rates for the three Mt. Baker hunt areas are generally 50% or greater in any year and has produced some mature goats of exceptional quality. During the 2023 season, seven hunters (six special permit and one raffle tag hunter) harvested three billies and four nannies for an overall success rate of 100%.

Mountain goat populations have been declining on Mt. Baker for the past several years (Figure 5). This mirrors declines recorded in almost all other goat populations in Washington, particularly in the North Cascades region. The reasons for the decline are not fully understood but are likely complex. They may include climate-related issues, recreation, habitat degradation, avalanches, predation, and weather patterns, including hot, dry summers following a severe winter, that impact habitat quality and recruitment. WDFW is working with Tribal co-managers and federal agencies to better understand this decline and determine next steps for managing Mt. Baker's goat population.

Figure 5. Population estimates for mountain goats on Mt. Baker, 2013 – 2023.



A hunter who kills a mountain goat in Washington must present the head with horns attached for inspection within ten days of harvest to a WDFW Regional or District office or a location designated by a WDFW representative. Call a [WDFW Regional or District office](#) to schedule an appointment with a biologist for inspection. After inspection, hunters may keep the head/horns of a lawfully harvested mountain goat in Washington for personal use.

Heavy precipitation since November 2021 has caused washouts and other travel issues on some U.S. Forest Service (USFS) roads and trails in District 14. Hunters are encouraged to reference the following interactive map from USFS to get the status of roads and trails within each goat hunt unit before your hunt begins: [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions](#).

Upland birds

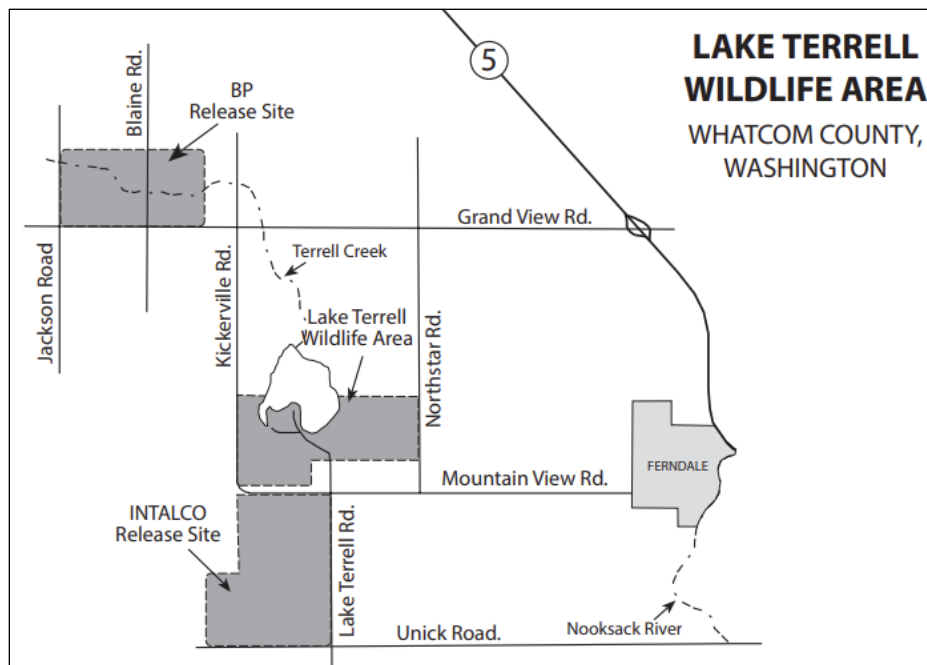
Upland bird opportunities available to hunters within District 14 include released ring-necked pheasants at designated release sites, sooty grouse, ruffed grouse, California quail, band-tailed pigeons, mourning doves, and an ever-growing population of non-native Eurasian collared-doves. Although some of these species are quite similar, each offers a unique opportunity to hunters throughout the state. For more general information on upland bird hunting in Washington, follow these links for a summary of [upland bird seasons](#), find ideas for [where to go upland bird hunting](#), and find information on [the basics of upland bird hunting in Washington](#).

Pheasant

The [pheasant release program](#) in Western Washington provides upland bird hunting opportunities in areas that cannot sustain naturally reproducing populations due to our cool, wet climate and lack of grain farming. This program encourages participation from new, young, and seasoned hunters. Approximately 35,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released yearly at 25 sites throughout western Washington. Pheasant releases will occur at four sites in District 14 this fall.

Whatcom County has three pheasant release sites, including the WDFW [Lake Terrell Unit of Whatcom Wildlife Area](#), the adjacent [Alcoa Intalco Works](#), and the BP release site along Grand View Rd. Volunteer members perform releases on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday of each week during the season, with approximately 300 birds released each week between the sites.

Figure 6. Release sites at Lake Terrell Wildlife Area.



The fourth site in District 14 is in Skagit County at the [Samish Unit](#) of Skagit Wildlife Area. There will be two releases, one just prior to the youth hunt and the other on the Monday of the senior hunt week. No further releases will occur after this. However, hunters may pursue the remaining on-site pheasants until the opening of the statewide waterfowl season on October 12 (see page 20 of the pamphlet). This site is closed after this date to minimize conflicts between pheasant and waterfowl hunters since the unit is managed and used primarily for waterfowl hunting. To hunt at these sites in District 14 or other pheasant release sites in western Washington, hunters must purchase a Western Washington pheasant license. A small game license is not required to participate.

Additional requirements to hunt pheasants and other upland birds include:

- Must wear a minimum of 400 square inches of hunter orange or fluorescent hunter pink clothing.
- Mandatory to use and carry only non-toxic shot for all upland bird hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide.

Please refer to the [WDFW 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet and [WDFW's Pheasant Hunting webpage](#) for more detailed information.

Forest grouse

Ruffed and sooty (blue) grouse are found on public and private forest lands throughout District 14. Ruffed grouse are the most widespread grouse species in the district and statewide. They are most abundant in lowland secondary succession coniferous and deciduous forests under 2,000 feet of elevation, often near riparian areas. Therefore, hunters after sooty grouse should seek higher elevation sites along trails and ridgelines above 2,000–3,000 feet within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. Also, areas with berry-bearing plants like huckleberry and grouse whortleberry should be sought when hunting this species. To find more information, check out the [hunting forest grouse](#) page.

During the 2021-2023 season setting rulemaking process, the WDFW Commission adopted a decision to delay the forest grouse season two weeks from the original opening date of September 1 to the new season dates of **September 15 – January 15**. The rule was recommended by WDFW biologists based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. Setting the season back to September 15 helps protect brood hens that are more vulnerable to harvest during early September. **This same rule will be in effect for the 2024 season.** More information is [available in this 2021 blog post](#).



Photo 9: A male ruffed grouse along a road. Photo by Michael Schroeder.

During the 2023 hunting season, hunters reported harvesting 1,086 grouse in Skagit county and 580 grouse in Whatcom County. Hunters averaged five hunting days in Skagit County and seven hunting days in Whatcom County. For the 2024 season, hunters should expect reliable hunting conditions if effort and time are put forth.

WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection

Biologists collect wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse throughout the season using designated collection sites. This collection effort contributes to a long-term statewide dataset that allows for a better evaluation of population trends and age-ratio data necessary for the local management of forest grouse species. Grouse hunters in District 14 can help with this effort by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse they harvest into one of our collection barrels located statewide. Please be sure to use the provided brown paper bags at the site and fill out all necessary information. To find the most up to date wing barrel locations in Skagit and Whatcom counties, as well as other locations in Washington, review the [WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) webpage.



Photo 10: An example of a wing barrel site. Photo by Robert Waddell.

Dove: mourning and Eurasian collared

To hunt mourning doves, hunters must possess a small game license and a state migratory bird permit. The season runs from September 1 – October 30, with a daily bag limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45. While dove hunting has decreased in popularity, the hunters who do pursue these birds are often successful. In 2023, 16 hunters in Skagit County harvested 95 birds and 17 hunters in Whatcom County harvested 78 birds. To maximize success, we recommend that hunters take the time to scout cut grain fields that will attract doves.

While hunting mourning doves, hunters can harvest an infinite number of Eurasian collared doves because they are a non-native species. Hunters can also pursue this species year-round because of its non-native status. In contrast to mourning doves, Eurasian collared doves tend to occupy more developed areas. Therefore, we recommend that hunters take the time to properly scout and acquire landowner permission in lowland agricultural areas with barnyard settings.

Figure 75. Comparison between a mourning and Eurasian collared dove.



Hunters should take the time to learn how to correctly identify Eurasian collared doves from mourning doves on the ground and in flight, as they can often be challenging to identify on the wing by inexperienced birders/hunters. Eurasian collared doves are much larger than mourning doves, but size can be difficult to gauge when only one species is present. Aside from the diagnostic black collar on the backs of their necks and overall lighter color, they also have a squared tail, while mourning doves have a pointed tail. Identification is especially crucial when hunting Eurasian collared doves outside the mourning dove season to prevent the accidental take of a species out of season.

Hunting Eurasian collared doves requires only a small or big game license. As for all hunting activities, hunters should confirm that the area they plan to pursue has no firearm restrictions and be mindful of people, buildings, farm equipment, or power lines while hunting.

Band-tailed pigeon

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest of Washington's pigeons and doves and are native to the state. Harvest trends for this species have been declining for some time. The decline is likely linked to decreases in hunter interest and participation. Hunting this species requires more tact than hunting other species in the pigeon/dove family. Finding areas that birds pass over, the sites they use for grit, and any mineral springs can increase success. They have a fruit and seed diet and are fond of elderberries, cherries, and other fruiting trees. Finding where they feed and pass and shooting as they enter and leave a site is a commonly used tactic.

Another solid hunting strategy is to target managed forest lands with mixed stand age classes that provide feeding areas with adjacent roosting areas. Additionally, band-tails are more challenging to bring down than mourning and Eurasian collared doves, so staying hidden and reducing your movement when hunting is essential to getting them in range and getting a good shot.

District biologists perform mineral site surveys annually in mid-July at historic mineral sites throughout the state. In District 14, two sites are actively monitored, one in Whatcom County and the other in Skagit County. Biologists use these surveys to monitor changes in the local breeding population, allowing them to anticipate trends in the regional population. However, the open season (September 17–23) usually corresponds with fall migration, when northern birds move into this area. Making predictions

about the quality of the hunting season for this species is difficult without an analysis of flyway-wide survey results, which takes time and isn't released before the hunting season.

A small game license, state migratory bird permit, and migratory bird authorization card with band-tailed pigeon harvest report card are required. The daily limit is two (2) birds with a six (6) bird possession limit. The mandatory harvest reporting deadline for this species is Sep. 30, 2024.

Waterfowl

Important regulations in the 2024-2025 season

- **Harlequin ducks are moving to a PERMIT SYSTEM.** Only 38 permits will be made available through a drawing to eligible applicants. Hunting Harlequin ducks without this permit is illegal. To apply for a harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington state small game hunting license, migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. Applications will be accepted July 1- August 14 and can be submitted by following instructions on the [Harlequin Duck Hunting Permit](#) webpage.
- **Electronic calls** are allowed during white-goose only season segments in GMA 1 (Feb. 8-18, 2025)

Special hunting dates

Youth hunt

Youth hunts will be held in Western Washington on September 21, 2024. Open species include Canada geese, white-fronted geese, ducks (including scaup), and coots. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt (see page 26 of the pamphlet). The youth hunt is open to hunters under 15 years of age who must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old who is not hunting.



Photo 11: Hunter and daughter head home after a successful day of hunting in Skagit County. Photo by Tucker Seitz.

Youth, Veterans & Active Military Personnel Hunt - This hunt will be held statewide on February 1, 2025. Open species include Canada geese, white-fronted geese, white geese, brant, ducks (including scaup), and coots. Authorization and Harvest Record Cards are required for certain species during this hunt. Veterans and Active Military are individuals who have served in the active military, naval, or air service and those discharged or released under Honorable conditions. The active-duty military also includes National Guard and Reserve members on active duty (other than for training). During the hunt, these hunters must have one of the following on their person (a copy is sufficient): DD214, Veteran Benefit Card, Retired Active Military I.D., or Active-Duty I.D. card. Please refer to the [Youth, Veterans & Active Military Personnel Hunt Information webpage](#) or pages 21 and 27 of the pamphlet for bag limit details for this hunt.

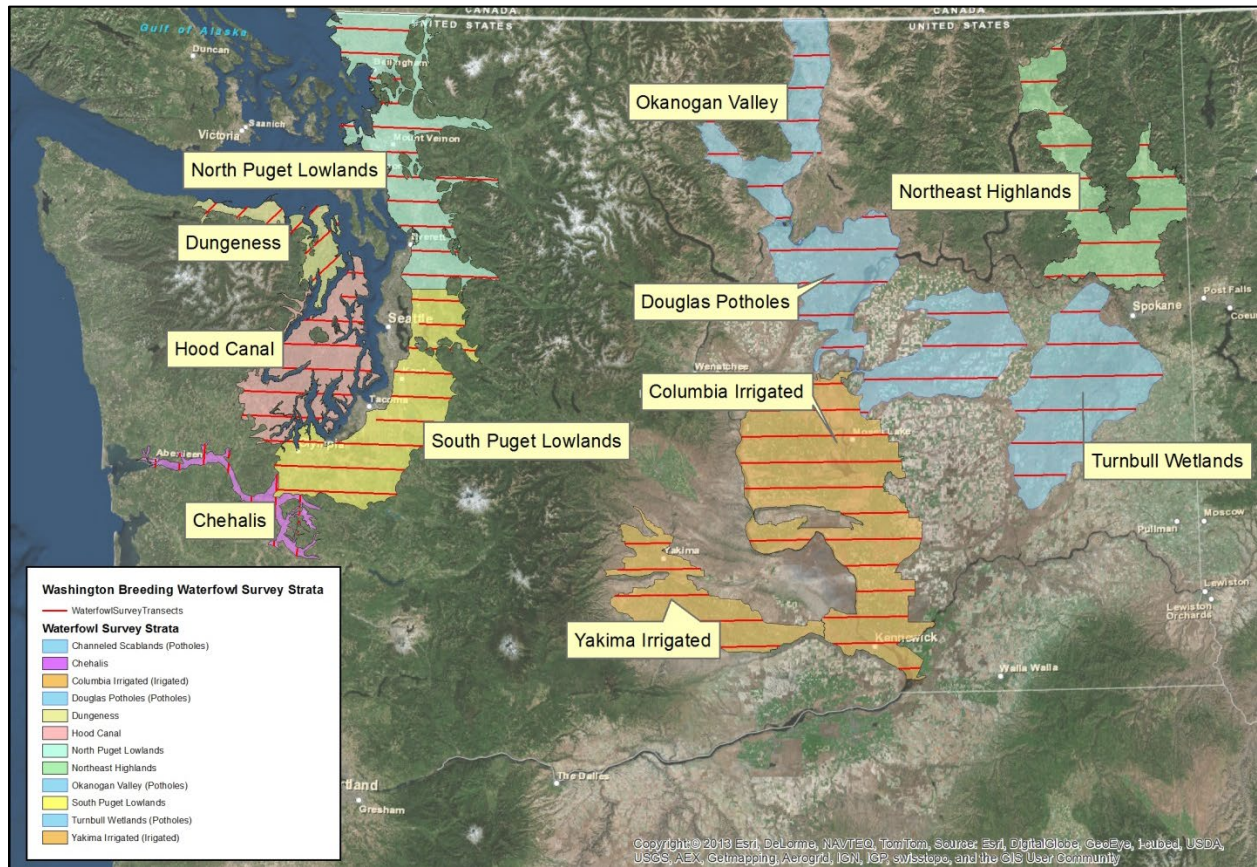


Photo 12: A youth hunter triumphantly holds her first duck at the Samish Wildlife Unit. Photo by John Garman.

Dabbling ducks

The Washington Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey is conducted yearly and is an index of breeding abundance since all areas of the state cannot be sampled. Surveys are conducted in late April through early May. District 14 falls within the North Puget Lowlands survey area (Figure 8). The breeding survey estimated 160,027 ducks statewide, a 22% decrease from 2023. The North Puget Lowlands holds approximately 26,807 ducks. The most common species viewed were mallards, green-winged teal, and wood ducks. Mallards decreased by 15% since 2023, but in comparison to the long-term average have only decreased by 6%.

Figure 86. Washington State breeding waterfowl strata and long-term Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey transects.



Based on 10-year average data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s annual [National Migratory Bird Harvest Survey](#), Skagit County boasts the second best duck harvest out of 39 counties in the state and 26th out of the 3,115 surveyed U.S. counties. Whatcom County ranks a respectable 7th in the state and 137th nationwide for duck harvest. During the 2023-24 season, Skagit County was second in duck harvest only to Grant County, with 57,580 ducks harvested, which is 13% higher than last year. The Whatcom County harvest was 26,158 ducks, up 6% higher than the previous season.

Hunters have several resources to help them get started if they want to hunt waterfowl in District 14. If you are new to hunting waterfowl, please visit the WDFW webpage [Let’s Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) for an excellent introduction. Hunters are encouraged to visit the WDFW webpage and [Hunt Planner Web map](#). The web map is a tool that provides information on Washington’s hunting regulations and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

Another resource for those planning to hunt the popular Skagit Wildlife Area and its many units productive for waterfowl hunting is the [WDFW Skagit Wildlife Area Waterfowl Hunting Guide](#).

Early season hunting opportunities in District 14 are generally more successful in saltwater marshes. On opening day, hunters can expect a mixed bag of species, including the less common blue-winged teal and wood duck, since they do not leave for their southern wintering grounds until later in the season. Then, large numbers of northern breeding ducks start to arrive in late October and November when colder weather pushes them south.

The bag limit for northern pintail is a one-bird daily limit. This change was made for the 2020-21 season because population estimates fell below federal management thresholds and have yet to rebound. Although this district supports a large northern pintail population, this is not typical in many other areas of the country and therefore does not accurately reflect the species' population status across North America.



Photo 1310: A northern pintail takes off from the water. Photo by Chad Morrison.

This year's general season will run from October 12–20 and October 23, 2024 – January 26, 2025, except for Greater scaup, which is open from November 2, 2024 – January 26, 2025. Bag limits are restricted to seven ducks. The species-specific daily bag restrictions mean a hunter cannot harvest more than two hen mallard, one pintail, two scaup (when open), two canvasback, and two redhead statewide. For sea ducks in District 14, bag limits should not include more than two scoters, two long-tailed ducks, and two goldeneyes. For more details, refer to page 21 in the pamphlet.

Please acquire all the appropriate authorizations and harvest record cards for the species/areas you are pursuing. Refer to the pamphlet for more information. In addition, authorizations and harvest record cards are available at WDFW license dealers or online using [WDFW's Wild System](#). Hunters are responsible for selecting each harvest record card for the species they intend to hunt.

Figure 97. Information about mandatory bird authorizations and harvest report cards.

Mandatory Bird Authorizations & Harvest Record Cards

MANDATORY HARVEST REPORTING DEADLINES:

- Band-tailed Pigeon
September 30
- Brant, Sea Duck, Harlequin Duck Permit
February 15
- SW Canada Goose (GMA 2), Snow Goose (GMA 1)
March 20

To improve management of certain limited migratory bird species, you are required to possess a Migratory Bird Authorization and Harvest Record Card(s) if you are hunting those species (see page 11). Immediately after taking a band-tailed pigeon, brant, sea duck (scoters, long-tailed duck, goldeneyes) in western Washington, Harlequin duck, snow goose (Goose Management Area 1) or any goose in Goose Management Area 2 – Coast & Inland into possession, you must fill out the required harvest record card information in ink within the designated spaces provided.

You must report hunting activity on your harvest record cards to WDFW using the online reporting system at: <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login>

Please note that you must comply with these reporting requirements or you will be required to pay a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card the next year.

Sea ducks

When pursuing intertidal and saltwater areas for sea ducks and diving ducks in Skagit County, hunters can use public boat ramps in Conway, the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit on Freshwater Slough, or under the twin bridges that cross over the Swinomish Channel on Highway 20. In Whatcom County, public boat ramps are available at most harbors, including Blaine, Squalicum, and Fairhaven. Birch Bay State Park is another popular access point for sea ducks and brant hunting. Boat access can significantly improve hunting options and success, but caution and preparation for a successful, enjoyable, and safe hunt are imperative.

Pacific brant

Skagit County has a historic and well-known tradition of Pacific brant (including black brant) hunting. Brant wintering in Padilla and Samish bays mainly belong to the sub-species referred to as western high arctic brant, also known as grey-bellies. This sub-species nests in a small area in the western Canadian high arctic and is vulnerable to excessive harvest because of their limited nesting and wintering grounds. Open season dates are determined by aerial surveys to prevent overharvest. The survey is flown to

determine a wintering population estimate and is then compared to current management thresholds established by the agency. The estimate dictates whether there is a six-day season (if surveyors count more than 6,000 birds), a three-day season (a count between 3,000 – 6,000 birds), or no season at all (a count under 3,000 birds).

The survey is flown in late December-early January to provide biologists with the data necessary to determine if any harvest will be sustainable for the population. Survey results and possible season dates will be provided via a WDFW news [release](#). Hunters can subscribe to the [WDFW email list](#) to receive news releases and other Department information.

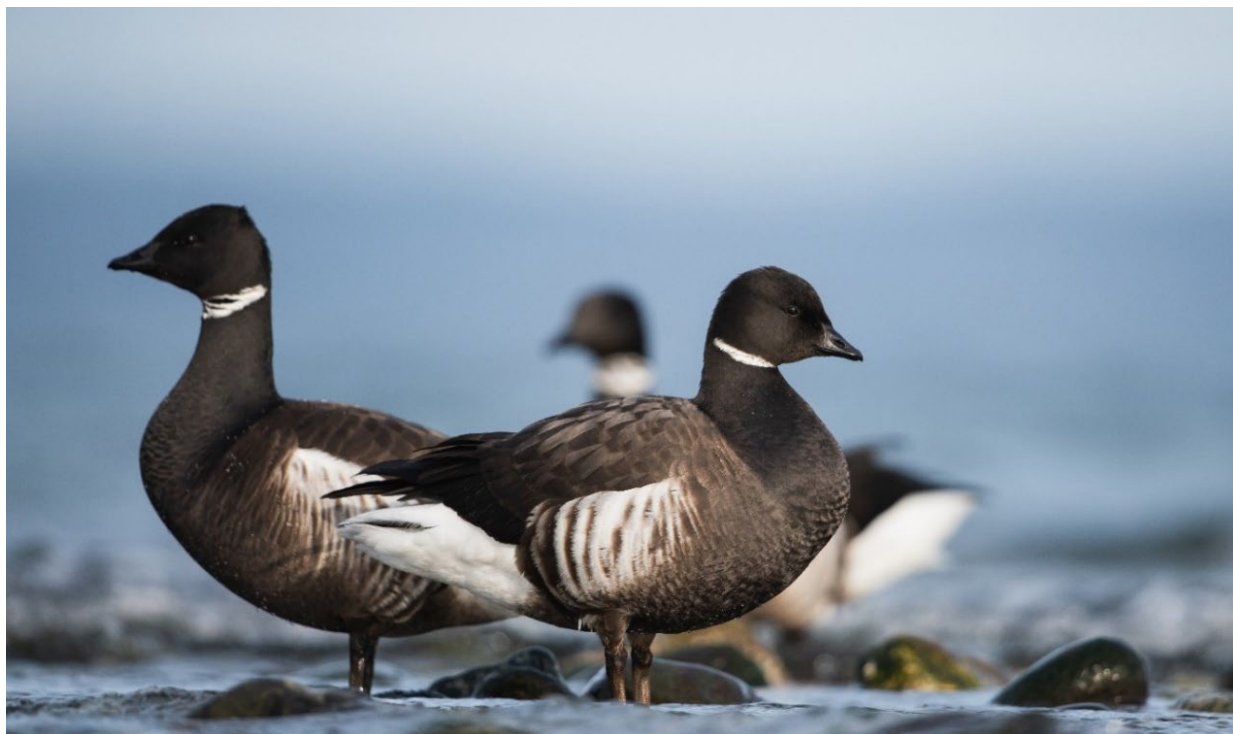


Photo 1411: Brant loafing on a gravel bar in Puget Sound. Photo by Ryan Askren.

In Whatcom County, the population is primarily made up of black brant, a more abundant and less vulnerable population to overharvest than grey-bellies. Clallam County exhibits similar subspecies patterns: thus, the two counties have been grouped for brant management. The guaranteed season dates for these two counties are January 18, 22, and 25.

Like last year, only Whatcom County will be opened for brant hunting on the special youth, veterans, and active military hunt day on February 1, 2025. Whether Skagit County is open for brant harvest on this day will be determined by aerial survey results, like the regular brant season. A special migratory bird authorization card is required to hunt brant during the general and special seasons. Lastly, the mandatory harvest reporting deadline for brant is February 15, 2025. Data obtained from these reports are essential for managing this species.

Location and strategy are vital for successful brant hunting. These birds will congregate in feedings areas where eelgrass is exposed at low tide, often near estuaries, spits, and mudflats, then head to open water nearby to "loaf" during hide tide or after being pressured. Depending on the location, successful hunters use layout blinds, small boats, kayaks, and various decoy configurations, including long lines, to intercept these iconic geese during their daily routine.

Canada geese

Skagit County hunters reported harvesting 149 birds during the early goose season and 1,718 during the regular 2023-24 season. Whatcom County hunters harvested 288 during the early season and 1,840 during the regular season. Cumulatively, the district accounts for around 7% of the statewide Canada goose harvest.

This year, the early Canada goose season will occur September 7–12, 2024, and offers early season hunting opportunities for hunters in Goose Management Area 1, which covers both Skagit and Whatcom Counties. Refer to page 26 of the pamphlet for more detailed information about Goose Management Areas. During this early season, bag limits are set at five birds per day, with a possession limit of 15. Higher limits are in place because early seasons target and decrease the population of resident birds, while later seasons see an influx of migrating geese.

This season's Western Washington Youth hunting date is September 21, 2024. Hunters under 16 can harvest Canada geese or white-fronted geese during this hunt, with a bag limit of four for Canada geese and ten for white-fronted geese. The regular open season occurs from October 12 – December 1, and December 14 – January 26 with daily bag limits of four Canada geese and a possession limit of 12. The **mandatory** harvest reporting deadline for Canada geese harvested in Washington is March 20, 2025.

Lesser snow geese

Snow goose hunting is another mainstay of waterfowl hunting in District 14, providing a very different alternative to hunting dabbling ducks. Whatcom County was added to Goose Management Area (GMA) 1 during the 2020-21 season. This population is healthy and stable and is evaluated using data collected on snow goose breeding grounds and during winter aerial surveys of the Skagit-Fraser River Delta. During the 2024-2025 season, hunters in Skagit and Whatcom will enjoy a liberal bag limit of 10 white geese per day and a 30-bird possession limit.

The winter Skagit-Fraser River Delta snow goose aerial population survey was flown in March 2024. If the productivity on Wrangel Island, Russia is good, hunters can expect the population to be similar to or slightly less than the population that arrived in the fall of 2023. Should conditions on the breeding grounds result in poor productivity, a slight to medium population decrease is expected.

Hunters interested in harvesting snow geese should seek access to multiple properties before the season. The early season is the best time to lure geese, particularly juveniles, with decoys. In this area, flocks stay within a several mile home range but do not necessarily return to the same field they were feeding in the previous day. Due to their large numbers and aggressive feeding, the species exhaust a

food source quickly. Hunting in corn stubble is a widespread technique at the beginning of the hunting season. As the season progresses, snow goose diets diversify, and geese begin to feed in a variety of crop fields, including winter wheat, hay or silage, and potatoes. Snow geese are most abundant on public and private land on Fir Island in District 14. However, geese do spend time in areas on either side of Interstate 5, north of Burlington and in the Edison area. Snow geese routinely rest on saltwater bays throughout the district. Flocks fly low enough during severe weather, opening up opportunities for pass shooting on various public and private lands and waters. For ethical reasons, hunters should avoid wounding or failing to retrieve waterfowl.

No changes have been made to this year's season structure for white geese (lesser snow, Ross', and blue geese) in GMA 1, which covers the entire district. The 2024– 2025 season will continue to include a late hunting season for white goose only from February 8–18, 2025. Electronic calls will **ONLY** be permitted during the white-goose-only season in GMA 1 from February 8–18. Electronic calls are **not** permitted during any other open goose season.

Hunters will need a federal migratory bird stamp (if over 16 years of age), a small game license, a state migratory bird permit, and a special migratory bird authorization with GMA 1 snow goose harvest record card. You must [report hunting activity](#) on your harvest record cards to WDFW using the online reporting system or by mailing the cards to WDFW, Wildlife Program — Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141 Olympia, WA 98504. The deadline for submission is March 20, 2025.

Submission of harvest record cards is mandatory for hunters that request them, even if you did not harvest birds. These reports must be postmarked by the reporting deadline to avoid penalties. You must comply with these reporting requirements to avoid a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card next season. The deadline is strictly enforced because WDFW must collate the data, develop preliminary reports, and provide the information to Department biologists across the state to set permit levels for the coming hunting season.

Hunters should note that many WDFW managed lands and National Wildlife Refuges are closed to goose hunting during this late-season opportunity (refer to page 26 in the pamphlet). All standard regulations regarding plugged shotguns, non-motorized decoys, and bag limits apply during both seasons. The bag limit for the late white geese season is 20 birds, with a possession limit of 60.

Whatcom and Skagit counties hold certain waterfowl species that could be confused with snow geese. Several thousand trumpeters and tundra swans reside throughout western parts of District 14 from mid-fall through spring. Waterfowl hunters **must** be able to distinguish between mature or juvenile swans and their snow goose counterparts, which can be a challenge for inexperienced hunters. With proper species identification and patience, there should be little confusion between the species. Hunters should review waterfowl identification materials to sharpen their skills before the season begins. Under state and federal laws, harming swans in Washington State is illegal. Emperor geese have been documented infrequently in District 14. They too are closed to harvest in the lower 48 states under federal migratory bird regulations.

Figure 108. Differentiating swans from snow geese.



Hunter access

Access to private lands for big game hunting opportunities remains limited. Because of experience with theft, vandalism, dumping, and other problems, private industrial timber companies generally do not allow vehicular access. Some timber companies limit public access to walk-in opportunities only, while others allow for vehicular access under a permit system. Less hunting pressure on these walk-in-only sites results in good hunting opportunities for those willing to use bicycles or hike behind locked gates when private companies allow this type of access.

One exception is Sierra Pacific Industries, which owns significant private industrial timberlands in Skagit and Whatcom counties. For the 2024–25 season, WDFW has facilitated access on Sierra Pacific properties in GMU 418 for special permit bull elk, some quality black-tailed buck permit holders, and fall general season bear hunters at a designated site near Black Mountain (under the Hunt by Reservation system).

Weyerhaeuser-Columbia Timberlands Corporation (Weyerhaeuser) sold properties throughout northwest Washington to Hampton Lumber. You can purchase a permit for motorized and non-motorized access to their forests in the North Cascades by following the links on the [Hampton Lumber](#) website.

Because much of the land in District 14 is private property, hunters should obtain permission to hunt from landowners. For safety, hunters must always be mindful of where houses, livestock, and outbuildings are situated. Portions of District 14 GMUs are under firearm restrictions. Hunters should research land ownership and understand local firearm limitations before hunting.

The Private Lands Access Program has negotiated access for hunters on dozens of private properties throughout Whatcom and Skagit counties. For the 2024-25 season, WDFW staff members have enrolled several deer and elk general season hunting sites in GMU 407 and continue to pursue more access opportunities. The Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program has over 60 sites on private lands for the upcoming waterfowl season (30 in Skagit County and 29 in Whatcom). These sites offer open field or blind-only hunting, primarily targeting dabbling ducks. While most of these sites are Register to Hunt

(note that sites are first-come, first-served), several are enrolled in the Hunt by Reservation system. Register to Hunt sites are very similar to Feel Free to Hunt sites (first-come, first-served), but you must complete a registration card when you use a site. Properties Enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program become available for public hunting once the agricultural practices are finished for the year. Because of this, many sites will not be open for the opening day of the waterfowl season. Our lands access program is constantly working to create more public access, so more sites may be added to the program before the season starts.



Photo 1512: A hunter and his dog crouch in a blind along the Skagit River. Photo by Duane Dixon.

The Hunt by Reservation program offers a quality hunting experience by limiting the number of days a site is hunted while guaranteeing the site will be available to whomever books the reservation. To reserve a Hunt by Reservation site, visit the [WDFW Hunting Access Webpage](#), create an account, choose a hunting site in the Hunt by Reservation category, and book your reservation. Reservations can begin at 8 a.m., two weeks before the hunt day. A fast internet connection improves your chances of securing a reservation.

Private Lands personnel have worked with landowners to grow forage for wintering waterfowl at some sites to provide additional feed for waterfowl. For those lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, this can generate some excellent hunting.

More information about individual sites, including maps, access rules, and the program, may be found on the WDFW [Places to go hunting](#) webpage. Waterfowl hunt units on private lands will open as crop harvests are completed, and other conditions are met, so only some units will be available on opening day.

In addition, the WDFW Private Lands program has developed and enhanced hunting opportunities on WDFW-managed lands. The five hunt sites are found on land managed by the Skagit Wildlife Area. They include South Padilla Bay (Bayview 1, 2, and 3) and Samish River (Edison East and West).

Public lands

Vehicle access by big game hunters to certain Washington Department of Natural Resource (DNR) lands in Skagit and Whatcom counties may be impacted by logging activities during the upcoming hunting season. Access to Van Zandt Dike and Alger Hill Road via Skarrup Road at Parson Creek Road may be restricted by the DNR to manage access during times of active logging. Even if potential closures prohibit the use of vehicles, hunters are allowed access to these areas on foot, mountain bike, or by horse so long as they are respectful of active forestry operations.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) national forest lands offer some vehicular access throughout Whatcom and Skagit counties. Many road systems have been closed due to flood-related damage, and some roads are subject to seasonal road closures. The USFS plans to decommission or abandon a significant portion of its managed road network on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. These closures further restrict vehicular access to upper-elevation habitats for big game and forest grouse hunting. For updated USFS road and trail information, review the [Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF Road and Trail Conditions Map](#).

Among the WDFW-managed lands in District 14, waterfowl hunters should consider the Headquarters, Island, Samish (also known as the Welts property), and Johnson/Debay's Slough units in Skagit County, and Tennant Lake, Nooksack, and Lake Terrell wildlife area units in Whatcom County. All these sites are managed for waterfowl and provide walk-in and boat access, with some blinds available. Hunters can visit the WDFW [Wildlife Areas](#) webpage and search WDFW wildlife areas and units by name, county, and region for more information on each location.

Skagit County

For more information on hunting waterfowl at the Skagit Wildlife Area and its various units, please see our [Skagit Wildlife Area Waterfowl Hunting Guide](#) (updated August 2022).

Island Unit

The Island Unit totals approximately 268 acres and is a popular waterfowl hunting site. During the November 2021 flood event, a significant breach occurred on the east lobe of the unit. This area is now intertidal, with daily tides and river levels inundating the site like the surrounding marsh. The unit's west lobe was unaffected by the flood event and is still managed for enhanced waterfowl forage. Hunters can

still hunt the entire unit, but because the east lobe of the Island Unit is now intertidal, hunters using this part of the Island Unit should reference a tide chart and Skagit River gauges before going out in the field.

The Island Unit is accessible by boat only. Hunters typically launch from the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit or the Skagit County Parks boat launch under the Conway bridge. Be aware that river conditions, even short crossings, may be challenging or dangerous for small boats during high flows.

Samish Unit

The Samish Unit has 410 acres of agricultural fields, grass, and seasonal wetlands. Approximately 220 acres of barley, millet, fava beans, and corn are planted on the site. Funding for the agricultural enhancements on this unit is provided through the Washington State Duck Stamp program. There are 23 shallow ponds and swales developed in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. Water control structures also allow a high percentage of the area to be flooded with sheet water during the hunting season. The Samish Unit is north of Highway 20 and can be accessed from the parking lot on Samish Island Road.

This site is very popular for waterfowl hunting, and all blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis. In addition to the existing permanent blinds, temporary blinds will be installed at locations varying yearly, depending on crop plantings and water conditions. Be sure to check the map on-site for the most updated information.



Photo 16: View of a mowed pond at the Samish Unit. Photo by WDFW.

Telegraph Slough Unit

The Telegraph Slough Unit is a freshwater wetland created when highway construction crossed the Swinomish Channel to Fidalgo Island. WDFW and the Department of Natural Resources have a land-use agreement to manage the wetland for waterfowl hunting and wildlife observation opportunities. Parking is available off State Route 20, and several small ponds and channels are present depending on water levels. Hunters should be familiar with private property boundaries.

Johnson/DeBay's Slough Unit

The Johnson/DeBay's Slough Hunt Unit is 23 acres and can be a productive hunting site. The unit is planted with barley and corn, depending on the year. Due to its small size, the unit can only accommodate four to five hunting parties. Because this is a field hunting site, it should be hunted with decoys. Temporary blinds are installed in various locations each year, depending on the plantings and water conditions. The blinds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Figure 119. Location of Johnson/DeBay's Slough blind and parking lot on the hunt unit.



Skagit Bay Estuary Unit

The Skagit Bay Estuary Unit starts at the bayfront edge of the delta of the Skagit River (North to South Forks). It extends south towards Stanwood along the north shore of Camano Island or the South Bay area. A large portion of this area's first-class and second-class tidelands are owned by WDFW (approximately 16,000 acres), with private ownerships interspersed. The property provides prime waterfowl hunting from a boat or by foot during low tides. WDFW manages two game reserves in this area, Skagit Bay Delta and Fir Island Farm Reserves.

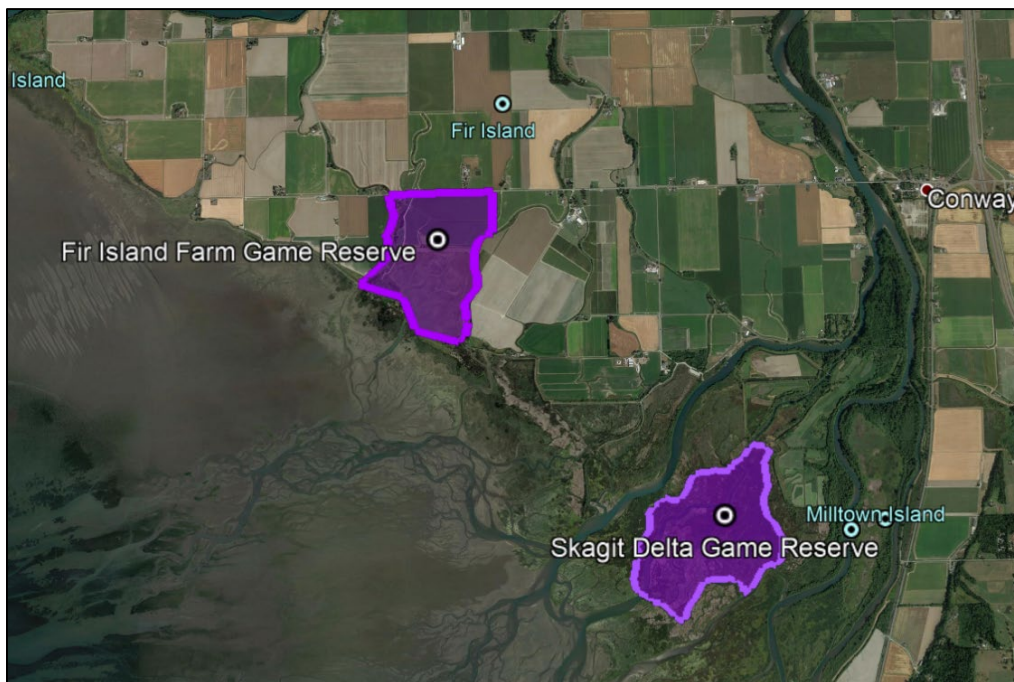
The diverse Skagit Bay topography includes open saltwater, mudflats, low marsh (grass), and a high marsh of cattails, brush, and taller woody vegetation. The entire area is a maze of channels, cut by both

tidal action and currents from the various sloughs of the Skagit River delta. Most bay front hunters set up on the edge of the vegetation line and in the higher marsh, channels, and backwaters. Some hunters prefer to hunt the open water on Skagit Bay.

The entire bay front can offer good shooting, but the most heavily used sites are on the South and North Forks of the Skagit River, downstream from the more popular boat launch access of Skagit Headquarters Unit (WDFW) and Conway Launch (Skagit County). For information about walk-in access options, refer to the [Skagit Wildlife Area webpage](#) for more details.

Large tide swings in Skagit Bay and nearby areas present challenges for waterfowl hunters every season, and both boat and walk-in hunters must be familiar with local tide tables and have a plan for their day before every hunt. Walk-in hunters should pay particular attention to deeper ditches and sloughs that may prohibit return routes or prevent the retrieval of downed waterfowl.

Figure 1210. Map of game reserves within the Skagit Wildlife Area.



Whatcom County

Lake Terrell Unit

The Lake Terrell Unit of the Whatcom Wildlife Area is an important and productive waterfowl hunting site. This unit has over 15 permanently constructed hunting blinds, all on a first-come, first-served basis. One ADA-accessible hunting blind was built by the Whatcom County Chapter of the Washington Waterfowl Association. To make a reservation for this blind, visit the [WDFW Private Lands Hunt by Reservation webpage](#) and search for “Lake Terrell Disability Access Site”.



Photo 1813: Lake Terrell Unit. Photo by Robert Waddell.

Tennant Lake Unit

The Tennant Lake Unit of the Whatcom Wildlife Area has three waterfowl hunting blinds available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hunters can sign in on the day of the hunt at the sign-in box at the top boat launch to let others know which blind they will be using. This site is reliably productive throughout the hunting season.



Photo 17: Tennant Lake Unit. Photo by WDFW.

Nooksack Unit

The Nooksack Unit is located south of Slater Road at the Nooksack River. It is heavily used during the waterfowl hunting season. At the north end of the unit is a 120-acre agricultural field that is usually planted with corn, potatoes, and barley during the spring. Upon harvest, 10 acres of corn and 15 acres of barley are left standing to provide winter waterfowl forage, providing for a high-quality hunting area. Several permanent hunting blinds and temporary stand-up blinds are located within the farm field, with all blinds on a first-come, first-served basis. An ADA-accessible blind is available at the Nooksack Unit. To make a reservation for this blind, visit the [WDFW Private Lands Hunt by Reservation webpage](#) and search for “Shady Lane Disability Access Site”.

2024 District 9 Hunting Prospects

Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

July 2024

2024 District 9 Hunting Prospects

Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat counties

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Cover photo by Eric Holman.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 9 general overview

District 9 is in the southwest/central part of Washington and is the only district in the state that spans the Cascade Crest. Game management units (GMUs) in District 9 include 554 (Yale), 564 (Battle Ground), 568 (Washougal), 560 (Lewis River), 572 (Siouxon), 574 (Wind River), 578 (West Klickitat), 388 (Grayback), and 382 (East Klickitat). Hunters can choose from a variety of habitats, as well as areas covered by westside or eastside season dates and permit regulations.

The Cascade Mountain Range dominates the geography of District 9, dividing the district into westside and eastside zones. Topography varies from near sea level along the Columbia River and its lower tributaries to alpine habitats associated with Mount St. Helens and Mount Adams in the Cascade Range.

Dominant westside river drainages include the Lewis, Washougal, and Wind rivers. Major eastside watersheds include the White Salmon and Klickitat rivers. Rock Creek in eastern Klickitat County is the primary watershed in ponderosa pine/oak and shrubsteppe portions of the district. The Columbia River bounds the southern border of the district.

District 9 features some of the most diverse habitats in the state and includes westside coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir and western hemlock. These forests give way to Oregon white oak and ponderosa pine as you travel east of the Cascade Mountains. In eastern Klickitat County, pine and oak habitat transition into shrubsteppe dominated by grassland and sagebrush.

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands make up the majority of the westside forestland. These lands are open to public access. Weyerhaeuser owns blocks of land in GMU 568 (Washougal) and scattered lands throughout GMU 578 (West Klickitat). Hunters must have permits or leases to access most of this land. More information about [recreation on Weyerhaeuser property can be found on their website](#). **Weyerhaeuser only allows free public access on their lands that are enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program.** To locate those lands, visit the [Private Lands Hunting Access webpage](#).

Eastside forest and shrubsteppe/grassland habitat is primarily privately owned with limited public access. Large tracts of private timberland in GMUs 574 and 578, which typically allow some degree of public hunting access opportunities, are held or managed by the following companies: Manulife Forest Management (formerly Hancock), Green Diamond Resource Company/TCT Columbia Holdings (lands formerly owned by SDS), The Conservation Fund/Lupine Columbia Holdings (lands formerly owned by SDS), and American Forest Management. Green Diamond participates in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program, though much of the land open for public hunting access is listed as "TCT Columbia Holdings" on the Private Lands Hunting Access webpage. Be sure to check the [online map](#) to determine which land parcels are included. These lands are popular for deer, elk, bear, and turkey hunting but generally are not open to motorized vehicles.

Most participating timber companies maintain recreational access hotlines where hunters can find out if the land is closed before hunting. Hunters can find a list of recreational access websites and hotlines

maintained by private industrial timber companies at the end of this document. A list of timberlands enrolled in WDFW's hunting access programs can be found on [WDFW's Private Lands webpage](#). Due to high fire danger, as of July 28, 2024 all lands owned or managed by the following parties in Klickitat, Skamania, and Yakima counties are closed to public access until further notice: American Forest Management, Broughton Lumber Company, Columbia Land Trust, DGS Timber, Green Diamond Resource Company, Kreps Ranch, Kreps Family LLC, Lupine Forest, Manulife Forest Management, Twin Creeks Timber (TCT Holdings), and Western Pacific Timber LLC.

The [WDFW Hunt Planner webpage](#) has useful map layers like GMU and elk/deer area boundaries, roads, Wildlife Areas, and different types of base maps (aerial photos, topography). If you prefer to use online or mobile apps to plan your hunt, OnX Hunt includes all WDFW Private Lands Access properties as a separate layer when you add Washington from the list of states. Look for the "WA Private Lands Hunting Opportunities" layer and activate it with the toggle button.

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [WDFW](#) and [DNR](#) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

Visitors to WDFW- and DNR-managed lands with a parking placard for people with disabilities can use Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes on all non-motorized natural surface trails and closed roads where bicycles are allowed until June 30, 2023, or until new legislation is enacted.



Hunting in GMU 568. Photo by Eric Holman.

GMU overviews

GMU 382 - East Klickitat

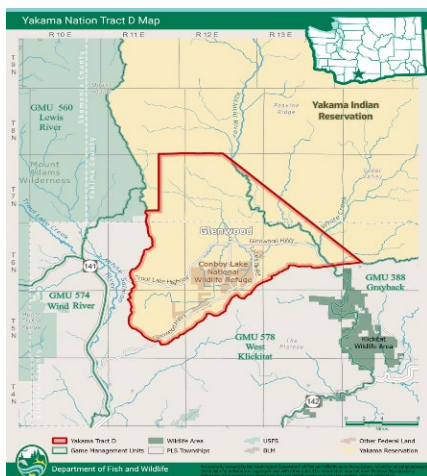
GMU 382 (East Klickitat) is almost exclusively private land except for the Klickitat Wildlife Area's [Simcoe Mountains Unit](#), which has some parcels of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land adjacent to it. There are several private hunt clubs that cater to deer and upland bird hunters. This GMU features mostly shrubsteppe and dryland agriculture, with oak-ponderosa forests in the northwestern quarter and major drainages. Deer are the most popular game species here, though chukar and partridge can also be found throughout the unit.

GMU 388 - Grayback

GMU 388 (Grayback) is mostly private land, with the exception of the [Soda Springs Unit](#) and other small units of the Klickitat Wildlife Area. As of Sept. 1, 2023, all Western Pacific Timber lands in Klickitat County are **no longer open to any hunting access**. However, there are a few smaller [private lands hunting options](#) in this GMU. This GMU is a mix of shrubsteppe, dryland agriculture, and oak-ponderosa forests with heavier timbered areas in the northwest corner. The units of the Klickitat Wildlife Area provide good opportunities for deer and turkey hunting. There are a few scattered elk in the northwest part of the GMU and you will need an eastern elk tag to hunt elk here.

The northwest finger of this GMU is now within the boundary of the Yakama Nation as part of the area known as "Tract D" (see map below). As with all landownerships and jurisdictions, hunting is a privilege, and we remind you to please be respectful of landowners' posted access requirements. While there are no changes to the 2024-25 state hunting regulations within Tract D, please be extra aware that public or private land within Tract D is also within the Yakama Nation reservation. WDFW is committed to working with Yakama Nation on long-term management of wildlife within the Tract D area and other geographic areas where WDFW cooperatively manages wildlife with Yakama Nation.

Figure 1: Map of Tract D



GMU 578 - West Klickitat

Most of GMU 578 (West Klickitat) is private land except for some blocks of DNR land and small parcels of the Klickitat Wildlife Area. The northern portion of this GMU is now within the boundary of the Yakama Nation as part of the area known as “Tract D” (see map above). As with all landownerships and jurisdictions, hunting is a privilege, and we remind you to please be respectful of landowners’ posted access requirements. While there are no changes to the 2024-25 state hunting regulations within Tract D, please be extra aware that public or private land within Tract D is also within the Yakama Nation reservation. WDFW is committed to working with Yakama Nation on long-term management of wildlife within the Tract D area and other geographic areas where WDFW cooperatively manages wildlife with Yakama Nation. There are several industrial forest landowners within this GMU, and many allow free public walk-in access (see section at the end of this document). Most of the GMU is forestland with a mix of oak-pine-conifer forests. This GMU has good success rates for deer and turkey, provides opportunity for elk in the northern and western parts of the GMU, and provides bear or cougar hunting opportunities.

GMU 574 - Wind River

GMU 574 (Wind River) is primarily public land, with most lands in the [Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area](#) and [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#), along with a large block of DNR land in the western quarter of the GMU. In the southwestern part of the GMU, there are a couple private industrial forest landowners that allow free walk-in hunting access (see section at the end of this document). Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on public lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where there are clearcuts or recent forest thinning. Forest grouse can be found throughout the GMU, while turkeys can be found in lower elevation southern and eastern portions of the unit.

GMU 572 - Siouxon

GMU 572 (Siouxon) is almost entirely within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. In 2020, the Big Hollow Fire burned a significant portion of GMU 572. Hazardous conditions and closures may still be present. For the latest information on closures, please check with the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#) before scouting or hunting and [read more about the fire](#) on the Forest Service website. The northwest corner of this GMU is DNR land, and [PacifiCorp](#) offers free walk-in hunting access on some of its lands along the reservoirs in the northern part of the unit. Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on public lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where there are clear-cuts or recent forest thinning. Forest grouse can be found throughout the GMU.

GMU 560 - Lewis River

GMU 560 (Lewis River) is quite large, with most of the land located within the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#). [PacifiCorp](#) offers free walk-in hunting access along the reservoirs in the southern part of this GMU. Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on the National Forest lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where there are meadows or

recent forest thinning or fires. This GMU offers bear or cougar hunting opportunity. Forest grouse can also be found throughout the GMU.

GMU 554 - Yale

GMU 554 (Yale) is small and primarily located within Clark County, which has firearms restrictions (see page 90 of the Big Game pamphlet). This GMU offers some DNR land in addition to free walk-in access on some of [PacifiCorp](#)'s lands. Deer and elk will be more abundant and accessible in the areas where there are clearcuts or recent forest thinning.

GMU 568 - Washougal

GMU 568 (Washougal) has a mix of private, DNR, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and private industrial forest lands. The [Yacolt Burn State Forest](#) is a popular and accessible spot for residents of Clark County. Walking or biking behind locked gates can be a good option to get away from other hunters. Mixed conifer forests dominate this GMU, which has good road access on public lands. This is a good GMU for black-tailed deer and offers bear or cougar hunting opportunity. Forest grouse can also be found throughout the GMU.

GMU 564 - Battle Ground

GMU 564 (Battle Ground) is an urban/suburban area with firearms restrictions and consists primarily of private land. Each of the [Shillapoo Wildlife Area Units](#) provide good public access for waterfowl and upland game bird hunting, with limited black-tailed deer hunting. There is a pheasant release site at the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. [Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge](#) offers waterfowl hunting through a pre-season lottery reservation system.

Elk



Elk in the Trout Lake Valley with Mt. Adams in the backdrop. Photo by WDFW.

WDFW manages elk in District 9 as part of the Mount St. Helens (MSH) Herd, detailed in the [Mount Saint Helens Elk Herd Plan](#) on the WDFW website. You can find more information on elk management in District 9 in the [Game Harvest Statistics](#) and [2023 Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Elk hunting within District 9 is managed under a variety of seasons, so hunters should check regulations closely before heading out. Hunters should be aware that GMUs 388 (Grayback) and 382 (East Klickitat) require Eastern Washington elk tags, while the remainder of District 9 is within the Western Washington elk tag area. Additionally, GMU 564 (Battle Ground) and 554 (Yale) are Firearm Restriction GMUs.

In terms of size, GMU 560 (Lewis River) offers the most opportunity for elk hunting in District 9. Most of this area is public land within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. [PacifiCorp](#) also offers non-motorized access to their lands on the north side of Swift Reservoir. Early-season snow levels can affect hunter access and success during the modern firearm season. GMUs 574 (Wind River), 572 (Siouxon), and 578 (West Klickitat) are also good elk units. GMUs 574 and 572 are mainly public Forest Service and DNR lands, while GMU 578 is predominantly private land with some DNR land. Be sure to have good maps to identify land ownership in this area.

GMUs 388 and 382 in Klickitat County have very few elk and are generally considered better for deer hunting. GMU 564 in Clark County only has elk in the northern and eastern portions of the GMU. This

area has a mix of public and private lands, and it's important to research ownership before planning your hunt in this area.

Some areas may be closed to both motorized and non-motorized access. Even in familiar areas, we recommend extra scouting because elk distribution may have changed, and normal hunting lands may be closed due to fire danger.

Elk population information

Elk populations in the GMUs comprising the Mount St Helens (MSH) Elk Herd area are down from historic high levels during the mid-2000s. This population reduction was implemented per the objectives of the [Mount Saint Helens Elk Herd Plan](#). Liberal antlerless elk hunting opportunity, combined with several years of late-winter and spring storms, reduced the elk population in these GMUs. The winter of 2016-17 was unusually severe, with early snowfall and persistent cold, wet conditions throughout the winter. Severe winters have a larger impact when animals are in relatively poor condition entering the winter. Elk within the MSH herd typically lack large fat reserves to help with long, hard winters.



Elk in the oaks in GMU 574. Photo by Chris Wilson.

Reflecting on these challenging conditions, the 2017 spring survey of elk in the monitored portions of the MSH herd showed a 30-35% reduction from 2016 numbers. The winters of 2017-18 and 2018-19 were mild, however elk hoof disease continues to impact survival and reproduction in this herd. Surveys conducted during the springs of 2018-2019 and 2022 indicated that the MSH elk herd had stabilized at a lower population level. Surveys were not conducted in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions, and none were conducted in 2023 due to budget restrictions. The spring 2024 survey showed an increase of

38% in the estimate compared to spring 2022. This sizeable increase in the population estimate is a hopeful indicator that the reduction in antlerless opportunity in recent years is helping the population recover.

Elk hoof disease (TAHD)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the MSH elk herd area. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009-2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. Disease prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties, but is also found in all three counties of District 9.

The entirety of District 9 falls within the MSH elk herd range. TAHD is most prevalent among elk in the southwestern part of Washington, however the disease was detected outside Trout Lake (GMU 578) in 2018 and has since been confirmed throughout Klickitat and Skamania counties.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

In 2021, WDFW implemented an [incentive-based pilot program](#) to encourage westside (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The objective of this program is to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of Sept. 1 through Dec. 31 will be awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

So, what can hunters do to help?

- Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.
- Turn in your elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington.
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. More information about TAHD can be found on [WDFW's website](#) and [Washington State University's TAHD page](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.



Example of elk hooves deformed by TAHD. Photo by WDFW.

Deer

Deer populations are generally stable in lower-elevation units such as Washougal (568) and Battle Ground (564). Deer harvests in West Klickitat (578), Grayback (388), and East Klickitat (382) were slightly lower in 2022 compared to 2020-2021, however hunter effort was much lower in 2022. Deer populations are generally low in the Cascade Mountain GMUs, including Lewis River (560), Wind River (574), and Siouxon (572). The extreme winter of 2016-17 hurt deer populations throughout District 9 but recent harvest statistics indicate some recovery. December 2023 aerial surveys in GMUs 388 and 382 indicate a slight increase in the population. Additionally, March 2024 driving route surveys in 388 showed an average fawn-to-doe ratio indicating that fawns born in 2023 had an average survival rate. To facilitate recovery of the deer population in GMUs 578, 388, and 382, nearly all antlerless permits have been removed. As the population recovers, those permits will be gradually reinstated. Deer harvest and success is remarkably consistent within District 9, where hunters are expected to harvest approximately 2,000 bucks during the 2024 general season, representing a success rate of 20-25%. You can find historical information on deer harvest trends in District 9 on the WDFW website under [Game Harvest Statistics](#) and [Game Status and Trend Reports](#).

Successful black-tailed deer hunting largely depends on the effort that hunters put into the hunt. Black-tailed deer thrive in dense vegetation and are often highly nocturnal. Successful black-tailed deer hunters must be in position early in the morning and carefully hunt near sources of food and secure cover.

Bucks travel more during the rut, covering large amounts of territory searching for does in estrus. This makes bucks more vulnerable, as they spend less time hiding. You can sometimes find them in open habitats such as clear-cuts and meadows. Not surprisingly, approximately one-third of the annual buck harvest in Region 5 occurs during the four-day late buck hunt held each November.

Within District 9, GMUs 554 (Yale), 560 (Lewis River), 564 (Battle Ground), 568 (Washougal), and 572 (Siouxon) offer an attractive general season hunting opportunity. However, hunters should note the firearm restrictions in GMUs 554 and 564 (see page 90 of the [2024 Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations Pamphlet](#)).

Those interested in trophy hunting opportunities for deer might consider any of the Klickitat County units. GMU 578 (West Klickitat), GMU 388 (Grayback), and GMU 382 (East Klickitat) are each managed under a 3-point or greater antler restriction. Collectively, the Klickitat GMUs support an annual harvest of around 1,000 three-point or greater bucks. Hunters are advised to carefully review the regulations before heading out, as the rules differ in each unit, and none of the Klickitat GMUs allow general season late buck rifle hunting. GMU 382 is primarily private land, with the exception of the Simcoe Mountains Unit of the Klickitat Wildlife Area. The main units of the Klickitat Wildlife Area are located in GMU 388 and provide good deer hunting opportunities. GMU 578 has some blocks of DNR land and private industrial forestlands that are open to non-motorized vehicle access.

Some areas may be closed to both motorized and non-motorized vehicle access. Hunters are advised to scout thoroughly, even in familiar areas, as deer distribution may have changed and normal hunting lands may be closed due to fire danger.



Successful Grayback hunt. Photo by Tyler Wilson.

Figure 2: General season and permit deer harvest in GMU 578

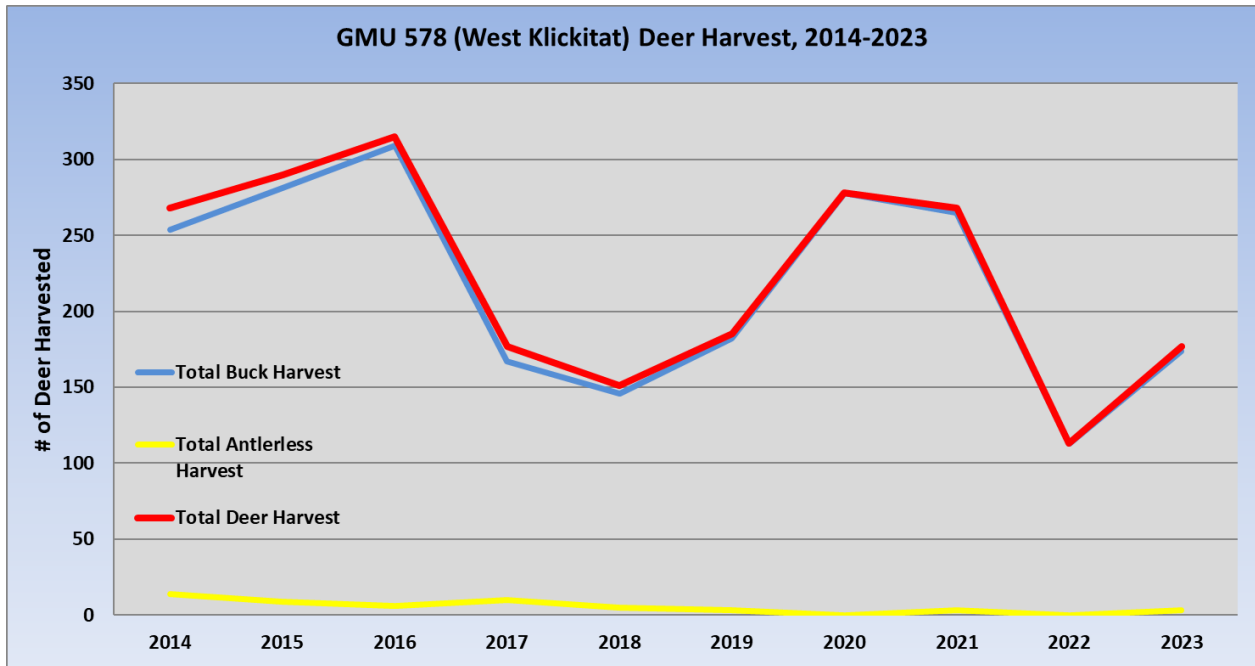


Figure 3: General season and permit deer harvest in GMU 388

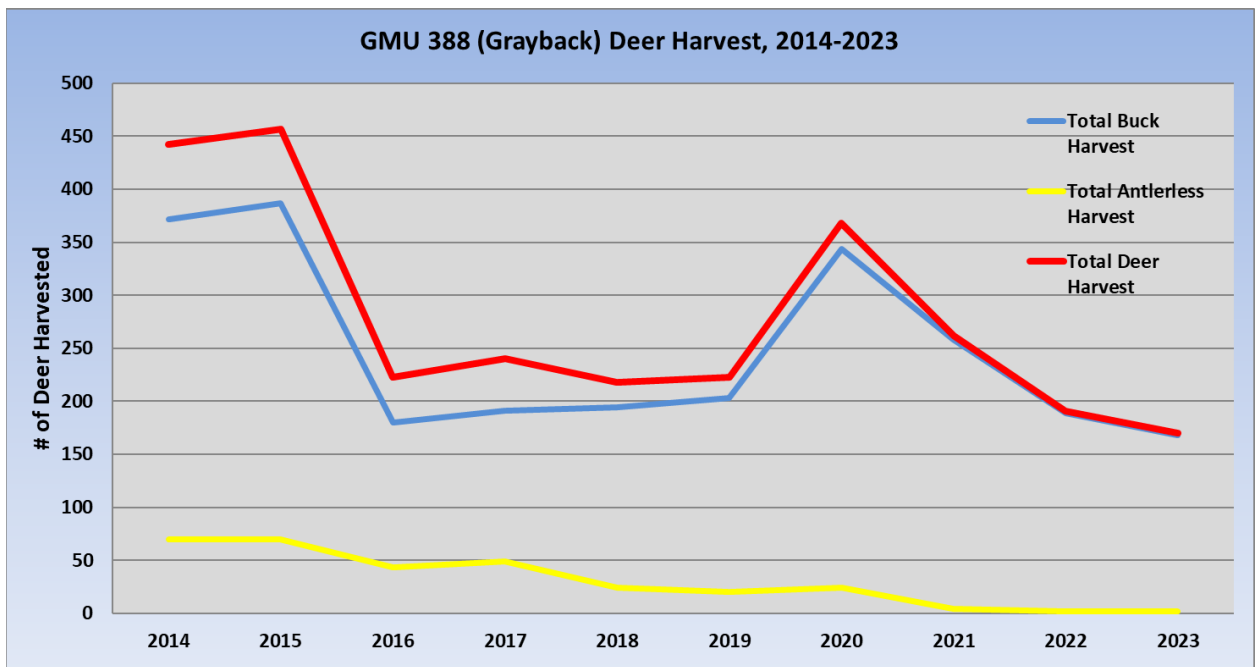
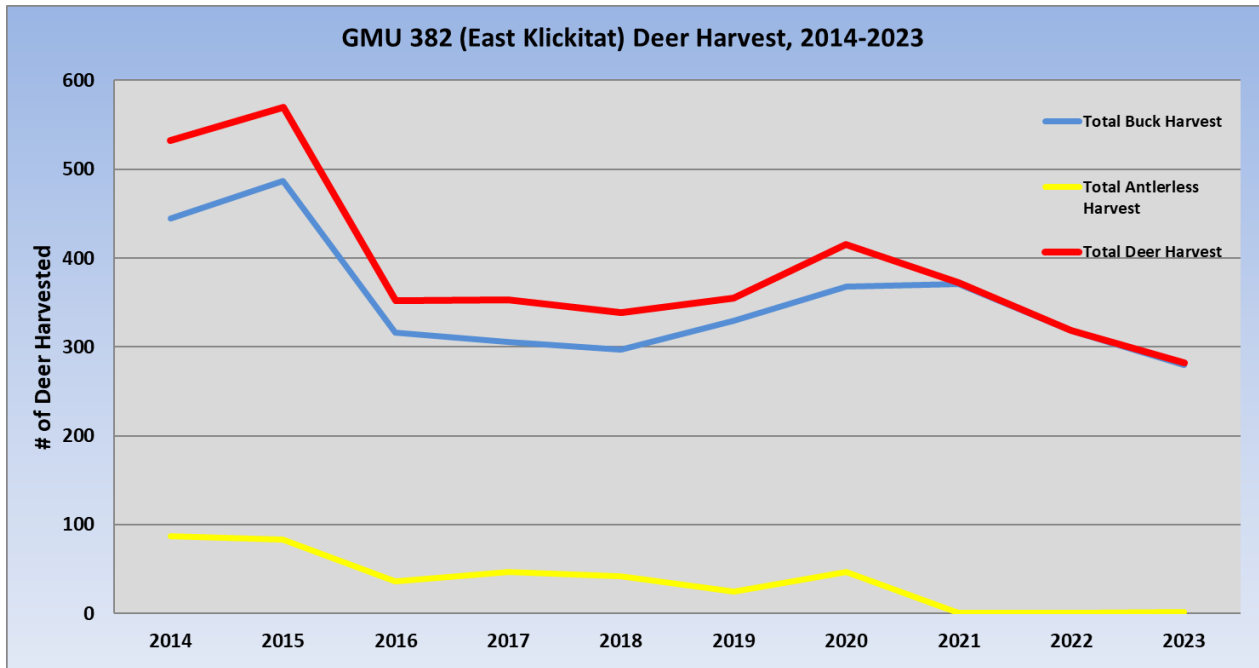


Figure 4: General season and permit deer harvest in GMU 382



Black bear



Black bear. Photo by WDFW.

District 9 is part of both the South Cascades and East Cascades black bear hunt zones for the fall bear hunting season. In 2023, both the South Cascades zone (which includes GMUs 574, 572, 568, 564, and 560) and the East Cascades zone (which includes GMUs 578, 388, and 382) are open from Aug. 1-Nov. 15. The bag limit is now two black bears per license year statewide. In 2023, hunters harvested 182 bears in the South Cascades (5% success rate) and 289 in the East Cascades zone (7% success rate), which are lower than the harvest rates for 2022. The 2023 success rates are slightly below the 2023 statewide average of 9 percent. Currently, no spring black bear hunts are available in District 9.

All successful bear hunters are required to submit the premolar tooth in a tooth envelope by Dec. 1, 2024. Refer to page 68 of the [2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet](#) for details.

Figure 5: Mandatory bear tooth submission information.

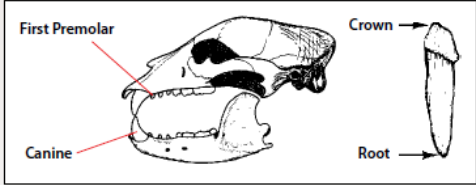
MANDATORY Submission of Bear Teeth Statewide

ALL successful bear hunters MUST submit the **complete, unbroken root of the** 1st premolar tooth from their harvest per WAC 220-415-090. Teeth should be sent using WDFW's pre-paid and self-addressed mortality envelope which can be obtained at any WDFW office or by calling (see page 6).

Successful hunters, please submit the required tooth from your harvest within 5 days of harvest, or by December 1, 2024.

WDFW uses teeth to get an accurate age of harvested bears. Hunters wanting to check the age of their harvested bear can visit the following website:
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/harvest-reporting/tooth-lookup>

Teeth are aged by an external laboratory and the turnaround time for age results can be up to 6 months after the close of the fall big game hunting season.



The diagram consists of two parts. On the left, a lateral view of a bear skull is shown with red lines pointing to the 'First Premolar' and 'Canine' teeth. On the right, a detailed view of a tooth is shown with arrows pointing to the 'Crown' (the upper, wider part) and the 'Root' (the lower, narrower part).

Cougar



Cougar in a ponderosa pine tree. Photo by WDFW.

Cougars are difficult to hunt, so deer and elk hunters typically harvest them when the opportunity presents itself. In 2024, the cougar hunting season runs from Sept. 1 to March 31, or when the cap is reached, whichever occurs first. While the current cougar hunting regulations are not included in the printed hunting pamphlet, they can be found in the [online regulations](#). For more information on these guidelines and to check on the status of your desired hunting area, visit the [cougar hunting webpage](#) on the WDFW website.

All successful cougar hunters must report their harvest to the toll-free Cougar Hotline (866-364-4868, press 3 after the recording) within 72 hours, and all cougar pelts must be sealed by WDFW within five days of harvest (skull and hide unfrozen with proof of sex attached to the pelt). [Contact a WDFW office](#) to make an appointment to have a cougar pelt sealed.

All hunters who purchase a cougar tag must report their hunt activity (successful or unsuccessful) via the WILD system by March 31, 2025.

Waterfowl



Waterfowl Hunting in Clark County. Photo by Brad Cady.

Goose hunting

Most goose hunting opportunities in District 9 occur in Clark County, which is part of Goose Management Area 2 - Inland. Hunters are reminded of the complex goose hunting regulations designed to protect wintering populations of the dusky Canada goose. New hunters and those whose hunting authorization for Area 2 (Coast or Inland) was invalidated during the previous year must pass an exam with a minimum score of 80% to receive authorization for the current year. Please visit our [Goose Identification](#) webpage for more information.

Goose hunting opportunities in Skamania County are very limited. Goose hunting in Klickitat County is limited and primarily occurs on private lands, where landowner permission is required. Please note that the daily bag limit is 23 geese, which can include up to three Canada geese of any subspecies (except dusky geese), up to 10 white geese (Snow and Ross's geese), and up to 10 white-fronted geese. For detailed information on season length and bag limits, refer to the [2024-25 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#).

A successful goose hunting season in Clark County relies on sufficient fall and early winter precipitation to fill the wetlands, as well as cold weather in the northern portions of the migratory route to push the geese south. Check hunting reports from northwestern Washington and Coastal British Columbia, monitor weather forecasts, and scout your hunting areas in advance to ensure geese have arrived and are congregating in huntable areas.

Important information for Area 2 goose hunting

Goose hunting in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties is subject to the additional restrictions of Goose Management Area 2 (GMA2) - Inland. These restrictions are in place to protect the dusky subspecies of the Canada goose. We encourage goose hunters to review the different subspecies of Canada geese in southwest Washington before each hunting season.

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved the following regulations for the 2024-25 southwest Washington goose hunting season in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of Oregon and Alaska:

- The season for dusky Canada geese is **closed**. If a hunter takes a dusky Canada goose or does not comply with a field check, that hunter's authorization will be invalidated, and the hunter will not be able to hunt geese in Goose Management Area 2 for the rest of the season.
- Goose Management Area 2 is split between the Coast (Pacific County and a portion of Grays Harbor County west of Highway 101) and Inland (Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, and a portion of Grays Harbor County east of Highway 101).
- In Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland), legal goose hunting hours begin 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours to 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours.
- Starting in 2019, goose hunters planning to hunt in Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland) began receiving a harvest record card when purchasing their licenses. Immediately after taking a

goose, you must fill out your harvest card in ink. You are required to report the information on your harvest card to WDFW by using the [online reporting system](#) or by mailing the cards to: WDFW, Wildlife Program – Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141, Olympia WA 98504. The reporting deadline is March 20, 2025. Reports need to be postmarked by the reporting deadlines even if you did not harvest any birds. Please note that you must comply with these reporting requirements, or you will be required to pay a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card the next year.

- The goose hunting season will be open every day from Sept. 7-15 as well as Oct. 12-27, and on selected dates (Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays) from Nov. 20, 2024-Jan. 12, 2025, and Feb 8-March 5, 2025.

Hunters are advised to review the revised [goose identification training program](#) before hunting and check the [2024-25 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information. Wildlife managers are relying on southwest Washington goose hunters to make this season format successful to ensure goose hunting can remain open in permit zones.

Most public goose hunting in Clark County is in the Vancouver lowlands and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Hunter access to Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is by reservation only. Estimates for the 2023 goose season are available [on the game harvest reports webpage](#), under “Small Game.”

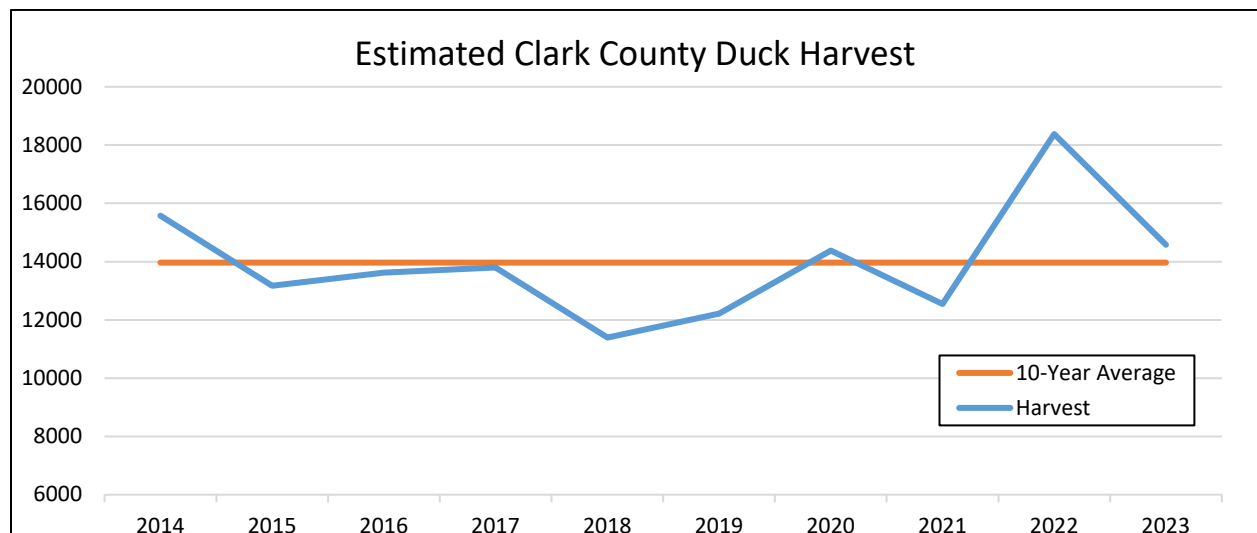
Duck hunting



Clark County duck harvest. Photo by Sam Gibbons.

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved a liberal duck hunting season of 108 days, including two youth hunt days (one in eastern Washington and one in western Washington), a one-day hunt for youth, veterans, and active military members, and a 105-day general season. The daily bag limit is seven ducks. Like Canada goose hunting, most public access for duck hunting in Clark County is limited to the Vancouver lowlands and Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Daily bag and possession limits for ducks (as well as coots, snipe, and pigeon) have not changed in recent seasons. However, starting in 2022, Harlequin ducks have been closed to harvest statewide. Over the last 10 years, the annual estimated harvest of ducks in Clark County has been relatively stable, averaging 13,966 ducks harvested per season. Similar to goose season, a successful duck hunt in Clark County requires ample rainfall in the fall and winter. Be sure to scout the area you plan to hunt or call the local Refuge or Wildlife Area manager for a water-level report before heading into the field. Estimates for the 2023 duck season are available [on the game harvest reports webpage](#), under “Small Game.”

Figure 6: Estimated duck harvest in Clark County from 2014-2023.



For more information on North American waterfowl populations and duck hunt locations in Clark County, use the following links:

- fws.gov/program/migratory-birds
- fws.gov/refuge/ridgefield/visit-us/activities/hunting
- wdfw.wa.gov/places-to-go/wildlife-areas/shillapoo-wildlife-area

Turkey



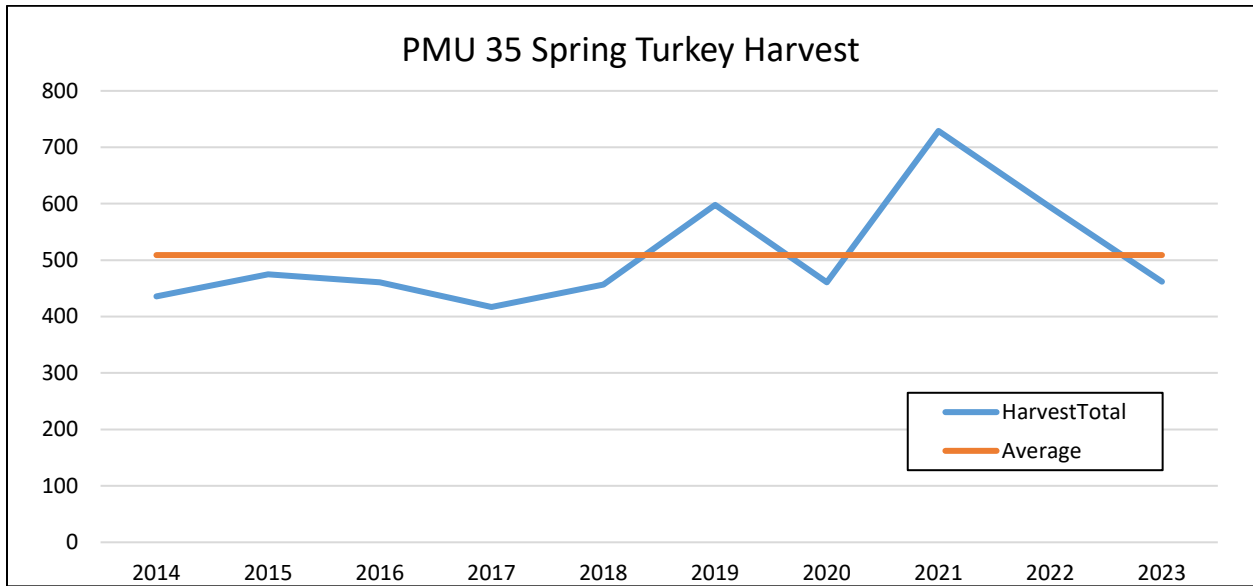
Turkeys along the Klickitat River. Photo by WDFW.

Wild turkey populations in Klickitat County remain very healthy and hunting conditions for fall 2024 are expected to be typical for this area. The 2024 fall turkey season in District 9 is open to general season hunting, which means no special permit is required. The fall turkey hunting season runs from Sept. 1- Dec. 31, and the bag limit is now two turkey (either sex). This is the fourth year of a four-month-long general season, which now includes the higher bag limit. Please refer to page 36 in the [2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information.

In fall 2023, 147 turkeys were harvested during the District 9 fall general season (includes GMUs 382, 388, 568-578) with a success rate of 34%. The success rate (2022: 35%; 2021: 23%; 2020: 38%; and 2019: 40%) and number of turkeys harvested (2022: 221; 2021: 164; 2020: 155; and 2019: 150) was about average compared to previous fall seasons.

Historically, the spring turkey season in Klickitat County has resulted in a much higher harvest when compared to the fall season, with a 10-year average of 500 birds. The estimated turkey harvest for the 2023 spring season was 462 turkeys, which is lower than the 594 taken in 2022, but still around average. Both the 2021 and 2022 spring seasons saw a considerably higher number of hunters and hunt days compared to 2019 and 2020, but these metrics declined again in 2023. Spring success rates have ranged between 24-40% since 2012. Estimates for the 2023 turkey season are available on the game harvest reports webpage, under "Turkey."

Figure 7: Estimated spring turkey harvest in PMU 35 (GMUs 382, 388, 568-578) from 2014-2023.



Most of the quality turkey hunting areas in Klickitat County are below 1,500 feet. Popular turkey hunting areas are generally associated with the White Salmon and Klickitat River drainages. East of the Klickitat River, turkeys can be found in the Klickitat Wildlife Area units, including the easternmost Simcoe Mountains Unit, as well as adjacent BLM lands. Hunters should note that a significant portion of private timberland in Klickitat County, owned by Western Pacific Timber and previously open to walk-in hunting, closed to public access in 2023. Having hunted turkeys in an area in the past does not guarantee it is still open to public hunting. Please do your research before heading out and check your mapping apps or the [Klickitat County GIS website](#) for ownership information.

Some landowners in western Klickitat County report turkey damage on their property and may be willing to provide access to turkey hunters who request permission and practice good hunting ethics. Additionally, WDFW enrolls private properties specifically for the spring turkey season through the [Private Lands Access Program](#).

Outside of Klickitat County, turkey hunting opportunity within District 9 is limited. In Skamania County, turkey populations are primarily located in the eastern part of the county, between Wind River and Underwood, and below 1,000 feet in elevation. However, flocks of turkeys have been reported as far west as Beacon Rock. Clark County offers little to no turkey hunting opportunity.



Successful Spring turkey season. Photo by Chris Wilson.

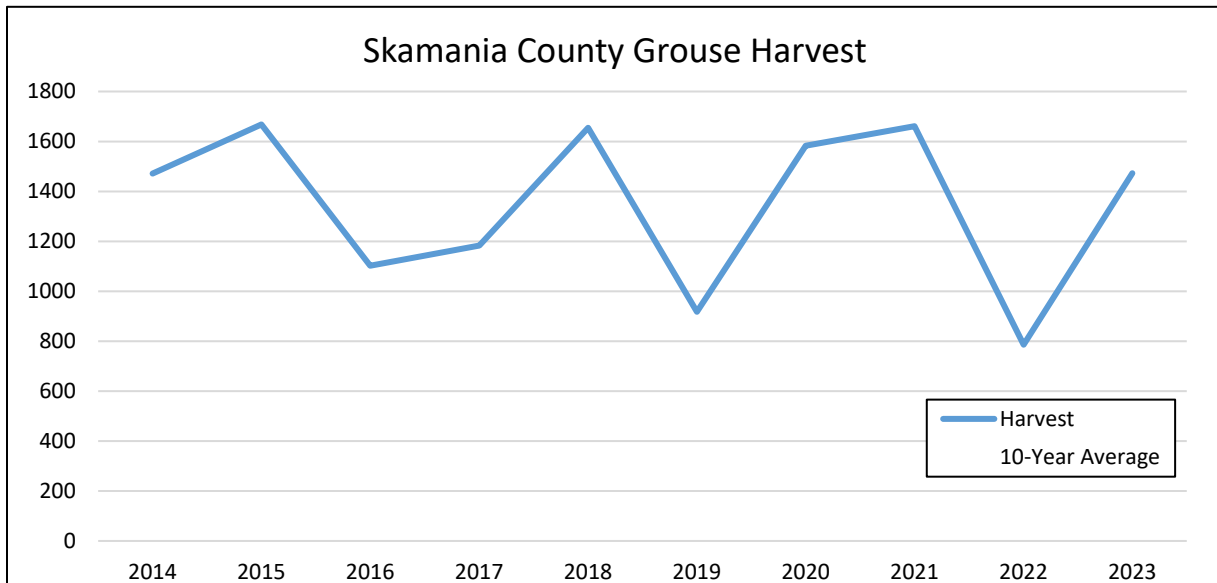
Forest grouse



Ruffed grouse in the snow. Photo by WDFW.

The grouse hunting season in Washington runs from Sept. 15-Jan 15. The shift to a Sept. 15 opening date was implemented to protect brood hens with chicks. Skamania County, which is predominately public land, provides grouse hunters with the most opportunity in District 9. The best grouse habitat in District 9 is on USFS lands in Skamania County and DNR lands in western and north-central Klickitat County.

Figure 8: Estimated forest grouse harvest Skamania County from 2014-2023.



Most grouse harvest in District 9 occurs during general deer and elk hunting seasons, with birds being hunted opportunistically. Prospective hunters should concentrate their hunting efforts on brushy riparian zones, overgrown abandoned logging roads, and forest service roads for the best chance at success, particularly for ruffed grouse. Hunters interested in forest grouse can improve their chances by scouting areas before their hunt. Estimates for the 2023 forest grouse season are available on the game harvest reports webpage, under “Small Game.”

In 2019, District 9 started collecting the wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse to collect more data and better track population trends for each species. Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of harvested grouse into collection barrels located throughout District 9. Paper collection bags and instructions are available at each barrel location. Please use one bag for each bird and do not deposit wings in a plastic bag. Forest grouse wing and tail [collection locations](#) can be found on the WDFW website. Please note that barrel locations are subject to change before or during the grouse season, so hunters are encouraged to check the website frequently.



Skamania County Wing Collection Barrel. Photo by WDFW.

District 9 falls within both the Southwest (Clark and Skamania counties) and South Central (Klickitat County) Forest Grouse Management Zones. In the Southwest Zone, most collected grouse wings are from ruffed grouse, while in the South Central Zone, blue grouse (formally known as sooty or dusky grouse) are more commonly collected (Table 2.). Data from the 2023 wing collections is not yet available.

Table 1: Number of forest grouse wings collected in each Forest Grouse Management Zone, 2016-2022.

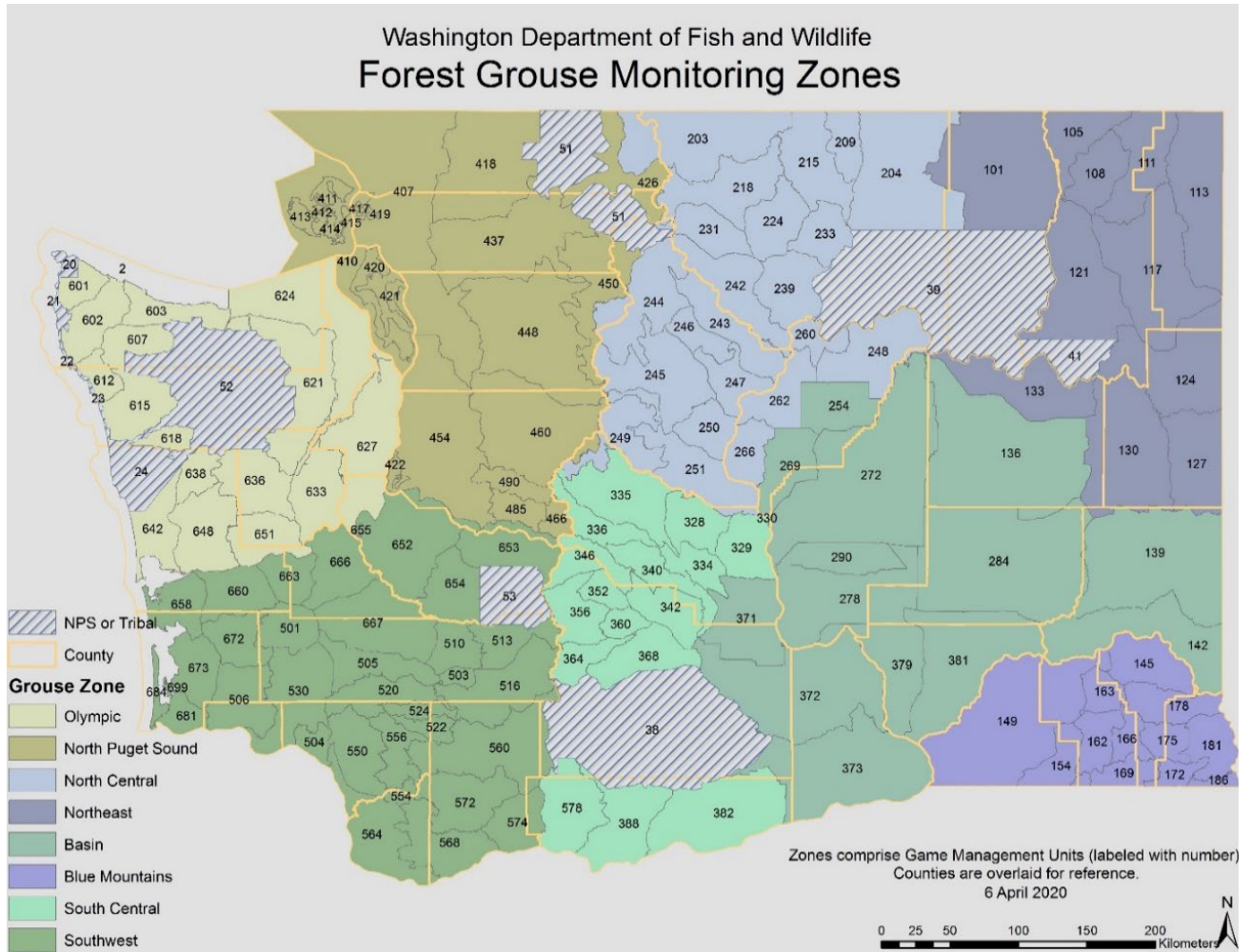
Zone	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Basin	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Blue Mtns	0	3	0	0	37	0	49	89
North Central	349	458	367	330	332	184	193	2213

Zone	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
North Puget Sound	0	0	0	41	170	126	66	403
Northeast	148	190	145	140	176	188	194	1181
Olympic	32	169	100	173	143	151	82	850
South Central	90	180	150	125	7	34	68	654
Southwest	3	0	234	260	222	188	117	1024
Unknown	0	2	57	45	10	17	44	175
Total	622	1002	1053	1116	1097	888	813	6591

Table 2: Number of wings collected by species in each District 9 Grouse Monitoring Zone since 2019.

Species	Ruffed Grouse	Blue Grouse	Spruce Grouse
Southwest Zone			
2019	177	84	0
2020	144	78	0
2021	146	42	0
2022	71	46	0
South Central Zone			
2019	26	98	1
2020	3	4	0
2021	8	26	0
2022	21	47	0

Figure 9: Statewide map of the Forest Grouse Monitoring Zones.



Dove



A mourning dove. Photo by WDFW.

Dove hunting is open statewide annually from Sept. 1-Oct. 30. In District 9, most dove harvest occurs in Clark and Klickitat counties. In Clark County, dove hunting opportunities are available on WDFW lands in the Vancouver lowlands, including the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. Over the past ten years, dove hunters in Clark County have averaged a yearly harvest of 379 birds, although the estimated harvest varies widely depending on annual participation.

Most dove hunting opportunities in Klickitat County are associated with private hunt clubs in the eastern part of the county. With the majority of Klickitat County being privately owned, hunters should be sure to secure permission from private landowners before hunting on private land. Over the past ten years, the average dove harvest in Klickitat County has been 152 birds, although it still varies widely despite relatively stable participation.

Estimates for the 2023 dove season are available on the [game harvest reports](#) webpage, under “Small Game.” Please note that the above statistics refer only to mourning doves, which have a daily bag limit of 15 and possession limit of 45 for the hunting season. Eurasian collared doves are an invasive species and can be hunted year-round with a valid hunting license. Eurasian collared doves are often found in urban and human-occupied areas, so hunters should be sure to abide by any local firearm restrictions. Eurasian collared doves are larger than mourning doves, which have a distinctive black “collar” on the back of their neck and a square-tipped tail, whereas mourning doves have a pointed tail.

Pheasant



Pheasant hunting in Clark County. Photo by Brad Cady.

District 9 has very limited, if any, wild pheasant production, especially in comparison to other areas of eastern Washington. Pheasant hunting opportunities are primarily from pen-raised birds released at designated locations in Klickitat County (Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Sites) and Clark County (Western Washington Pheasant Release Sites). In Clark County, an average of 3,316 pheasants are harvested each season, with most pheasant hunting occurring at the Vancouver Lake and Shillapoo release areas. In Klickitat County, most pheasant hunting occurs at three release sites near Goldendale or the surrounding private properties (with landowner permission). In Klickitat County, where public hunting acreage is limited and fewer pheasants are released, the average annual harvest is only 163

birds. More information about the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) (for Clark and Skamania counties) and [Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) (for Klickitat County), including maps of the release sites, is available on the WDFW website. Estimates for the 2023 pheasant season are available on the [game harvest reports webpage](#), under “Small Game.”

Clark County pheasant release sites

Shillapoo Wildlife Area

The Vancouver Lake and Shillapoo release sites are located on WDFW-managed land and cover approximately 1,450 acres. To reach both the Vancouver Lake and Shillapoo release sites, take the Fourth Plain Blvd. exit (exit #1D) off I-5 and head west on Fourth Plain Blvd. To access the Vancouver Lake release site, head north on Fruit Valley Road and then west on La Frombois Road. To access the Shillapoo release site, continue on Lower River Road to the site. Hunters should be aware that these areas are extremely popular on Saturdays, typically with more than 100 vehicles at the Shillapoo release sites.

Klickitat County pheasant release sites

Each year, WDFW releases approximately 350 pheasants at three Klickitat County sites. One site is on department-owned land, while the other two are on privately-owned lands enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program as “Feel Free to Hunt” properties. Please respect the land; hunting on private lands is a privilege. All sites are day use only, with no overnight camping permitted. These sites are relatively undeveloped with primitive road access. In early fall, the fire risk is often high, so please take necessary precautions. After fall rains and snow, roads can become slippery and muddy, so choose parking spots carefully to avoid getting stuck. Driving off-road or on private land is prohibited year-round. Additionally, the use of non-toxic shot is required within designated release areas.

Goldendale Hatchery pheasant release site

WDFW manages this 240-acre site, which is bordered by Hill Road on the west side and Fish Hatchery Road on the north. From Goldendale, drive west on Highway 142 for approximately four miles until you reach Hill Road. Drive north on Hill Road for roughly half a mile, cross the bridge over Spring Creek, then turn east onto a dirt road leading to WDFW property. This road will take you to the center of the site.

A parcel of private land adjacent to the Goldendale Hatchery release site is currently enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program as a “Hunt by Reservation” property called Fish Hatchery Road. To hunt on the land, you must make a reservation online. Visit the [WDFW Private Lands webpage](#) to make your reservation, access property details and maps, and check for temporary closures.

Please note: Hatchery facilities are located along the parcel’s east boundary. Please avoid the area near the buildings to ensure the safety of workers and protection of infrastructure.

Gun Club Property – Feel Free to Hunt

This 480-acre site is privately-owned, bordered by Rogers Road to the north and Fenton Lane to the east. The property features high-quality wildlife habitat, with a mix of open grasslands, shrub cover, trees, and a small lowland area that seasonally hold water.

From the Broadway Street intersection in Goldendale, drive east on Bickleton Highway for 5.6 miles until you reach the Purvine Road intersection. Turn right (south) on Purvine Road and drive 0.9 miles to the T-intersection with Rogers Road. You can turn left or right on Rogers Road and look for the wire gates marking the property—there are two gates, both with WDFW Access Program signage. Park along Rogers Road outside the fence and walk in. **Caution:** -Purvine Road may be impassable when wet. For better access, continue east another mile on the Bickleton Highway, then turn right (south) onto Fenton Lane. Follow Fenton Lane south 1 mile to its intersection with Rogers Road. Turn right (west) onto Rogers Road and drive about 0.1 miles to the gate and parking area.

You may hunt this property without a reservation or registering. Visit the [WDFW Private Lands webpage](#) for property details and maps and check for temporary closures.

Quail, gray partridge, and chukar



Chukar. Photo by Tom Kogut.

In District 9, upland game bird hunting is primarily focused in Klickitat County, where quail are the most frequently and successfully hunted species of the three. On average, 641 quail are harvested in Klickitat County each season, compared to approximately 195 chukar and 46 gray partridge. Access for upland bird hunting is mainly restricted to private lands and hunt clubs in eastern Klickitat County. Hunters interested in hunting this area should seek access permission in advance of the season. Most hunt clubs have waiting lists for new members, and accessing these lands can be difficult without membership. Estimates for the 2023 upland game birds are available on the [game harvest reports](#) webpage, under “Small Game.”

Public land resources

DNR-Pacific Cascades Office (Clark and Skamania counties)

360-577-2025
601 Bond Road
PO Box 280
Castle Rock, WA 98611-0280

pacific-cascade.region@dnr.wa.gov

DNR-Southeast Region Office (Klickitat County)

509-925-8510
713 Bowers Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926-9301

southeast.region@dnr.wa.gov

[Purchase DNR quad maps](#)

Gifford Pinchot National Forest

Cowlitz Valley Ranger District

360-497-1100
10024 US Hwy 12
PO Box 670
Randle, WA 98377

Mt. Adams Ranger District

509-395-3400
2455 Hwy 141
Trout Lake, WA 98650

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument and District

360-449-7800
42218 N.E. Yale Bridge Rd.
Amboy, WA 98601

Forest Headquarters

360-891-5000
987 McClellan Road
Vancouver, WA 98661

[Forest Alerts and Closures](#)

[Mapping Resources](#)

Private Lands Access Resources

WDFW Private Lands Access Program

Free public hunting opportunities for different game species are available through the Private Lands Access Program. The [Private Lands Hunting Access](#) website will list the properties available by county, GMU, or type of access allowed such as:

- [Feel Free to Hunt](#)
- [Register to Hunt](#)
- [Hunt by Written Permission](#)
- [Hunt by Reservation](#)

Each property will designate what species can be hunted. Read each property description carefully and find property maps on the [Private Lands Hunting Access website](#).

NEW properties are added and removed each year, so be sure to check the [Private Lands Hunting Access](#) webpage for updates.

For Private Lands Access program information within Region 5 contact:

Monique Gray
360-696-6211 ext. 6721
monique.gray@dfw.wa.gov

Private industrial forestlands

Private industrial forestlands are often closed to all recreation from mid-summer through early fall due to fire danger. Before scouting or hunting, be sure to check on the status of these lands. Additionally, private timberlands are often bought and sold between timber companies, so it's important to have updated ownership maps. Due to high fire danger, all lands owned or managed by the following parties in Klickitat, Skamania, and Yakima counties are closed to public access, effective July 28, 2024, until further notice: American Forest Management, Broughton Lumber Company, Columbia Land Trust, DGS Timber, Green Diamond Resource Company, Kreps Ranch, Kreps Family LLC, Lupine Forest, Manulife Forest Management, Twin Creeks Timber (TCT Holdings), and Western Pacific Timber LLC.

Broughton Lumber Company (American Forest Management)

- Generally allows non-motorized access. Please abide by any signs posted at access points.
- Visit the [AFM website](#) for hunting maps and more information.
- Mainly GMUs 578 and 388.

DGS Timber LLC (American Forest Management)

- Generally allows non-motorized access. Please abide by any signs posted at access points.
- Visit the [AFM website](#) for hunting access maps and more information.
- Mainly GMUs 578 and 388.

Manulife (formerly Hancock Forest Management - HFM)

- Generally allows non-motorized access. Please abide by any signs posted at access points.
- Call the Manulife hotline: (509) 364-3331
- Mainly GMUs 578 and 388.

PacifiCorp

- PacifiCorp owns over 15,000 acres of land within the Lewis River basin that are managed for fish and wildlife and are generally open to non-motorized access.
- Visit the [PacifiCorp website](#) for hunting access maps and more information.
- Mainly GMUs 554 and 560

Rayonier

- Hunting access by permit only.
- Visit the [Rayonier website](#) for hunting access maps and more information.
- Call the Rayonier hotline: 855-729-4868
- GMUs 572 and 560

The Conservation Fund/Lupine Forest/Lupine Columbia Holdings LLC (formerly Stevenson Land Company)

- Some lands are open to non-motorized access.
- Mainly GMU 578

Green Diamond Resource Company/TCT Columbia Holdings (formerly Stevenson Land Company or Broughton Lumber)

- Many of the parcels owned or managed by Green Diamond, which span over 59,000+ acres, are enrolled in the WDFW Private Lands Access Program, including Feel Free to Hunt and Hunt by Reservation properties. Visit the [Private Lands](#) webpage for more details and contact information.
- Generally open to walk-in access on some parcels, but please abide by any posted signs. More information can be found on the [Green Diamond website](#).
- [Mainly GMUs 574 and 578](#)
- Hunters should be aware that certain blocks of lands are now closed to access.

Weyerhaeuser

- Call the Weyerhaeuser recreational access hotline at 866-636-6531 or access details and maps on the [Weyerhaeuser website](#).
 - **Yacolt (Columbia River East)**
 - Access is by permit only. Hunters can purchase permits and find more information, including maps, on the [Weyerhaeuser website](#).
 - GMU 568
 - **Klickitat County**
 - Access is by Recreational Lease only. Please visit the [Weyerhaeuser website](#) for details and maps.
 - GMU 578

Western Pacific Timber

- As of Sept. 1, 2023, all Western Pacific Timber lands in Klickitat County are **no longer open to any hunting access of any kind**.

2024 District 10 Hunting Prospects

Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

July 2024

2024 District 10 Hunting Prospects

Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum counties

Authors

Eric Holman, District Wildlife Biologist

Nicholle Stephens, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

Monique Gray, Private Lands Access Program Biologist

Cover photo by Jacqueline Siegel.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 10 general overview

District 10 is in southwest Washington and includes Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum counties. Game Management Units (GMUs) in District 10 include 501 (Lincoln), 503 (Randle), 504 (Stella), 505 (Mossyrock), 506 (Willapa Hills), 510 (Stormking), 513 (South Rainier), 516 (Packwood), 520 (Winston), 522 (Loo-Wit), 524 (Margaret), 530 (Ryderwood), 550 (Coweeman), and 556 (Toutle). The landscape of this vast area ranges from tidally influenced Columbia River shorelines to Cascade peaks. Details for each GMU in District 10, including size, approximate percentage of public land, primary landowners, and access roads, can be found in the GMU overviews section.

A large portion of this district is privately owned. Private timber companies often limit public access to their lands or sell hunting access permits to a limited number of participants. When planning your hunt, it's important to understand the recreational access policies of individual timber companies. You can usually find this information on their websites or by calling their access hotlines. A list of recreational access websites and hotlines maintained by private industrial timber companies is included at the end of this document.

Weyerhaeuser owns a significant amount of land in District 10. In 2014, major changes to hunting access were introduced, requiring hunters to purchase an access permit to hunt on most Weyerhaeuser lands, including the Saint Helens Tree Farm (GMUs 550, 520, 524, and 556). Motorized access permits range from \$250 to \$400, while non-motorized access permits are between \$75 and \$125. Visit their [website](#) for more details. Weyerhaeuser also allows free public access on their lands enrolled in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Private Lands Access Program. To find these lands, visit the [Private Lands Hunting Access webpage](#).

Other industrial timber company lands are generally open to public hunting without an access fee, though vehicle access may be limited. Major industrial forest landowners in District 10 include Manulife (formerly Hancock Forest Management), Port Blakely, Sierra Pacific, Green Diamond (permit fee access), Rayonier (very limited access), and Pope Resources/Olympic Resource Management. Access to these lands may be restricted in August, September, and sometimes October due to fire danger. For more information about hunting opportunities on private lands, visit the [WDFW website](#), refer to page 96 of the [Big Game Hunting Pamphlet](#), or by using the [WDFW Hunt Planner](#).

Public land in District 10 includes the [Cowlitz](#) and [Mount St. Helens](#) wildlife areas. Additionally, the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#) spans eastern Lewis and Cowlitz counties, and state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is scattered throughout all three counties. These state and federal lands are open for public access. Spans of eastern Lewis and Cowlitz counties, and state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is scattered throughout all three counties. These state and federal lands are open for public access.

The [WDFW Hunt Planner webpage](#) has useful map layers like GMU and elk/deer area boundaries, roads, Wildlife Areas, and different types of base maps (aerial photos, topography). If you prefer to use online or mobile apps like OnX Hunt to plan your hunt, OnX includes all WDFW Private Lands Access properties

as a separate layer when you add Washington from the list of states. Look for the “WA Private Lands Hunting Opportunities” layer and activate it with the toggle button.

For hunters interested in using e-bikes, note that they are typically considered motorized vehicles allowed only on roads and trails open to other motorized use (local regulations may vary). Hunters should check with each landowner, public or private, to ensure they are allowed. Please see the [WDFW](#) and [DNR](#) E-bike policy planning webpages for more information.

Visitors to WDFW- and DNR-managed lands with a parking placard for people with disabilities can use Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes on all non-motorized natural surface trails and closed roads where bicycles are allowed until June 30, 2023, or until new legislation is enacted.



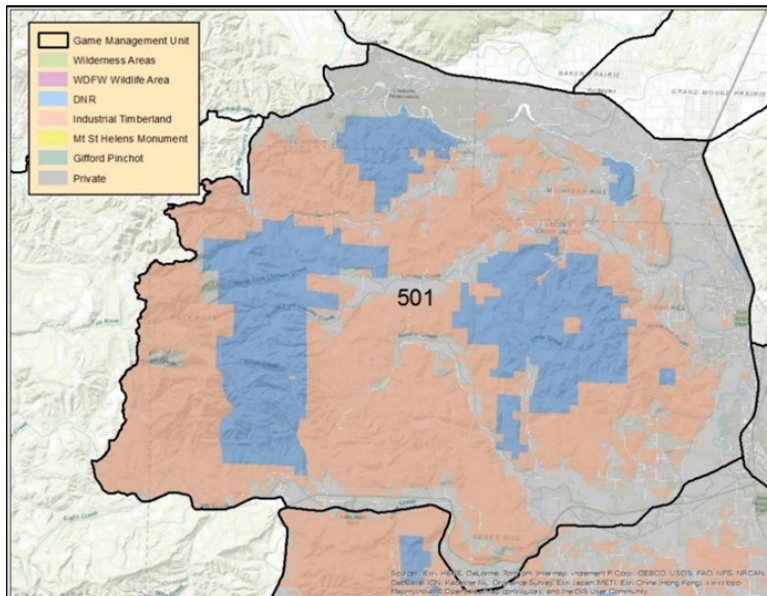
Successful Hunter with Blacktail Buck Taken on Forestlands in District 10. Photo by Tom Rhodes.

GMU overviews

GMU 501 - Lincoln

GMU 501 (Lincoln) is located west of Interstate 5 (I-5) near Chehalis and Centralia, and predominantly lies within Lewis County. The unit is a mix of private agricultural lands and rural homes in the lower elevations close to I-5, transitioning quickly to forestlands as the elevation increases. Key geographic features include the Chehalis River, Interstate 5, and the Doty Hills. The unit is generally excellent for black-tailed deer but less favorable for elk.

Figure 1. GMU 501 - Lincoln, General Land Ownership



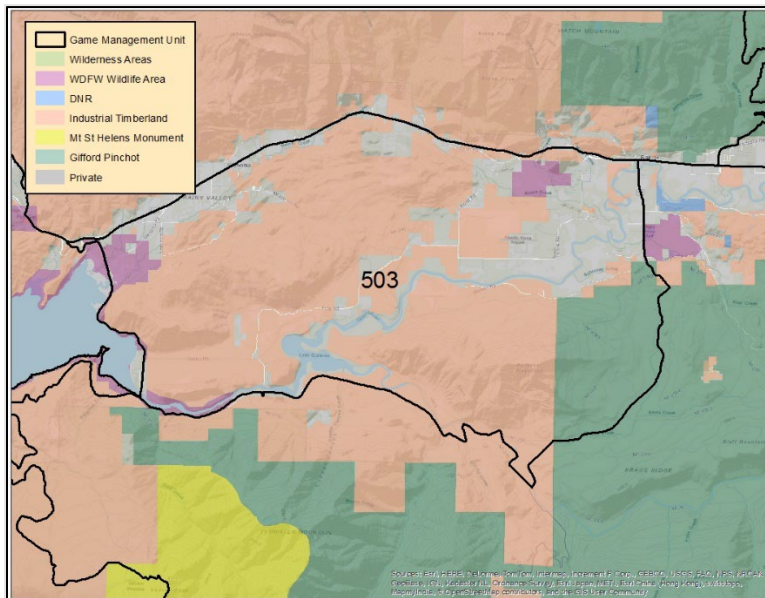
Category	Details
Square miles	232
Public land	~35%
Industrial forestland	~45%
Urban/suburban	~10%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Weyerhaeuser; DNR; small agricultural owners; state and industrial forestlands
Habitat/terrain	Floodplain/private agricultural areas and steeper hills; mix of flatter agricultural areas and steeper hills
Primary access points	State Route 6; Lincoln Creek Road
Small game/waterfowl	Average for ruffed grouse; very good for waterfowl

GMU 503 - Randle

GMU 503 (Randle) is located east of I-5, near Randle and east of Riffe Lake, south of State Route 12, and is entirely within Lewis County. The GMU features a mix of private agricultural lands and rural homes in the lower elevations, private industrial forestlands, and U.S. Forest Service lands. It also includes the Kiona Creek and Kosmos units of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. Key geographic features include the Cowlitz and Cispus rivers, USFS Road 25, and State Route 12. The unit is generally moderately productive for black-tailed deer and elk, though its small size and substantial private property make access challenging.

Figure 2. GMU 503, Randle, General Land Ownership



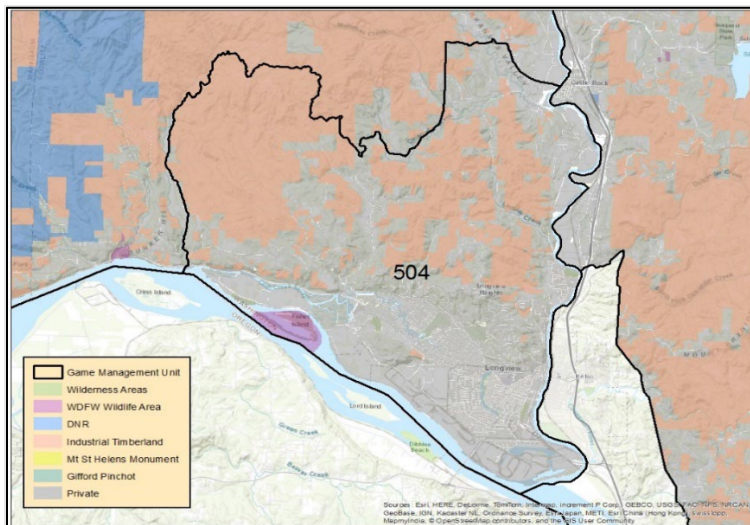
Category	Details
Square miles	56
Public land	~20%
Industrial forestland	~50%
Urban/suburban	~0%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Small agricultural owners, U.S. Forest Service, private industrial forestlands
Habitat/terrain	Floodplain/private agricultural and residential; U.S. Forest Service lands; forested hills and flatter agricultural areas mix of flatter agricultural areas
Primary access points	State Route 12, U.S. Forest Service 25 Road
Small game/waterfowl	Average for ruffed grouse, low for waterfowl

GMU 504 - Stella

GMU 504 (Stella) is located west of I-5, entirely within Cowlitz County, and includes the city of Longview. The GMU is a mix of urbanized areas, industrialized areas, private agricultural lands, and rural homes in the lower elevations, and private industrial forestlands. It also includes the Fisher Island Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area. Key geographic features include the Columbia River, the City of Longview, and Coal Creek. The unit generally has low productivity for black-tailed deer and elk. Access is challenging due to its small size, prevalence of private lands, and urbanized areas. Additionally, GMU 504 is “Firearm Restricted,” meaning modern firearms are not allowed for hunting. Refer to the annual Big Game Hunting Regulations for specific details. The GMU also has a small population of Columbian white-tailed deer in low-elevation areas near the Columbia River, but there is no open season for these deer. Check the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet for additional information.

Figure 3. GMU 504, Stella, General Land Ownership



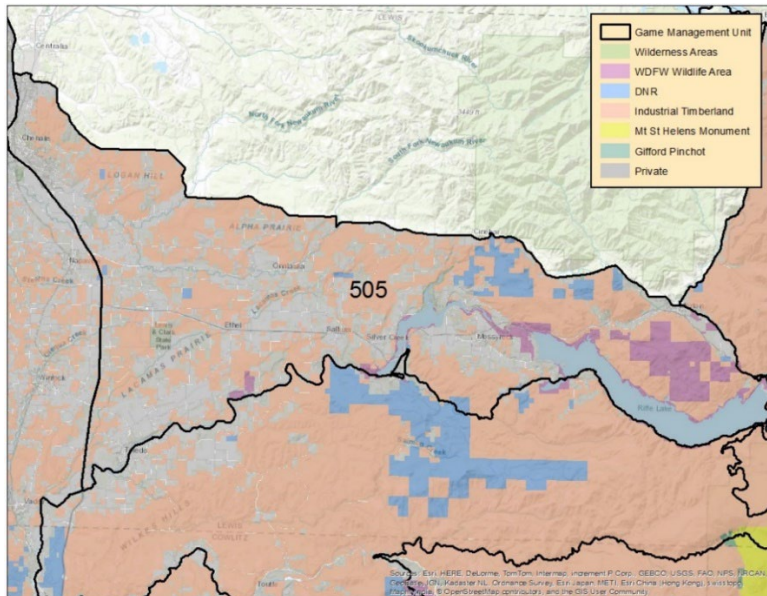
Category	Details
Square miles	96
Public land	~5%
Industrial forestland	~40%
Urban/suburban	~35%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Small agricultural owners, Weyerhaeuser, urban/suburban
Habitat/terrain	Industrial forestlands, floodplain/private agricultural and urban, mix of forested hills and flatter developed areas
Primary access points	State Route 4, Coal Creek Road
Small game/waterfowl	Average for ruffed grouse, good for waterfowl

GMU 505 - Mossyrock

GMU 505 (Mossyrock) is located east of I-5, north of the Cowlitz River, and entirely within Lewis County. The GMU is primarily a mix of private agricultural lands and rural homes. It also includes the Peterman Hill and Swofford Pond units of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area. Key geographic features of GMU 505 include the Cowlitz River, I-5, State Route 12, and Riffe and Mayfield lakes. The unit generally offers good productivity for black-tailed deer, but only has a small elk population. Access can be challenging due to numerous small private landholdings, though the Peterman Hill Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area provides good deer hunting opportunities.

Figure 4. GMU 505, Mossyrock, General Land Ownership



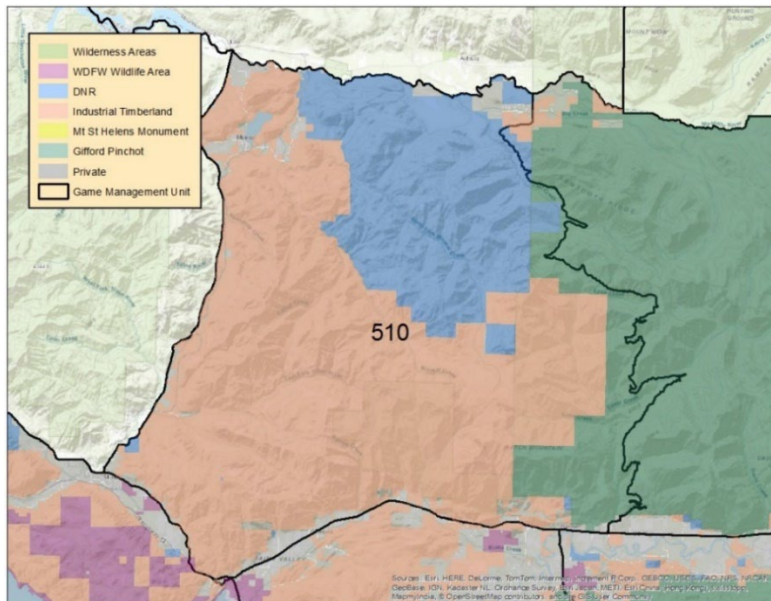
Category	Details
Square miles	295
Public land	~20%
Industrial forestland	~45%
Urban/suburban	~5%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Small agricultural owners, private agricultural, private industrial and state forestlands
Habitat/terrain	Mostly flatter or rolling topography; some steeper, rugged terrain
Primary access points	State Route 12, Peterman Hill Road
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse, modest for waterfowl

GMU 510 - Stormking

GMU 510 is located north of State Route 12, east of State Route 7, and lies entirely within Lewis County. The GMU is primarily a mix of private industrial forestlands, DNR forestlands, and USFS-managed lands. Key geographic features include the Tilton River, Stormking Mountain, and Kiona Peak. Overall, the unit is low in productivity for black-tailed deer and elk.

Figure 6. GMU 510, Stormking, General Land Ownership



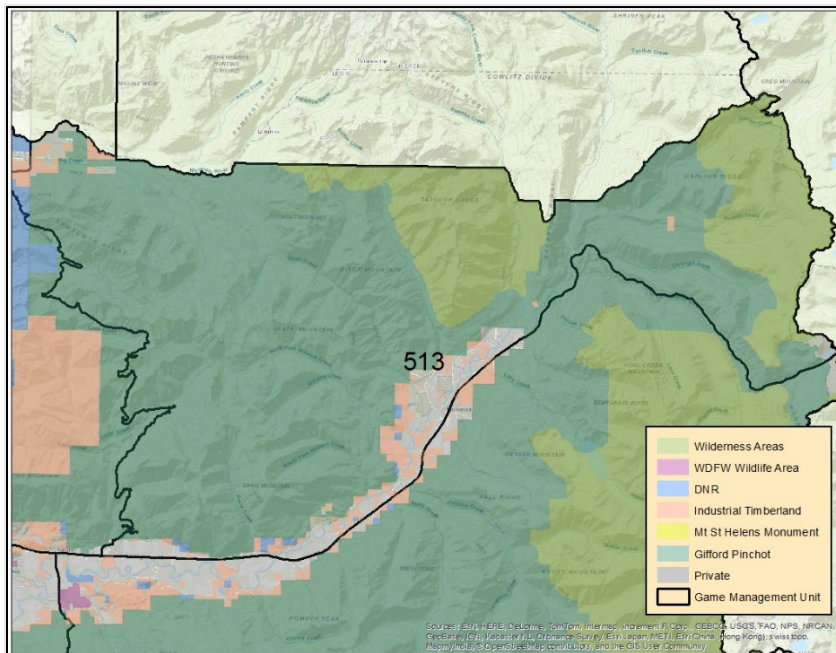
Category	Details
Square miles	208
Public land	~50%
Industrial forestland	~45%
Urban/suburban	~0%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Hancock, Sierra Pacific, DNR; private industrial, state, and U.S. Forest Service forestlands
Habitat/terrain	Rugged mountain terrain
Primary access points	State Routes 3 and 12; U.S. Forest Service Road 47, DNR Road 1
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse, poor for waterfowl

GMU 513 - South Rainier

GMU 513 (South Rainier) is north of State Route 12, south of Mt. Rainier National Park, and lies entirely within Lewis County. The GMU is almost entirely managed by the USFS, with the exception for a narrow strip of private lands along State Route 12 and the Cowlitz River. Key geographic features include the Cowlitz River, Sawtooth Ridge, Skate Mountain, and Carlton Ridge. The unit also contains two USFS wilderness areas: Tatoosh and William O. Douglas. Overall, the unit has low productivity for black-tailed deer and elk.

Figure 7. GMU 513, South Rainier, General Land Ownership



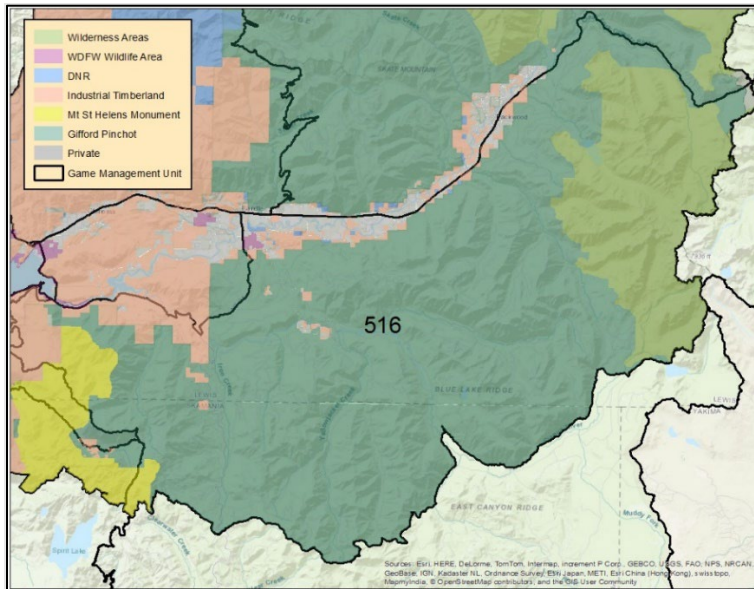
Category	Details
Square miles	240
Public land	~95%
Industrial forestland	~0%
Urban/suburban	~0%
Wilderness	~20%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	U.S. Forest Service
Habitat/terrain	Federal forestlands, rugged mountainous terrain including wilderness
Primary access points	State Route 12, U.S. Forest Service Road 47, Pacific Crest Trail
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse, poor for waterfowl

GMU 516 - Packwood

GMU 516 (Packwood) is a very large unit located, south of State Route 12, and lies entirely within Lewis County. The GMU is almost entirely managed by the USFS, with the exception for a narrow band of private lands along State Route 12. Key geographic features include the Cowlitz River, Cispus River, and Goat Rocks Wilderness. Overall, the unit has low productivity for black-tailed deer and elk.

Figure 8. GMU 516, Packwood, General Land Ownership



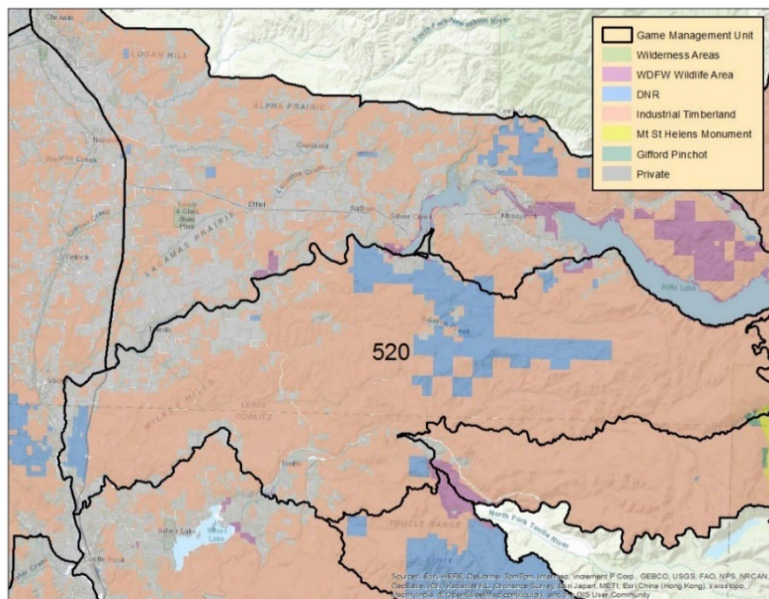
Category	Details
Square miles	538
Public land	~95%
Industrial forestland	~2%
Urban/suburban	~0%
Wilderness	~20%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	U.S. Forest Service
Habitat/terrain	Federal forestlands, rugged mountainous terrain including wilderness
Primary access points	State Route 12, U.S. Forest Service Roads 20 and 24; Pacific Crest Trail
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse, poor for waterfowl

GMU 520 - Winston

GMU 520 (Winston) is located east of I-5, primarily between the Cowlitz and Toutle/Green rivers. While the unit is mostly in Lewis County, it also extends into Cowlitz and Skamania counties. The GMU is primarily private industrial forestlands, with some DNR lands, a small section of USFS at its far eastern edge, and rural homes and agricultural areas in the northwest. Key geographic features include the Toutle and Green rivers, Cowlitz River, Riffe Lake, and Salmon Creek. The unit has good productivity for both black-tailed deer and elk. Accessing the unit requires navigating the property boundaries and access policies of private industrial forestland owners, as well as identifying public lands.

Figure 9. GMU 520, Winston, General Land Ownership



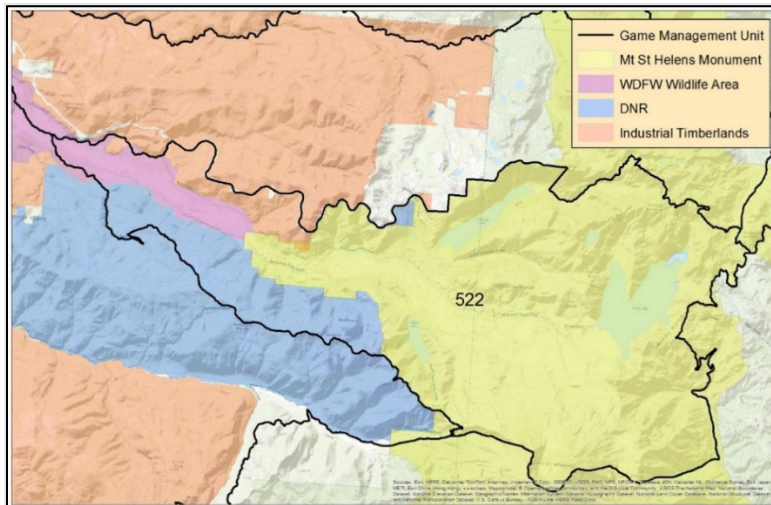
Category	Details
Square miles	299
Public land	~20%
Industrial forestland	~75%
Urban/suburban	~2%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Weyerhaeuser, Olympic Resource Management, DNR
Habitat/terrain	Mountainous terrain, flatter in the western part of the GMU
Primary access points	State Routes 505 and 12, Winston Creek Road, Weyerhaeuser 1900
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse, poor for waterfowl

GMU 522 - Loo-wit

GMU 522 (Loo-wit) is a small unit located south of State Route 12 within Skamania and Cowlitz counties. The GMU is dominated by the USFS Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, with smaller portions owned or managed by DNR, Weyerhaeuser, and WDFW. The Mudflow and Hoffstadt units of the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area partially lie within this GMU. Key geographic features include Mt. St. Helens and the North Fork Toutle River. Recreational access is heavily limited due to Monument policies designed to protect the recovering landscape. **Hunting in this unit is generally prohibited, with exceptions for elk and mountain goat hunting, which are allowed on a permit-only basis.**

Figure 10. GMU 522, Loo-wit, General Land Ownership



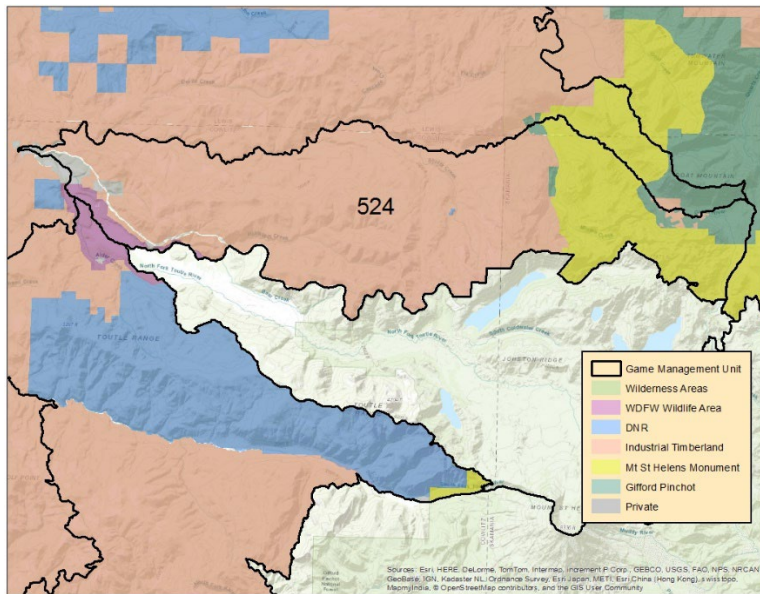
Category	Details
Square miles	93
Public land	~95%
Industrial forestland	~5%
Urban/suburban	~0%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	U.S. Forest Service (St. Helens Monument), DNR, WDFW, Weyerhaeuser
Habitat/terrain	Mt. St. Helens blast zone and mudflow, DNR/private industrial forestlands, remote mountainous terrain
Primary access points	State Routes 504, U.S. Forest Service Road 26/99, DNR 3000 Road
Small game/waterfowl	CLOSED season for these species

GMU 524 - Margaret

GMU 524 (Margaret) is a small unit located south of the Green River, primarily within Cowlitz and Skamania counties. This GMU is primarily owned by Weyerhaeuser and the USFS Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, with smaller areas of private industrial forestland and a small portion of the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area. Key geographic features include the Green River and Mount Margaret Backcountry. The easternmost portion of the unit (as defined by Elk Area 5066) is closed to general season elk hunting, with some permit-only hunting allowed.

Figure 11. GMU 524, Margaret, General Land Ownership



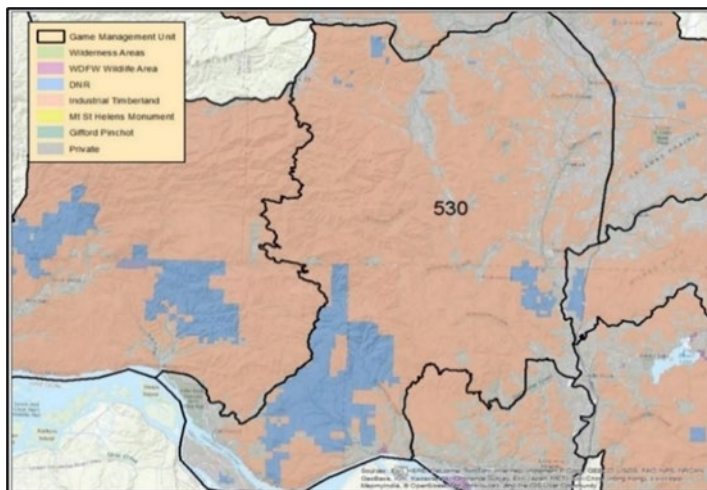
Category	Details
Square miles	96
Public land	~20%
Industrial forestland	~75%
Urban/suburban	~0%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	U.S. Forest Service (St. Helens Monument), Weyerhaeuser
Habitat/terrain	Private industrial forestlands, remote mountainous terrain, Mt. Margaret Backcountry
Primary access points	State Routes 504, Weyerhaeuser 1100
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse, poor for waterfowl

GMU 530 - Ryderwood

GMU 530 (Ryderwood) is located along the western side of I-5, extending from Castle Rock to Chehalis, and spans Cowlitz, Lewis, and Wahkiakum counties. The GMU is primarily private industrial and DNR forestlands, with private agricultural lands and rural homes on the valley floors and Puget Island. Key geographic features include the Willapa Hills, the Columbia and Chehalis rivers, and State Routes 4 and 6. The unit has very good productivity for black-tailed deer and supports a good elk population. The unit also has a population of Columbian white-tailed deer in low elevation areas near the Columbia River, particularly in the vicinity of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Julia Butler Hansen Refuge and Puget Island. Hunters are reminded that there is no open season for these deer and should consult the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet for details.

Figure 12. GMU 530, Ryderwood, General Land Ownership



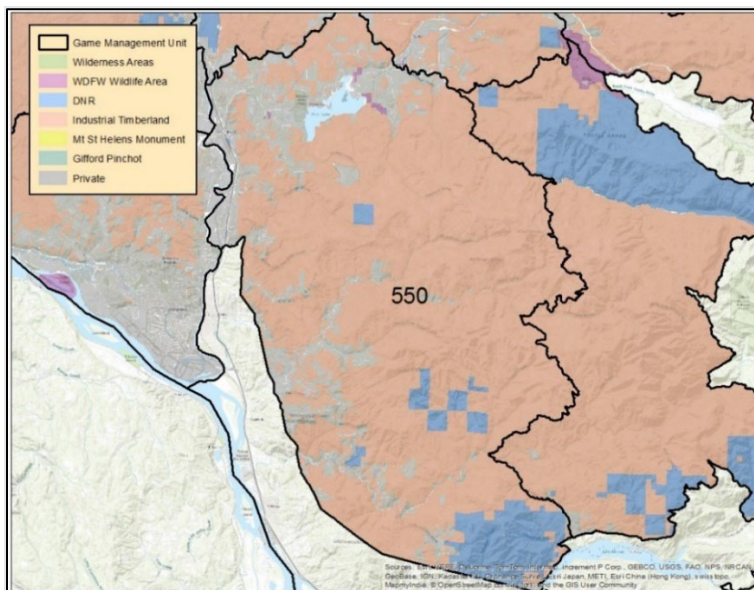
Category	Details
Square miles	541
Public land	~20%
Industrial forestland	~70%
Urban/suburban	~5%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Sierra Pacific, Weyerhaeuser, DNR, small private/agricultural
Habitat/terrain	Private industrial and DNR forestlands; floodplain/private/agricultural, mountainous terrain
Primary access points	State Routes 4, 6, and 506; Boistfort Road, Germany Creek Road, Abernathy Creek Road
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse and waterfowl

GMU 550 - Coweeman

GMU 550 (Coweeman) is located east of I-5 and south of State Route 504 in the Cascade Mountain foothills, entirely within Cowlitz County. The GMU is primarily private industrial forestlands, with some DNR lands, along with rural homes and agricultural areas, mostly in the northwestern part of the unit. Key features include Silver Lake, the Coweeman, Cowlitz, and Kalama rivers, as well as Baird Mountain and Georges Peak. The unit has very good productivity for black-tailed deer and good productivity for elk. Accessing the unit requires navigating the property boundaries and access policies of private industrial forestland owners as well as identifying public lands.

Figure 13. GMU 550, Coweeman, General Land Ownership



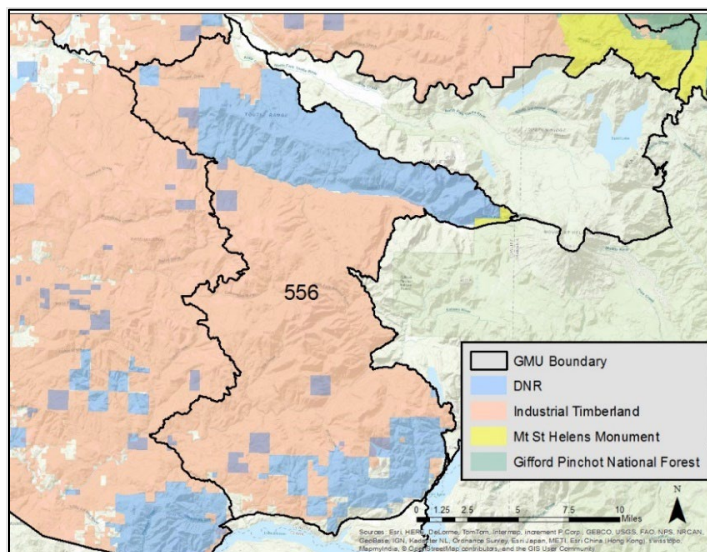
Category	Details
Square miles	347
Public land	~15%
Industrial forestland	~80%
Urban/suburban	~5%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Weyerhaeuser, DNR, small private/agricultural
Habitat/terrain	Private industrial and DNR forestlands; floodplain/private/agricultural, mountainous terrain
Primary access points	State Routes 504, Weyerhaeuser 4700, 6100, and 6300; Kalama River Road, Rose Valley Road
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed grouse, modest for waterfowl

GMU 556 - Toutle

GMU 556 (Toutle) is located east of I-5 in the upper watersheds of the Coweeman, Kalama, and South Fork Toutle rivers, entirely within Cowlitz County. The GMU is primarily private industrial forestlands but also includes a significant amount of DNR land in its northern and southern portions. Key geographic features include the Coweeman, Kalama, and South Fork Toutle rivers, as well as Lakeview Peak and Big Bull, Elk, and Little Cow mountains. The unit has modest productivity for black-tails and good productivity for elk. **Hunters should be aware that all elk hunting in GMU 556 (Toutle) is by Special Permit only, with no general season for elk.** In 2021, the boundary between the Toutle and Yale GMUs was adjusted to simplify hunting regulations. The new southern boundary of GMU 556 now follows Lewis River Road. Accessing the GMU requires navigating the property boundaries and access policies of private industrial forestland owners, as well as identifying public lands.

Figure 14. GMU 556, Toutle General Land Ownership



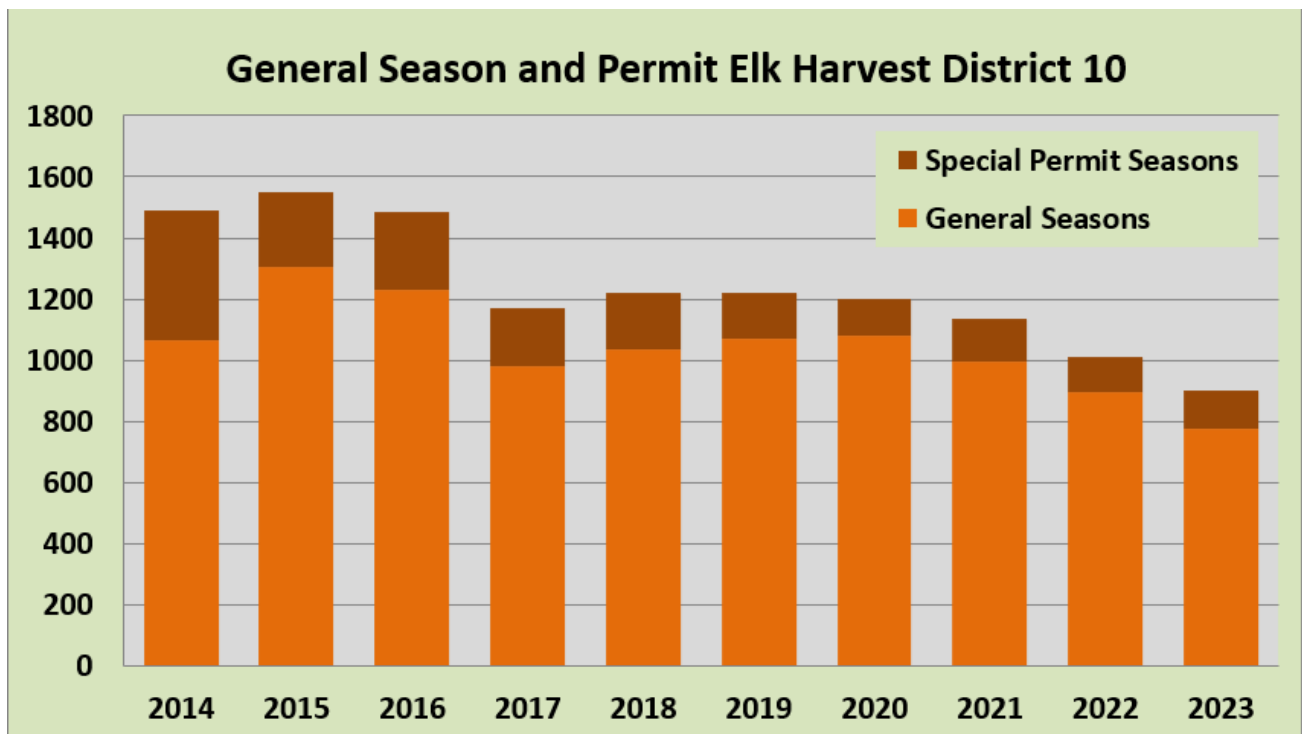
Category	Details
Square miles	230
Public land	~35%
Industrial forestland	~65%
Urban/suburban	~0%

Category	Details
Primary landowners	Weyerhaeuser, DNR
Habitat/terrain	Private industrial and DNR forestlands, mountainous terrain
Primary access points	State Routes 503 and 504; DNR 4200 and 4250 roads; Weyerhaeuser 4950, 5500, 7200, 1400, 6600; Rock Creek Road
Small game/waterfowl	Good for ruffed and sooty grouse, poor for waterfowl

Elk

Historically, District 10 has been among the leaders in statewide elk harvest. In 2023, the highest general season harvests occurred in GMUs 506 (Willapa Hills), 530 (Ryderwood), 520 (Winston), and 550 (Coweeman). The district also offers many permit hunts to manage the elk population, address agricultural damage caused by elk, and provide recreational opportunity. Additionally, GMUs 522 (Loo-Wit) and 556 (Toutle) are permit-only for both cow and bull elk. In 2023, 777 elk were harvested during the general season, with an additional 124 elk taken by permit in District 10. Elk west of I-5 belong to the Roosevelt sub-species, while those in the Cascade Mountain Range are of mixed origin. Cascade elk are a genetic combination of native Roosevelt elk and introduced Rocky Mountain elk. The chart below illustrates the elk harvest trend in District 10 over the past ten years, highlighting how this harvest is divided among general and permit seasons.

Figure 15. General Season and Permit Elk Harvest in District 10



Additional metrics can help hunters decide where to begin scouting for an elk hunting location. The table below includes elk harvest, percentage success, number of hunters, number of hunters per square mile, elk harvest per square mile, and the percentage of harvest comprised of five-point or larger bulls. The data is organized by GMU and represents the 5-year averages for the 2019-23 modern firearm general hunting seasons.

Table 1. District 10 modern firearm general season elk harvest, 2019-23, 5-year averages

GMU	Elk Harvest	% Success	Hunters	Hunters/sq mi	Harvest/sq mi	% 5pt+ Bulls
501*	16	7.0	214	.9	.07	.59
503	6	3.0	158	2.8	.10	.60
504*	6	7.6	80	.8	.06	.28
505	11	5.4	167	.6	.04	.73
506	116	13.0	898	2.4	.31	.39
510	8	6.2	136	.7	.04	.68
513	13	7.2	185	.8	.06	.63
516	16	2.8	572	1.1	.03	.59
520	63	7.8	810	2.7	.21	.64
524	19	6.4	306	3.2	.20	.61
530	76	9.8	783	1.4	.14	.51
550	51	6.0	823	2.4	.15	.41
Total**	402	7.2	5052	1.5	.12	.51

*Antlerless elk included. **GMUs 522 and 556 not included (special permit only).

Elk population information

Elk populations in District 10 GMUs, including the Mount St. Helens Elk Herd, are down from their historic highs in the mid-2000s. This reduction aligns with the objectives of the [Mount St. Helens Elk Herd Plan](#). Liberal antlerless elk hunting opportunity, combined with several years of late-winter and spring storms, have reduced the elk population in these GMUs. Elk within the Mount St. Helens herd typically lack the necessary fat reserves to endure long, harsh winters. Additionally, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is common in District 10 elk. Female elk suffering from this debilitating condition have been documented to have lower pregnancy rates, poorer body condition, and lower survival rates than healthy elk in the same landscape, according to unpublished WDFW data.

Survey efforts conducted during the spring of 2017-19 and 2022 indicated that the Mount St. Helens Elk Herd had stabilized at about 1,000 adult female elk in the area surveyed as an index to the population. The most recent survey, completed in 2024, showed a slight increase to approximately 1250 adult females. Available data suggests the elk population remains below objectives and well below historic highs. Hunters should expect a generally challenging elk hunting season in the Mount St. Helens herd area in 2024. WDFW has reduced antlerless hunting opportunities accordingly.

Elk population surveys in GMUs 506 (Willapa Hills) and 530 (Ryderwood) are conducted intermittently, with the most recent survey completed in spring 2023. Surveys conducted in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2023 indicate stable elk populations in these units. Severe winter conditions rarely cause

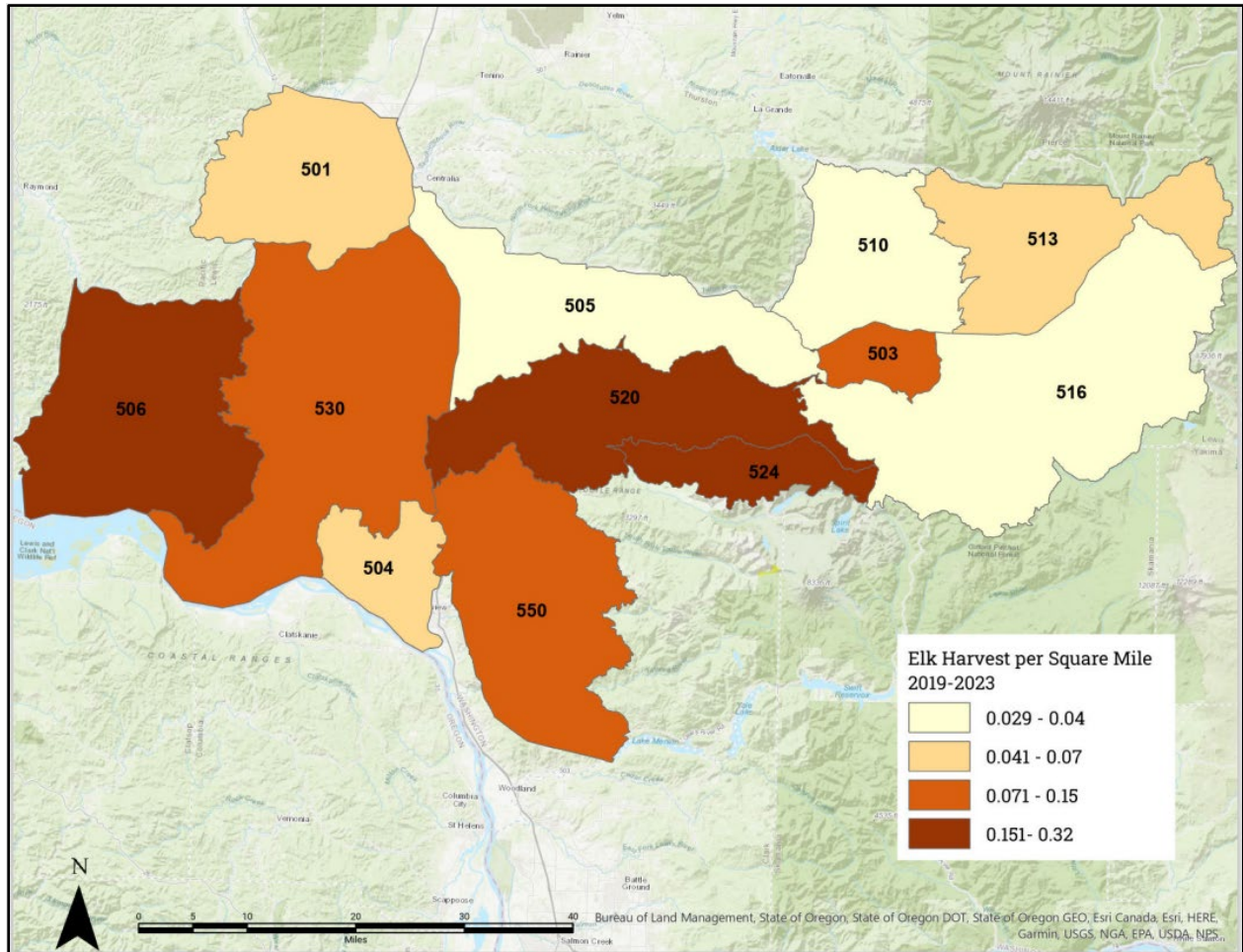
population-level impacts on Willapa Hills elk. Hunting opportunities and success rates should be similar to recent years.

The general bull elk season is always challenging, but the District 10 elk population yields a harvest of nearly 800 bull elk annually. Hunters who put in the effort and stay focused may be rewarded with success. Below is an illustration of the average elk harvest per square mile in District 10 during 2019-23 modern firearm general seasons, organized by GMU. Note that GMUs 522 and 556 are excluded because all elk hunting in these two units is by special permit only.



Bull Elk Taken in District 10. Photo by Jeff Larson.

Figure 16. Average number of elk harvested annually, per square mile, during modern firearm general season in District 10, 2019-23



Additional resources

You can find annual [game harvest reports](#) for deer and elk on the WDFW website. For more information regarding elk management in the Mount St. Helens, Willapa Hills, and South Rainier elk herd areas, review the elk herd managements plans on the [Game Management Plans \(GMP\) webpage](#).

Elk scouting strategies

Use the [Hunt Planner mapping tool](#) to view aerial photos and identify recent clear-cuts and drainages. You can do some pre-season scouting on commercial tree farms by bike or on foot, as most areas will not be open to motorized access yet. Motorized access and camping are generally available on DNR and U.S. Forest Service lands unless there is a high fire danger. Prospective elk hunters should remember that elk often prefer cooler, wetter areas during warmer weather and are more often active during dawn and dusk.

Treponeme-associated elk hoof disease (TAHD)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with some west of the Cascade Range. While elk are susceptible to many conditions that cause limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction — now known as [treponeme-associated hoof-disease](#) (TAHD) — suggested something different. WDFW, with a panel of scientific advisors, conducted diagnostic research that found that these abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause digital dermatitis in cattle, sheep, and goats. Although this type of disease has plagued the livestock industry for decades, TAHD had never been documented in elk or any other hooved wildlife species. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help

In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage hunters in west side GMUs (400, 500, and 600 series) to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing the prevalence of the disease over time. The program aims to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase the overall elk harvest. General season or permit hunters participate by submitting elk hooves at collection sites in western Washington. Locations of [collection sites](#) are available on the WDFW website. Hunters who submit hooves with signs of TAHD, such as abnormal hooves, will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington, with season dates of Sept. 1-Dec 31, will be awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

So, what can hunters do to help?

- **Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.**
- **Turn in your elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington.**

- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department’s online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit [WDFW’s website](#) and [Washington State University’s website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65-66 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.

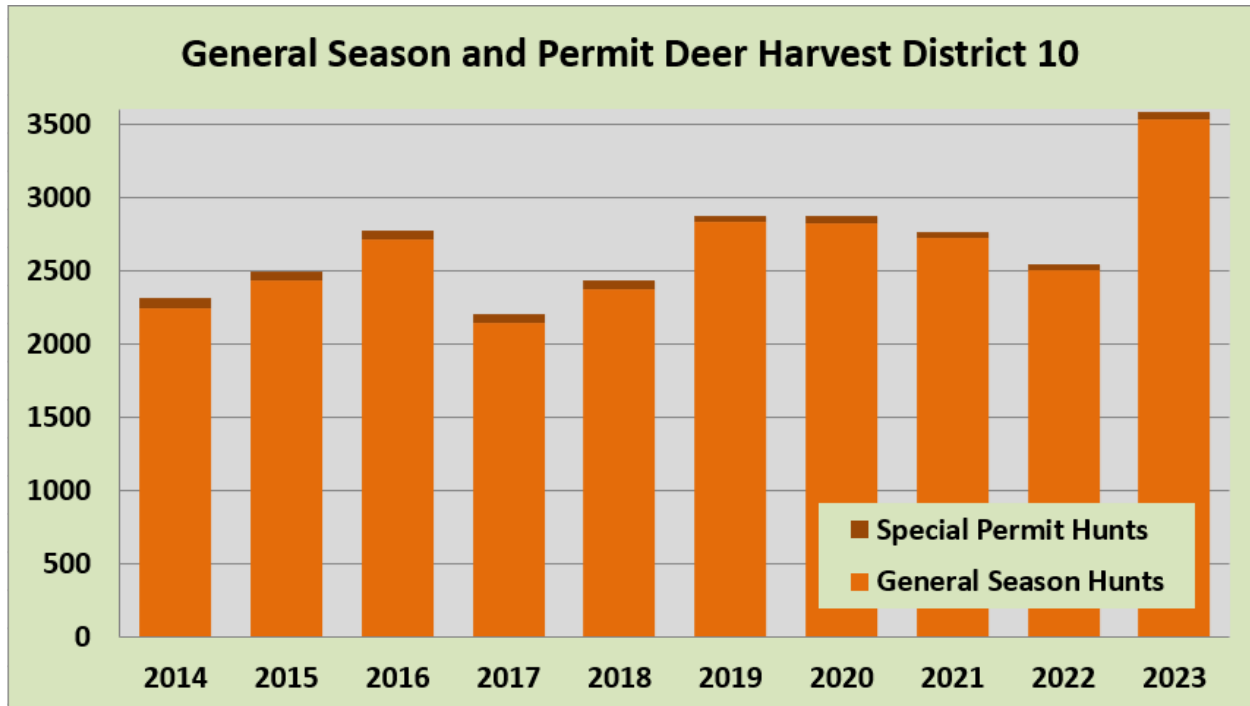


Study elk captured in GMU 550. Photo by WDFW.

Deer

Several GMUs in District 10 are among the best in the state for black-tailed deer harvest. The highest 2023 general season buck harvests in District 10 occurred in GMUs 550 (Coweeman), 520 (Winston), 530 (Ryderwood), 505 (Mossyrock), and 501 (Lincoln). Most of the harvest occurs during general seasons, with a small portion occurring during special permit seasons (see figure below). For more information on deer in District 10, review the [Game Status and Trend Reports](#) on the [Game Management Plans \(GMP\)](#) webpage.

Figure 17. General Season and Permit Deer Harvest in District 10



Additional metrics can help hunters decide where to begin scouting for a deer hunting location. The below table includes buck harvest, percentage success, number of hunters, number of hunters per square mile, buck harvest per square mile, and the percentage of harvest comprised of 3-point or larger bucks. The data is organized by GMU and represents the 5-year averages for the 2019-23 modern firearm general hunting seasons.

Table 2. District 10 modern firearm general season deer harvest, 2019-23, 5-year averages

GMU	Buck Harvest	% Success	Hunters	Hunters/sq mi	Harvest/sq mi	% 3pt+ Bucks
501	238	25.6	932	4.0	1.03	.29
503	45	16	288	5.1	.80	.33
504	52	28.4	181	1.9	.54	.45
505	229	27.4	838	2.8	.78	.34
506	235	25	939	2.5	.63	.28
510	32	11.6	279	1.3	.15	.53
513	23	11.6	197	0.8	.10	.50
516	49	9.2	535	1.0	.09	.38
520	340	27.2	1248	4.2	1.14	.28
524	29	16.8	172	1.8	.30	.38
530	350	25.4	1357	2.5	.65	.31

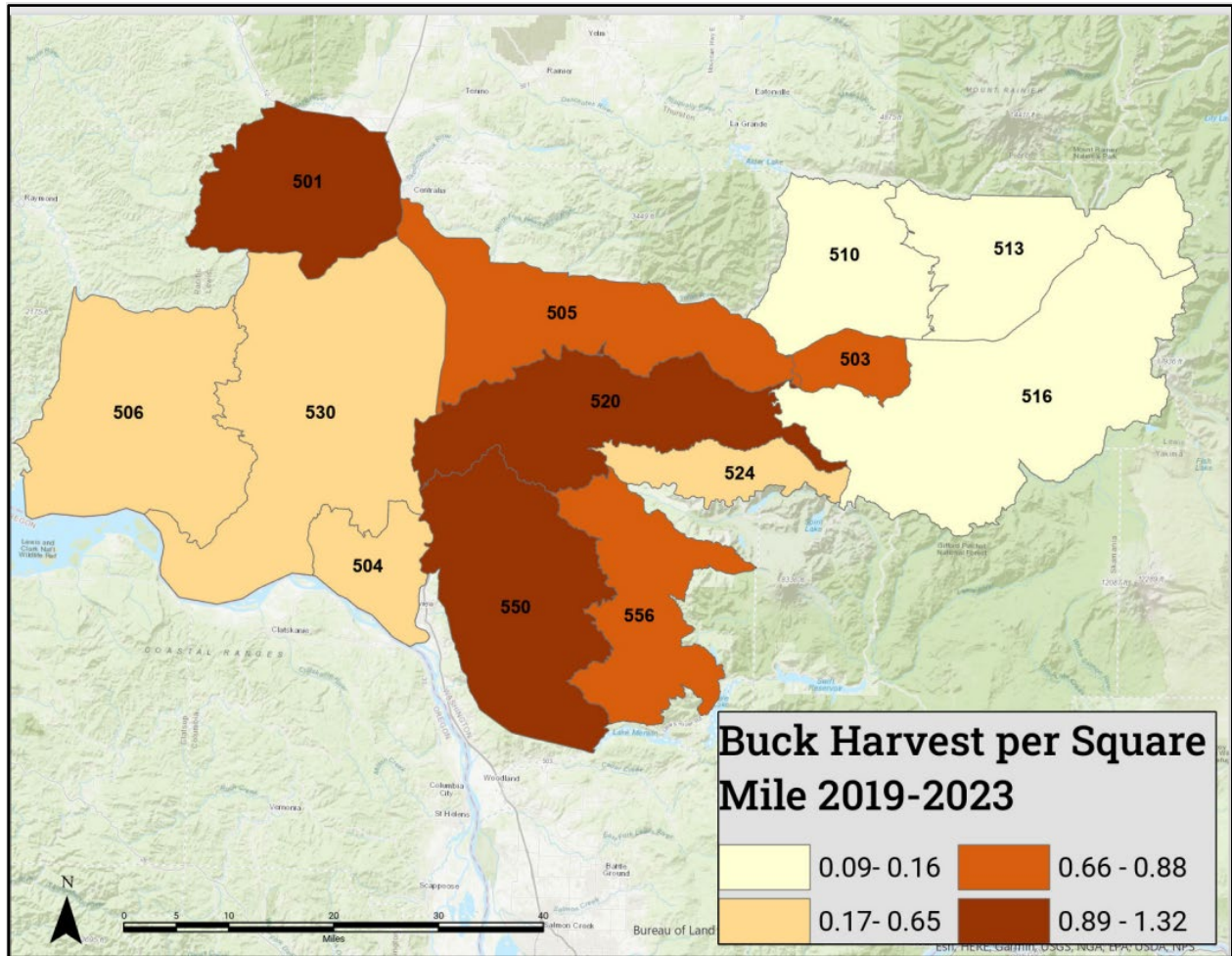
GMU	Buck Harvest	% Success	Hunters	Hunters/sq mi	Harvest/sq mi	% 3pt+ Bucks
550	459	29	1608	4.6	1.32	.28
556	194	22.4	871	3.9	.87	.24
Total	2274	24.9	8815	2.5	.64	.30

Black-tailed deer populations in District 10 are stable to increasing. The annual harvest of more than 2,000 bucks for all user groups combined has been typical for many years. The severe winter of 2016-17 caused some deer mortality and led to a decline in the 2017 harvest. Recent winters have been mild, and deer hunting opportunity should be good again in 2024.

Hunting for black-tailed deer is often best near the end of the general season when conditions improve for stalking and moving through heavily vegetated areas of western Washington. The best opportunities typically occur during the late buck hunt, when favorable stalking and weather conditions coincide with the breeding season, or rut. The 2024 late buck season runs Nov. 14-17. Black-tailed deer generally favor dense vegetation and have small home ranges. The most successful hunters study the area carefully and move very slowly, constantly searching for deer.

Below is an illustration of the average buck harvest per square mile from 2019-2023 by GMU in District 10 during the modern firearm general hunting season. Note that GMU 522 (Loo-wit) is excluded as this unit is closed to deer hunting.

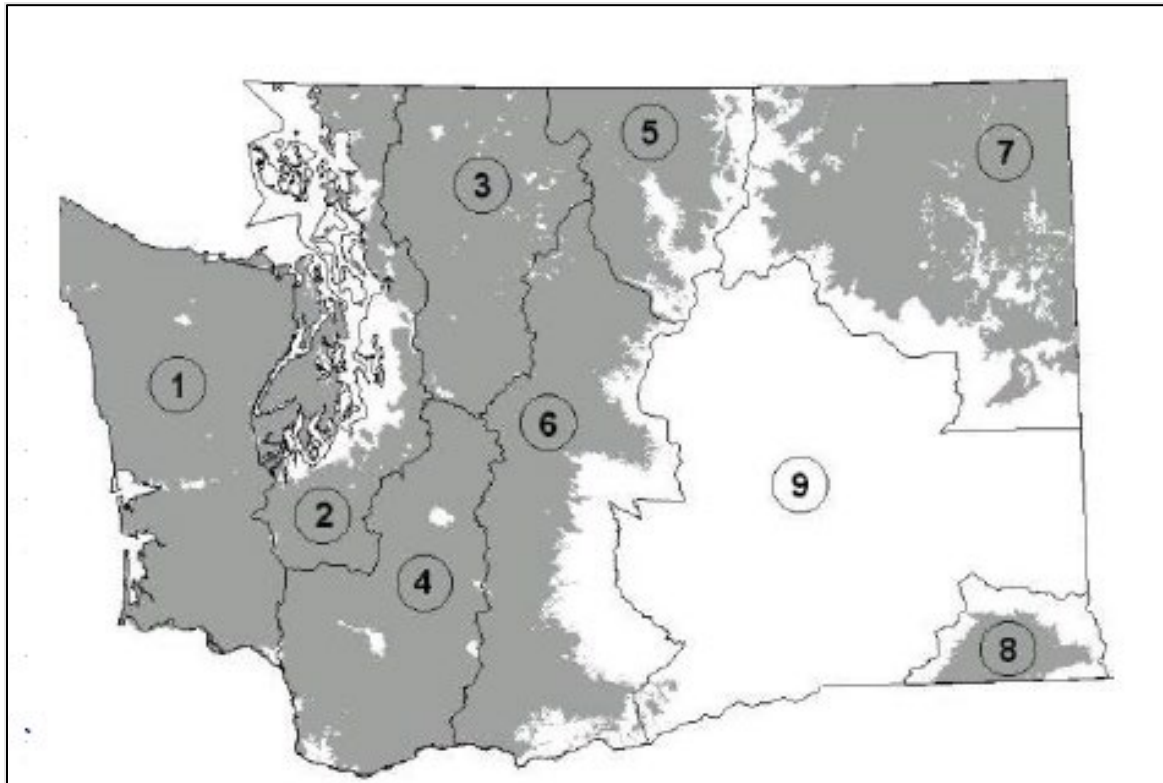
Figure 18. Average number of bucks harvested annually per square mile during modern firearm general hunting seasons in District 10, 2019-23.



Black bear

District 10 is part of both the South Cascades and Coastal Bear Management Units (BMU) for the fall bear hunting season which is open Aug. 1-Nov. 15. There currently are no spring bear hunting opportunities in District 10.

Figure 19. Black bear distribution (grey) and Black Bear Management Units (9) in Washington.



Harvest numbers and hunter success in 2023 were similar to those in 2022. The total bear harvest in District 10 was 132 in 2023, compared to 144 in 2022. The table below includes black bear harvest numbers and hunter success, organized by GMU, for the 2021-23 hunting seasons. For more information on the management of black bears in Washington, including the Coastal and South Cascades management zones, review the [Game Status and Trend Reports](#).

Successful bear hunters must submit a premolar tooth to WDFW. For more information on this requirement, refer to page 68 of the [Big Game Hunting Pamphlet](#).

Hunting for black bears is challenging but can be rewarding. Hunters should use a variety of methods, such as targeting areas with favored foods like huckleberries, blackberries, and cascara trees. Other effective techniques include glassing clearcuts or alpine areas at dawn and dusk, and predator calling.

Table 3. District 10 black bear harvest, 2021-23.

GMU	Total harvest (2023)	% Hunter success (2023)	Total harvest (2022)	% Hunter success (2022)	Total harvest (2021)	% Hunter success (2021)
501	13	7	13	6	6	3
504	2	3	2	7	0	0
506	29	7	21	7	12	4
530	13	3	20	7	15	4
503	2	3	6	9	0	0
505	14	8	8	8	6	4
510	8	9	5	6	4	5
513	5	4	11	11	15	12
516	20	9	31	12	10	4
520	9	3	10	3	4	1
524	5	5	4	5	3	3
550	10	3	8	3	2	1
556	2	1	5	4	0	0



Black bear in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Photo by WDFW.

Cougar



Two young cougar siblings examine a camera trap site set-up by WDFW biologists. Photo by WDFW.

In 2023-24, hunters harvested 15 cougars in the GMUs that comprise District 10. The cougar hunting season structure recently underwent a review, and the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved proposed changes.

In 2024, the cougar hunting season runs from Sept. 1 to March 31, or when the quota is reached, whichever occurs first. The current cougar hunting regulations are not included in the printed hunting pamphlet, but they can be found in the [online regulations](#). Prospective hunters should visit the [cougar hunting page](#) to assure that the season in their prospective area remains open.

All successful cougar hunters must report their harvest to the toll-free Cougar Hotline (866-364-4868, press 3 after the recording) within 72 hours, and all cougar pelts must be sealed by WDFW within five

days of harvest (skull and hide unfrozen with proof of sex attached to the pelt). Contact a [WDFW office](#) to make an appointment to have a cougar pelt sealed.

All hunters who purchase a cougar tag must report their hunt activity (successful or unsuccessful) via the WILD system by March 31, 2025.

Cougars are difficult to hunt, so most deer and elk hunters typically harvest them when the opportunity presents itself. Hunters who want to harvest cougars should focus on areas with concentrations of deer and elk. Fresh snow facilitates tracking, and hunters may want to try predator calling.

Mountain goat

The southern Washington Cascade Mountains support a robust population of mountain goats. These populations span the boundaries of WDFW districts. Specifically, the Goat Rocks population is found in both Districts 8 and 10, while the Mount St. Helens population is located in Districts 9 and 10.

Goat populations in the Goat Rocks area have declined in recent years and currently stand at approximately 141 goats. Tag numbers have been reduced, but hunters fortunate enough to draw these permits should still enjoy a successful hunt. The Goat Rocks area has been divided into two hunt areas. Selected hunters should review the boundaries of the hunt areas before heading out.

Starting in 2018, mountain goat permits were issued for the Mount St. Helens population. Goats have re-colonized the area following the 1980 eruption, and the population now stands at approximately 335. For hunting management, two hunt areas have been delineated, with one tag awarded in each area annually from 2018-22. Beginning in 2023, two tags were available for each hunt area.

Successful draw applicants for all hunt areas will receive a letter with additional details about the hunt areas, mandatory checking requirements and goat identification training, biological sample collection, and more.



Mt. St. Helens mountain goat harvest. Photo by Brad Croce.

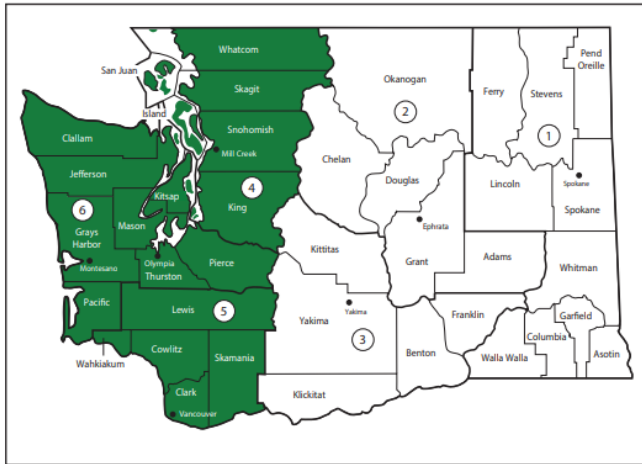
Pheasant

WDFW releases pheasants multiple times throughout the pheasant hunting season at various locations in District 10. In Lewis County, releases occur at the Kosmos Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area and on DNR property on Lincoln Creek. Additionally, there is a private lands release at Woodland Bottoms. More information about pheasants and the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) sites is available on the WDFW website. Site location guides with maps will be available in the 2024 Western Washington Pheasant Release Pamphlet, which will be available in late summer.

Youth hunters and those over 65 years of age should check the regulations for opportunities to hunt earlier in the season before the general season opens. Hunting hours are from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Figure 20. Western Washington Pheasant Release Program

Western Washington Pheasant Release Program



Forest grouse

District 10 supports substantial forest grouse populations and is one of the top-producing areas for hunters in western Washington for ruffed grouse and sooty grouse. Spruce grouse can also be found in the higher elevations of District 10. Grouse hunters should note that the statewide season for forest grouse in 2024 is Sept. 15-Jan. 15 (previously Sept. 1-Dec. 31). This change, implemented in 2021 after public input, aims to reduce the vulnerability of breeding females to harvest during early September. After brood break-up in mid-September, females are less vulnerable to harvest. Since females drive population growth or decline, delaying the season start is a strategy to increase the grouse population.

Effective hunting strategies include targeting riparian areas with mixed forest vegetation and walking closed or abandoned roads.

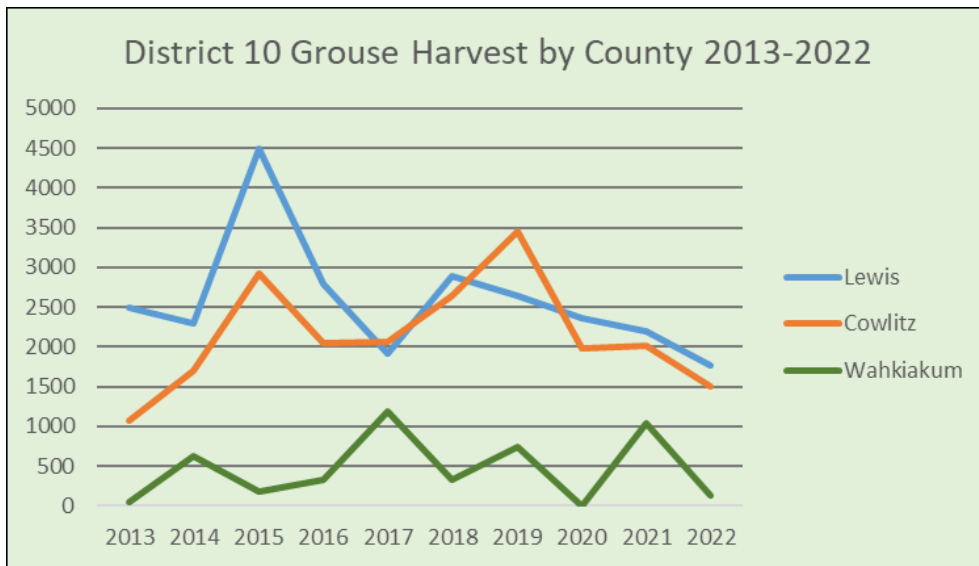
WDFW is collecting wings and tails from hunter-harvested grouse. The submission of wings and tails is voluntary and helps wildlife managers determine the species, age, and sex composition of the grouse harvest locally. Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of harvested grouse into collection barrels located throughout the region. Paper collection bags and instructions are available at each location. Please use one bag for each bird and do not deposit wings in a plastic bag.

Grouse [wing and tail collection locations](#) can be found on the WDFW website. Please note that barrel locations are subject to change before or during the grouse season, so hunters are encouraged to check the website frequently.



Grouse Wing and Tail Collection Barrel. Photo by WDFW.

Figure 21. Grouse harvest by county in District 10, 2013-22.



Waterfowl

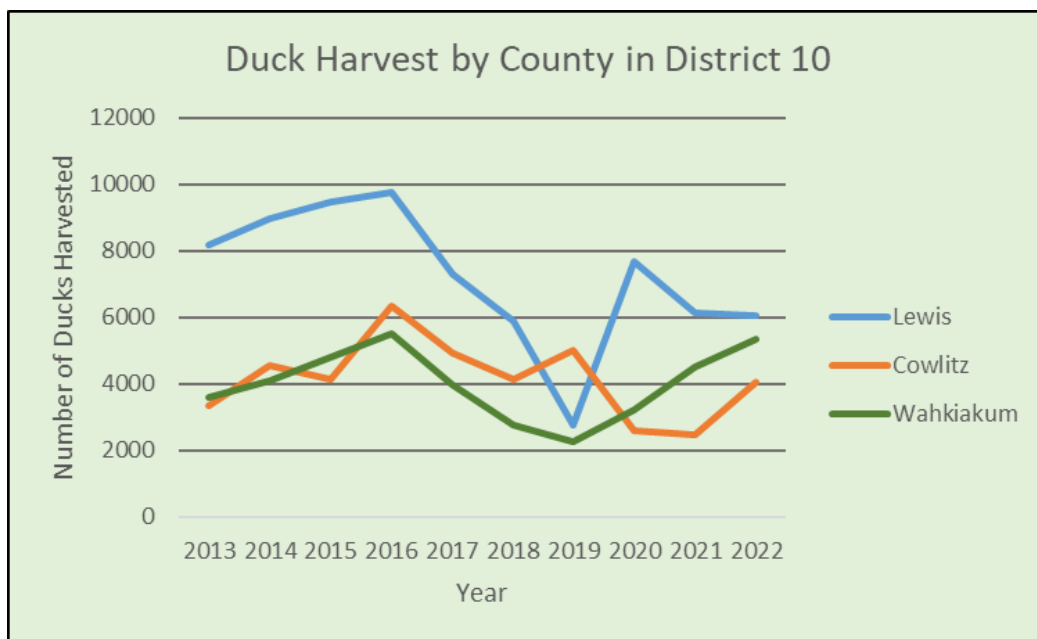
Duck hunting

For the first time since onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey was conducted in 2022. Results for the 2024 breeding waterfowl survey have not yet been published. When available, they can be found on the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](https://www.fishandwildlife.gov) website. In 2023, the prairies were drier than average, resulting in a 7% decline in waterfowl from the 2022 survey and a 9% decline from the long-term average.

Hunters are reminded to consult the [2024-25 Washington Game Bird Hunting Pamphlet](#) for details on hunting regulations. Prospective hunters should pay special attention to the late September season, which is open only to youth hunters. Check the regulations closely for the details on this mentored hunting opportunity for early-season ducks.

Early season hunting is often best along the Columbia River and other large, permanent bodies of water. The Columbia River up to the Bonneville Dam is tidally influenced, so be aware of outgoing tide conditions to avoid getting your boat stuck. Later in the season, high water might disperse birds, making flooded farmlands more successful hunting grounds. Prospective hunters should note that success often depends on the severity of fall and winter weather, with wet, blustery conditions generally producing better duck hunting in southwest Washington.

Figure 22. Number of ducks harvested by county in District 10, 2013-22.



Goose hunting

Hunters are reminded of the complex goose hunting regulations in Goose Management Area 2, designed to protect wintering populations of the dusky Canada goose. New hunters and those whose hunting authorization for Goose Management Area 2 was invalidated during the previous year must pass a goose identification exam with a minimum of score of 80% to receive authorization for the current year. Goose hunters are encouraged to review the different subspecies of Canada geese in southwest Washington, as the ability to identify these birds is critical for a productive and enjoyable season.

Please review the [information regarding goose identification](#) before hunting this season, and refer to the [2024-25 Game Bird Hunting Pamphlet](#) for more information.

While dusky Canada geese remain a concern, several other subspecies are abundant and support large annual harvests.

Goose hunters are encouraged to take advantage of the early goose season in September. For details on this enjoyable goose hunt for western Canada geese, refer to the [2024-25 Game Bird Hunting Pamphlet](#).

Important information for Area 2 goose hunting

Goose hunting in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties is subject to the additional restrictions of Goose Management Area 2 (GMA2) – Inland. These restrictions are in place to protect the dusky subspecies of the Canada goose. We encourage goose hunters to review the different subspecies of Canada geese in southwest Washington before each hunting season.

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved the following regulations for southwest Washington goose hunting season in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the states of Oregon and Alaska:

- The season for dusky Canada geese is **closed**. If a hunter takes a dusky Canada goose or does not comply with a field check, that hunter's authorization will be invalidated, and the hunter will not be able to hunt geese in Goose Management Area 2 for the rest of the season.
- Goose Management Area 2 is split between the Coast (Pacific County and a portion of Grays Harbor County west of Highway 101) and Inland (Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties, and a portion of Grays Harbor County east of Highway 101).
- In Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland), legal goose hunting hours begin 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours, and conclude 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours.
- Starting in 2019, goose hunters planning to hunt in Goose Management Area 2 (Coast or Inland) began receiving a harvest record card when purchasing their licenses. Immediately after taking a goose, you must fill out your harvest card in ink. You are required to report the information on your harvest card to WDFW by using the [online reporting system](#) or by mailing the cards to: WDFW, Wildlife Program – Waterfowl Section, PO Box 43141, Olympia WA 98504. The reporting deadline is March 20, 2025. Reports need to be postmarked by the reporting deadlines even if

you did not harvest any birds. Please note that you must comply with these reporting requirements, or you will be required to pay a \$10 administrative fee before obtaining a harvest record card the next year.

- The goose hunting season will be open every day from Sept. 7-15 as well as Oct. 12-27, and on selected dates (Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays) from Nov. 2, 2024-Jan. 12, 2025, and Feb 8-March 5, 2025.

Public Land Resources

DNR-Pacific Cascades Office (SW WA)

601 Bond Road
PO Box 280
Castle Rock, WA 98611-0280
Phone: 360-577-2025
[https://www.dnr.wa.gov/
pacific-cascade.region@dnr.wa.gov](https://www.dnr.wa.gov/pacific-cascade.region@dnr.wa.gov)

To purchase [DNR quadrangle maps](#), please visit the DNR website.

Gifford Pinchot National Forest

For more information on the [Gifford Pinchot National Forest](#), including maps, closures, and more, visit the U.S. Forest Service website, or contact local offices with the information below.

Headquarters

10600 N.E. 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA 98682
360-891-5000

Cowlitz Valley Ranger District

10024 US Hwy 12
PO Box 670, Randle, WA 98377
360-497-1100

Mt. Adams Ranger District

2455 Hwy 141, Trout Lake, WA 98650
509-395-3402

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument

42218 N.E. Yale Bridge Road, Amboy, WA 98601
360-449-7800

Private Lands Access Resources

WDFW Private Lands Access Program

Free public hunting opportunities for different species are available through the Private Lands Access Program. The [Private Lands Hunting Access](#) website will list the properties available by county, GMU, or type of access allowed such as:

- [Feel Free to Hunt](#)
- [Register to Hunt](#)
- [Hunt by Written Permission](#)
- [Hunt by Reservation](#)

Not all properties allow the same hunting options. Landowners can allow hunting of all legal species or choose to be more restrictive, such as allowing only deer and elk, waterfowl, or turkey. Read each property description carefully for property rules, and maps of property locations. Please be respectful — hunting on private land is a privilege.

NEW properties are added and removed each year, so be sure to check the [Private Lands Hunting Access](#) webpage for updates.

Table 4. District 10 Private Lands Access Program, 7,222 acres, effective July 15, 2024.

Landowner	Location	Species allowed	Hunting type	Acres
Weyerhaeuser	Multiple parcels	All species	Feel Free to Hunt	6,297
Columbia Land Trust	2 properties, Wahkiakum Co.	Waterfowl	Register to Hunt	259
Woodland Bottoms	2 properties, Cowlitz Co.	Pheasant and waterfowl	Feel Free to Hunt	369
Nisqually Land Trust	Cattle Creek Road, Lewis Co.	Deer and elk	Feel Free to Hunt	200
Longtain Road (NEW)	Wahkiakum Co.	All species	Hunt by Written Permission	97

For Private Lands Access program information in District 10, please contact:

Monique Gray
 360-635-7606
Monique.gray@dfw.wa.gov

Private Forestlands

Green Diamond

- Recreation permits must be purchased for motorized and non-motorized access.
- For more information, visit the [Green Diamond](#) website.

Manulife (formerly Hancock) Forest Management (HFM)

- The Cathalmet Tree farm is open for non-motorized recreational access.

PacifiCorp

- Generally open for non-motorized recreational access.
- No camping allowed.
- For more information, visit the [PacifiCorp](#) website.

Pope Resources/Olympic Resource Management

- Was recently acquired by Rayonier.
- For more information, visit the [Rayonier](#) website.

Rayonier

- Hunting access by lease or permit depending on the location.
- For more information, visit the [Rayonier](#) website.
- Call the Rayonier hotline: 855-729-4868

Port Blakely

- Generally open to public access.
- Check the [Port Blakely](#) website for information on access.

Sierra Pacific

- Generally open to walk-in, day-use access.
- Call the Sierra Pacific hotline: 360-623-1299

Weyerhaeuser

- Includes St. Helens Tree Farm, Yacolt (Columbia River East), Vail, Pe Ell, Columbia Timberlands
- Access is by permit only except on lands enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program designated as Feel Free to Hunt.
- Motored and non-motorized permits available
- For information on recreational access and permits, visit the [Weyerhaeuser](#) website.
- Call the Weyerhaeuser hotline: 866-636-6531

2024 District 11 Hunting Prospects

Thurston and Pierce counties and Lewis County GMU 667



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

September 2024

2024 District 11 Hunting Prospects

Thurston and Pierce counties and Lewis County GMU 667

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District 11 hunter G. Reed with his first cougar harvest, 2023. Photo by G. Reed.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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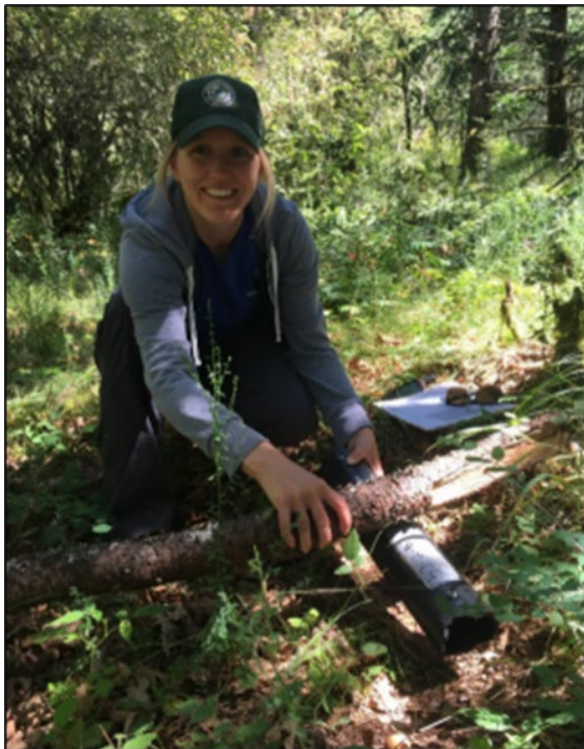
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Your District 11 wildlife management team



Biologist Tirhi collects black bear hair samples as part of a 2020 District 11 bear density monitoring project. Photo by WDFW.

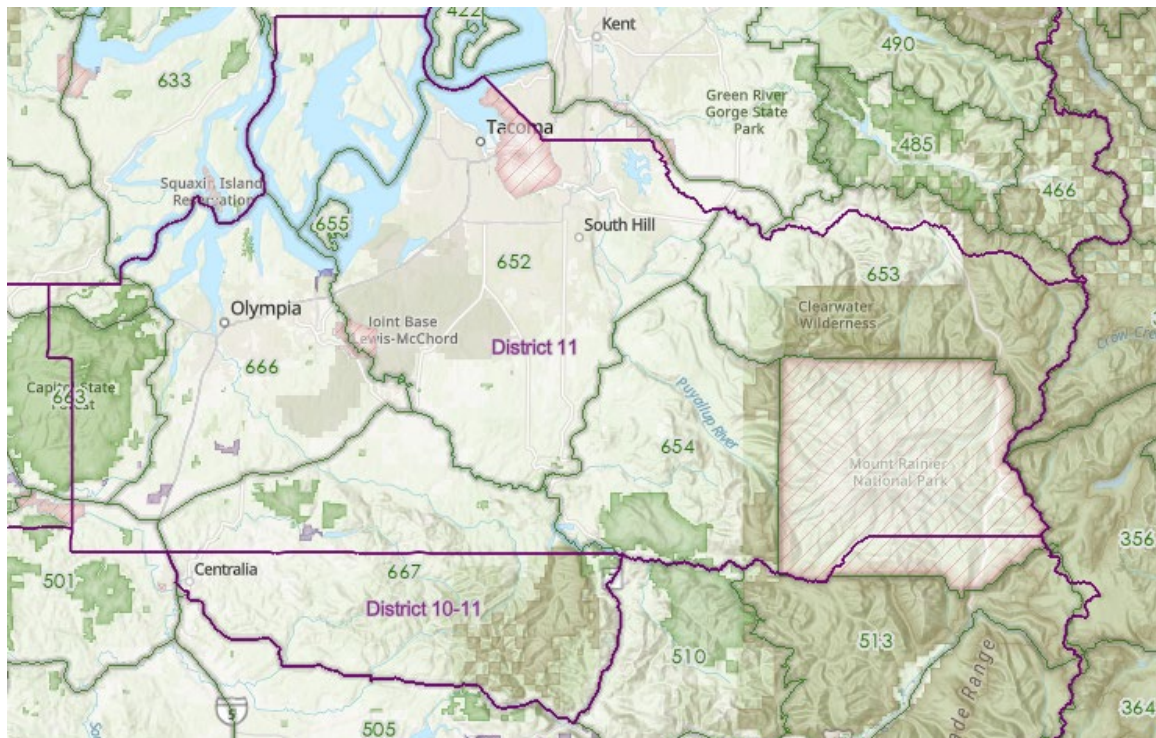


Biologist Butler checks western gray squirrel hair tubes on Joint Base Lewis McChord in 2019. Photo by WDFW.

District overview

The game management units (GMUs) in District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), Anderson Island (GMU 655), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Land ownership in the district includes private residential and agricultural (e.g., GMUs 652 and 666) and private and public industrial timberlands (e.g., GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.

Figure 1. Map depicting the six District 11 game management units and surrounding units in neighboring districts (400s for Region 4 and 500s for Region 5).



Varied hunting opportunity exists within District 11, from waterfowl on Puget Sound waterways to deer, elk, bear, and cougar on commercial forest land. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie wildlife areas (GMU 667), and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654), Tahoma State Forest (GMU 654/667), and additional patchwork ownership in the district provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting on public land. U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land surrounding Mount Rainier National Park in the eastern portion of the district is also accessible. Hunting is not allowed within Mount Rainier National Park.

Western District 11

The western GMUs within District 11 include Anderson Island (GMU 655), Puyallup (GMU 652), Deschutes (666), and the western half of Skookumchuck (GMU 667). This side of the district is more urbanized than the eastern half. Because of this, WDFW often uses hunting regulations and management to stabilize game populations and mitigate wildlife conflicts with humans. For example, WDFW provides hunters in these western GMUs with more liberal seasons and damage hunts for deer and elk. However, urbanization also results in more private property in the western half, and hunters must seek access permission for most hunting. In addition, hunters can only access Anderson Island by private boat or ferry. Despite these hurdles, urbanization in the western GMUs also contributes to less hunting pressure and pockets of higher game species density, in particular deer, elk, coyote, beaver, river otter, and waterfowl.

Eastern District 11

The eastern GMUs within District 11 include White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), and the eastern half of Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Eastern District 11 is characterized by expansive forestland, both public and private, and higher elevation mountainous areas. Most of Mount Rainier National Park lies within District 11 and dominates the southeast corner of the district. Elevation increases eastward across the district, profoundly affecting game species. Habitat condition, food availability, and seasonal migration patterns are all dictated by this gradient and resulting weather patterns. Snowpack from September through July in eastern District 11 affects both game availability and road access; these in turn affect hunting opportunity and success. Those interested in a more rugged, challenging, and mountainous hunting experience will certainly appreciate the eastern half of District 11. Access can be challenging since most of the eastern district is either national or state forest, tribal forestland (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe), or private timberland. Secondary and primitive roads provide access into these forestlands but require hunting by foot or horse away from roads and deep into timber or along river systems and often in snow.

Firearm and weapon restrictions

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston counties. Maps of Pierce County firearm restriction areas are available on the county's [Public GIS tool](#), and Pierce County firearm regulations can be found at: piercecountywa.gov (type firearm regulation in the search button to find a list of related material). Maps of no-shooting and controlled shooting zones in Thurston County can be found at: co.thurston.wa (Open 'Show Me Everything Map,' choose Maps and Layers tab, type 'controlled shooting' in the lower search button, and click the 'controlled shooting zones' layer). Note that fire season can result in both public USFS and private industrial timberlands closing for all access. Hunters should check with the local ranger station for USFS closures before setting out during fire season. The [Incident Information System](#) also includes wildfire updates. Anderson Island is mostly private property with some public access, so much of the island is 'hunt by permission.'

Major public lands

District 11 encompasses parts of two national forests: Gifford Pinchot and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie. USFS land is found primarily in the eastern half of the district, surrounding the northern and western sides of Mount Rainier National Park. This includes the Clearwater Wilderness bordering Mount Rainier on the north. USFS land is free to hunt, but much of it is either permanently or seasonally gated and requires access by foot or horse (reference Road Closure section).

DNR manages 3 million acres of public trust lands in Washington. WDFW manages over 1 million acres of public lands. Outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing, is allowed on most of those lands with a Discover Pass. Visiting Washington state parks also requires a Discover Pass, although hunting is not allowed. Discover Passes may be purchased at discoverpass.wa.gov. WDFW issues a Vehicle Access Pass at no charge with the purchase of any annual hunting, trapping, or fishing license, excluding an annual razor clam or shellfish/seaweed license. A Vehicle Access Pass allows visitors to park at WDFW wildlife and water access areas and is transferable between two vehicles. Review sections below on ways to obtain maps of DNR, WDFW, and Washington State Parks managed lands.

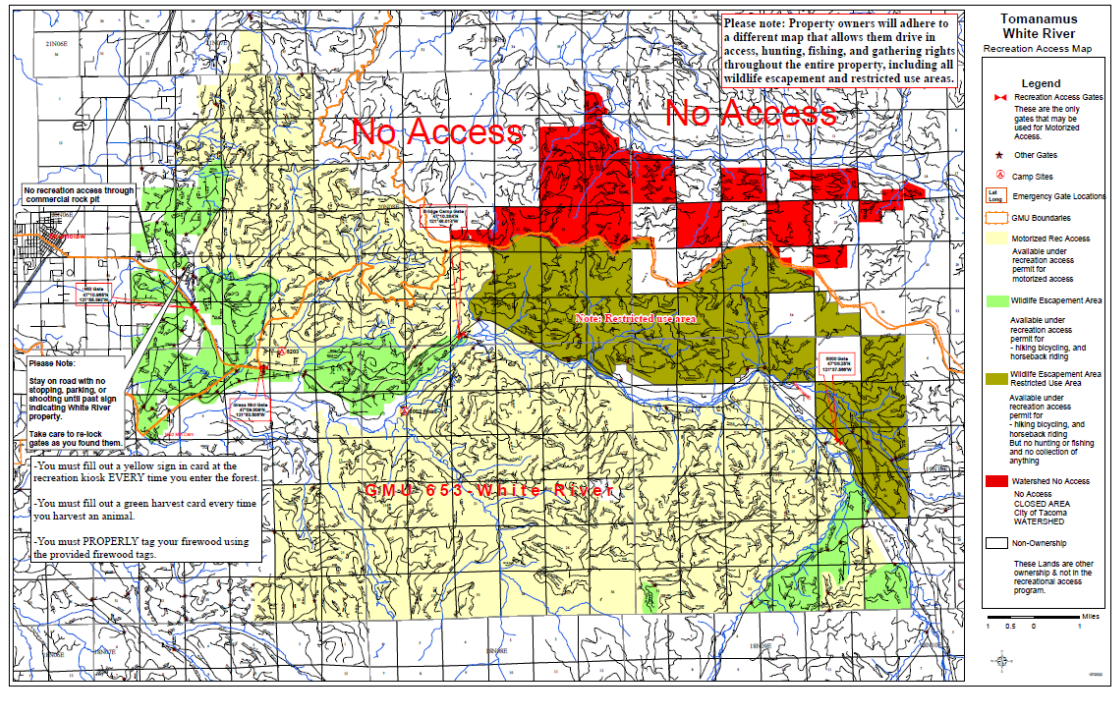
Private industrial forestlands

Timberlands throughout the district are owned or managed by various private commercial timber companies and tribal governments, each having their own access regulations, including some with fee access programs. These lands provide some of the best opportunities for small and large game hunting in District 11.

Muckleshoot

The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe owns the 78,121-acre Tomanamus (White River) Tree Farm along H-410. Hancock Natural Resource Group, later known as Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture Inc. (Manulife), previously owned and managed the land. The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe continues to allow hunting and both non-motorized and motorized access, but only under a fee access program. The license allows access April to December, with no access July 2-5. Starting in 2024, access permits must be purchased directly from the Tribe and will be issued **in person only** at the tribal office in Enumclaw. At the time of this publication, the Tribe was still putting together the process for permits and suggested contacting manager Melissa Calvert at Melissa.Calvert@muckleshoot.nsn.us to be placed on a list to receive a permit. Clearly include contact information in the email and put Requesting Access Permit in the subject line. A map of Muckleshoot Indian Tribe ownership and access is below. For prices, application process, and rules and conditions for the fee access program contact the Muckleshoot Wildlife Program at 253-876-3266.

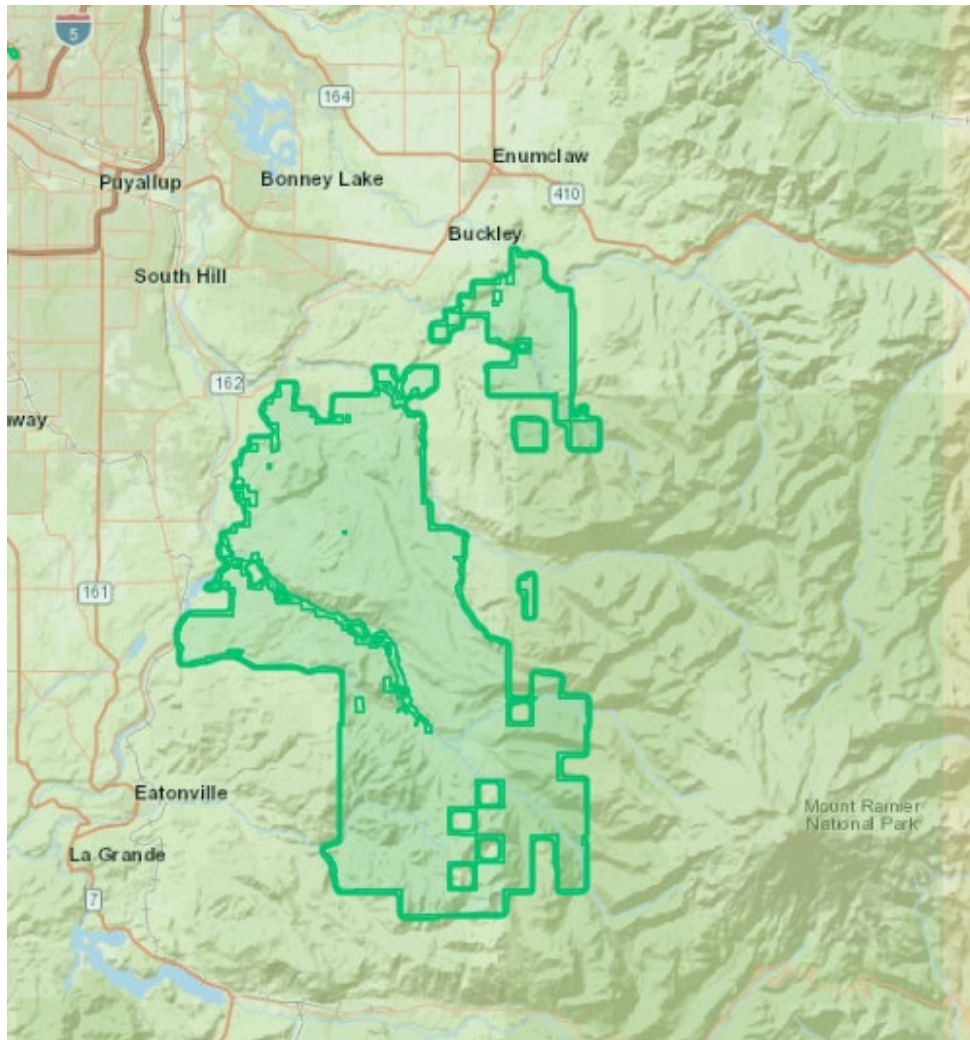
Figure 2. Muckleshoot Indian Tribe's Tomanamus (White River) Tree Farm and access.



Manulife

Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture Inc. (Manulife, previously known as Hancock Forest Management) continues to own 103,462 acres of the Kapowsin Tree Farm but has sold a significant amount of land to other companies and tribes. A Manulife Recreation Access License is required for motorized and non-motorized access. Maps of this tree farm, along with prices, application process, rules, and conditions for the fee access program, can be found at hancockrecreation.com Elk hunters should read about the limitations on general season elk hunting before purchase by opening the PDF at that site titled 'Promotional Contest of Chance.' Elk and deer hunters: refer to the Kapowsin Permit Area Rules PDF also found at the link above for special restrictions on hunting both species. Other timber companies have small inholdings within the Kapowsin Tree Farm that may have additional access restrictions. Currently, most permits allow access from April 1 to March 30, with no access the first week of July or during bull elk seasons.

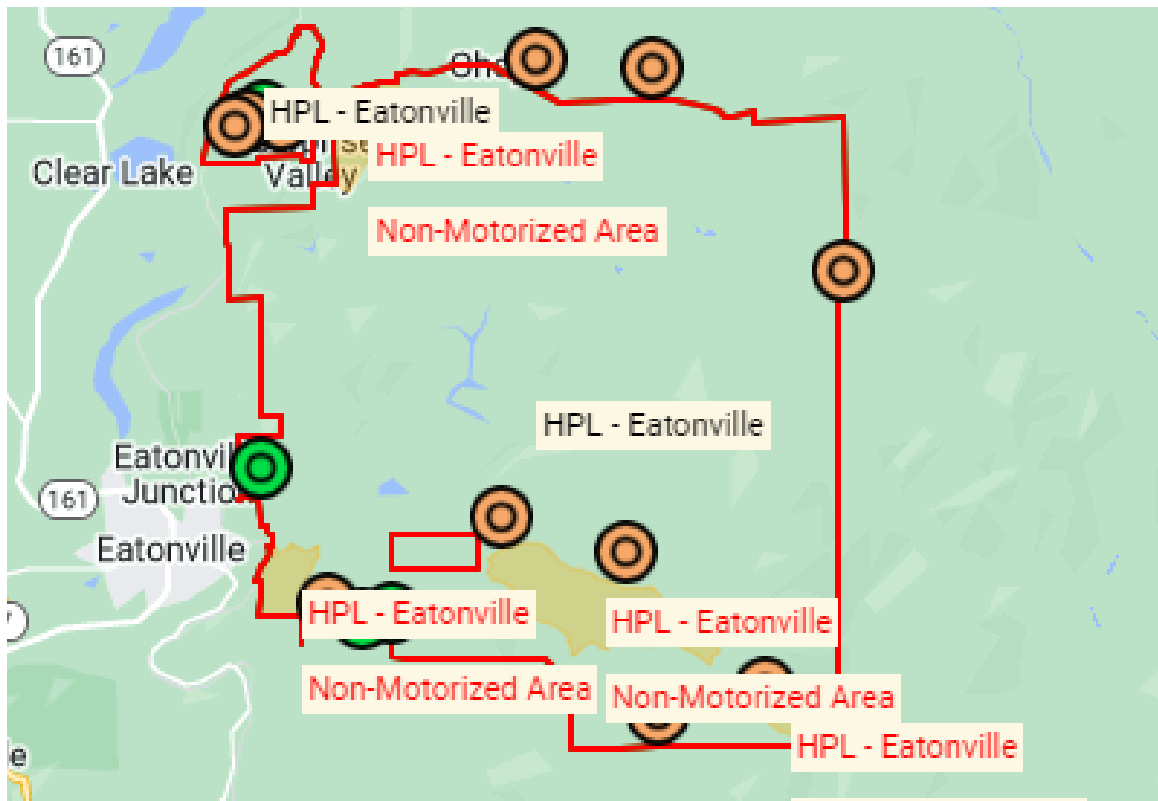
Figure 3. Manulife's Kapowsin Tree Farm.



Hampton Lumber

[Hampton Tree Farms](#) owns and manages the 53,000-acre Eatonville Forest. A recreational access permit is required and can be purchased through [My Outdoor Agent](#) (scroll down and choose West to find Eatonville Motorized Permit details). The recreation term begins May 1 and ends Dec. 31 each year. The property is closed to all recreation access from Jan. 1 to April 30.

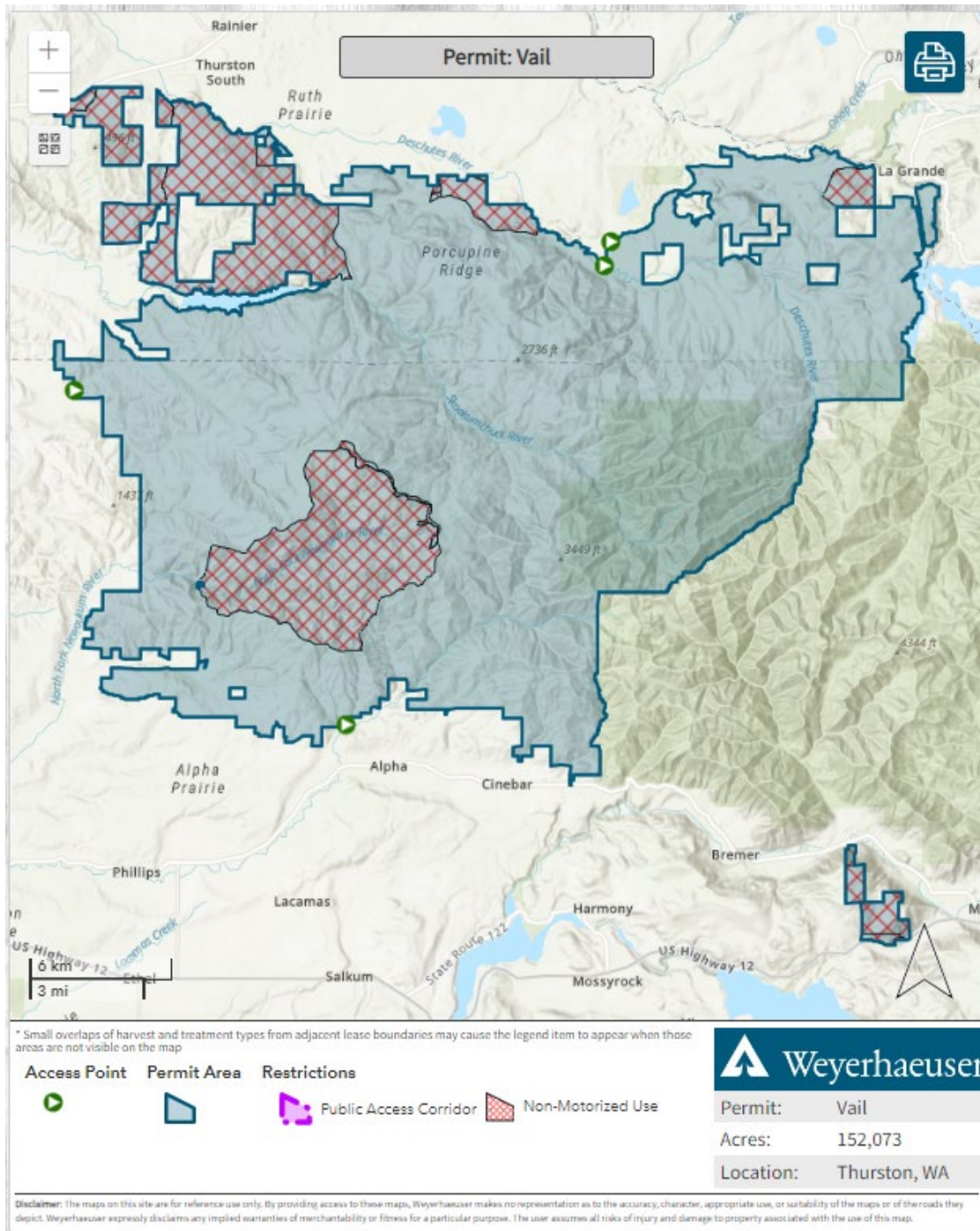
Figure 4. Hampton Lumber's Eatonville Tree Farm.



Weyerhaeuser

Weyerhaeuser owns property across District 11, including the 152,073-acre Vail Tree Farm in GMUs 654 and 667. A recreational access permit is required for all Weyerhaeuser property. Two types of programs are available: lease and permit. Three types of permits are available: motorized, motorized premium, and non-motorized. Motorized and non-motorized permits go on sale in spring (dates and times are announced on the website in April) and allow access for one year (August through the following July). They typically sell out well in advance of the hunting season. All forestry operations continue during the permit season. Information on leases and permits can be found on [Weyerhaeuser's recreation page](#).

Figure 5. Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm.



Port Blakely

Port Blakely owns two parcels just east of Delphi Road SW and three parcels south of Old Highway 99 (just east of the Highway 12/Interstate 5 interchange) that are open for non-motorized public access only, including walking, bicycle, and horse. Information on the Port Blakely public access program can be found [at PortBlakely.com](http://PortBlakely.com).

Manke Lumber Co.

Manke Lumber Co. owns a few smaller forestland parcels in District 11. The [company website](#) has no information regarding access for recreation; hunters are encouraged to contact the company directly with questions.

Major timber company contact information

In eastern Pierce County (GMUs 652, 653, and 654), the following ownership and contact information may be found (hover over name for direct link to company website):

- [Hampton Lumber/Mid Valley Resources](#) (access managed under Manulife Access Program)
- [Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture](#) (Phone: 800-782-1493)
- [Muckleshoot Indian Tribe](#) (access managed by Manulife Access Program)
- [Rayonier Forest Products, Timber & Land Management Company](#)
- [Manke Lumber Company](#)

In Thurston County (GMUs 666 and 667):

- [Manke Lumber Company](#)
- [Port Blakely](#)
- [Weyerhaeuser](#)
- Bascom Pacific LLC (no website available)

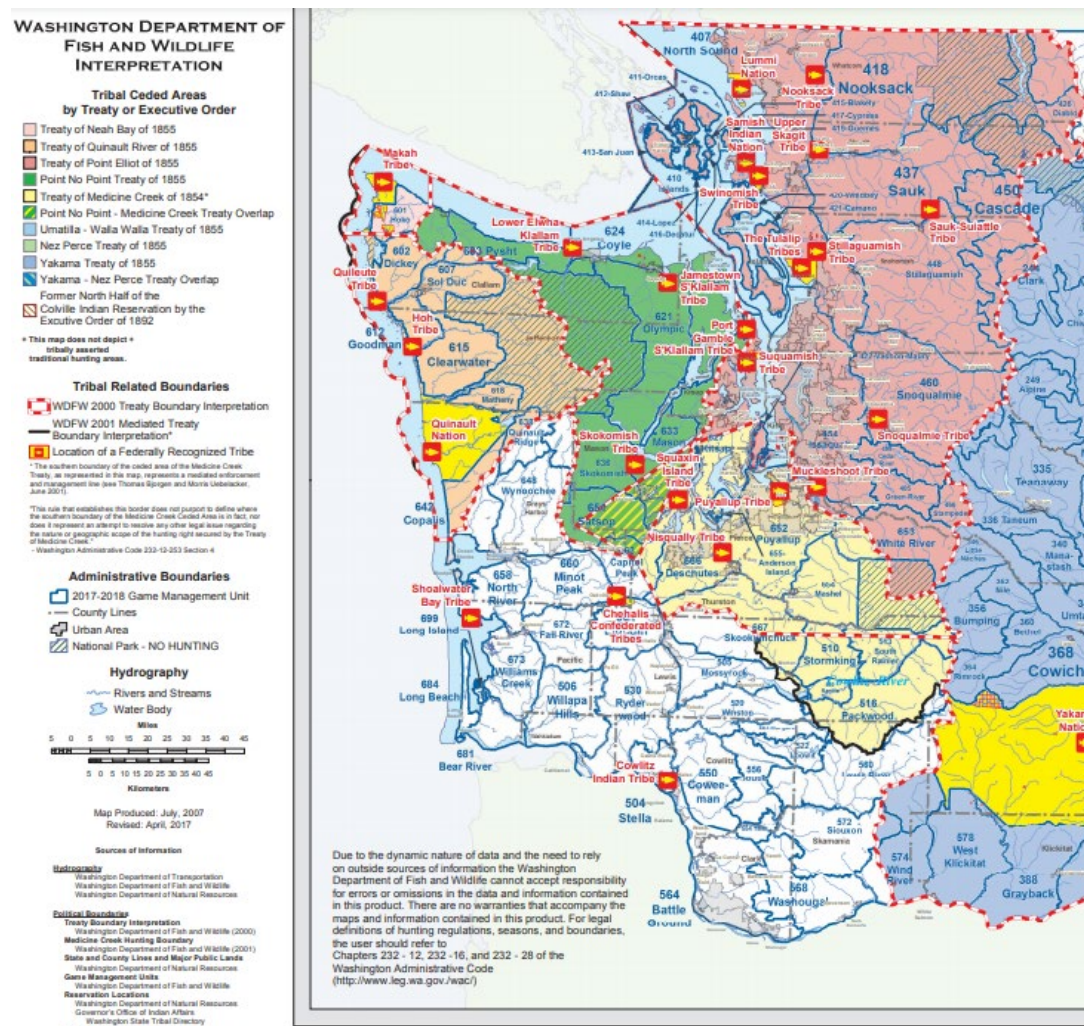
Anderson Island (GMU 655) is almost entirely privately owned with the exception of small parks that either the Anderson Island Park & Recreation District or [Pierce County](#) own. Hunting and trapping are prohibited on all parks owned by Anderson Island. For location and rules, reference. Hunters and fishers visiting Anderson Island should secure permission to access private property.

Tribal hunting

District 11 is within the ceded area of the Treaty of Medicine Creek of 1854 and the Treaty of Point Elliot of 1856 (reference graphic below). WDFW and tribal governments cooperatively manage wildlife populations. Treaty tribes with off-reservation hunting rights can hunt within their ceded areas or traditional hunting areas. Tribal hunting often occurs concurrent with WDFW hunting seasons. Tribal governments set their own seasons and bag limits. Tribal Enforcement personnel are responsible for ensuring compliance with tribal hunting regulations, which may differ from state regulations. Several tribes have entered into cooperative agreements with WDFW regarding hunting; those agreements can be found on [WDFW's website](#).

Tribal big game harvest reports are available at the Northwest Indian Fisheries [Commission website](#).

Figure 8. Tribal ceded areas of Western Washington.



Road closures

Table 1. Current road closures in effect in District 11.

GMU	Name	Roads closed	Purpose	Dates
653*	Greenwater River / White River	USFS Roads 7010, 7012, 7013, 7160, 72	Elk winter range	Dec. 15 – May 1
653*	Greenwater River / White River	USFS Roads 70 (beyond milepost 10.3), 7060, 73	Winter recreation Sno-Park	Dec. 15 – May 1
653*	Greenwater River	USFS Roads 7012-240, 7020, 70-223, 7080-210	Wildlife closures	Year-round
654	Mashel	Manulife/ORM/Hampton/Muckleshoot forestlands	Private industrial timberland	Year-round, except special permittee access**
654	Mashel	DNR Elbe Hills Road 5	Disabled Hunter Program	Sept. 1 – March 1 except special permittee access***
667	Skookumchuck	Portion of Skookumchuck Wildlife Area	Restricted dam operation area, with exception of Disabled Hunter Program	Year-round, except special permittee access***
667	Skookumchuck	Weyerhaeuser forestlands	Private industrial timberland	Year-round, except special permittee access**

*Non-motorized traffic is allowed beyond all these gates.

**Review private lands access information above for fee access programs.

***Visit [WDFW disabled hunter road access entry program](#) for these areas.

Hunting organizations

Below is a list of known hunting organizations active in District 11. If other organizations should be included in this document, please contact WDFW.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

[Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation \(rmef.org\)](http://rmef.org)

Alex Baier 425-293-2160

Abaier@rmef.org

Washington Waterfowl Association

Grays Harbor Chapter (Thurston and Lewis counties)

washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Grays-Harbor

Southwest Chapter (Pierce County)

washingtonwaterfowl.org/Chapters/Southwest

Washington Mule Deer Foundation

muledeer.org/state/washington/

Puget Sound Blacktail Chapter - WA 0115

Tacoma, WA 98360

Stephanie Cordes

253-232-3133

cordessj@plu.edu

Eyes in the Woods

eyesinthewoods.org

Washington Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

backcountryhunters.org/washington

Cameron Lankhaar, West Side Co-Chair

washington@backcountryhunters.org

Ducks Unlimited - Washington

ducks.org/washington

Izaak Walton League of America, Greater Seattle Chapter

iwla.org/local-chapters

A. William Way

425-868-4759

bway@watershedco.com

3451 E. Lake Sammamish Lane NE, Sammamish, WA 98074

Washington Brant Foundation

wabrant.org

Maynard Axelson 360-445-6681

info@wabrant.org

15929 Fir Island Road, Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Washington Outdoor Women

washingtonoutdoorwomen.org

P.O. Box 1656, Bellevue, WA 98009-1656

Online tools and maps

Hunters and anglers can find maps and land ownership information at the following:

- [Pierce County](#)
- [Thurston County](#)
- [Lewis County](#)
- [WDFW statewide](#)
- [WDFW hunt planner](#)

DNR maps have some of the best combination of land ownership and current roads. However, ownership exchanges between DNR and private forestland may not show up on older maps. To reference current DNR ownership, visit [DNR Map Resources | WA - DNR](#).

To order DNR maps online visit: [Recreation Guide](#).

Maps of the two state forests within District 11, Elbe Hills and Tahoma, as well as other DNR-managed lands can be found at [Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests | WA - DNR](#).

For questions about buying maps for a store, call 360-664-4343. For questions about roads in District 11, call the DNR office in Enumclaw at 360-802-7055.

Other maps that can be helpful for select areas include:

Forest Service online

Many USFS maps can be downloaded for free at [Maps | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#).

District 11 USFS maps

Maps of the two national forests found in District 11, Gifford Pinchot and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, can be downloaded or purchased at:

[Gifford Pinchot National Forest - Maps & Publications \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest - Maps & Publications \(usda.gov\)](#)

Other maps

Topographic maps can be custom built and printed at CalTopo: [Map the Backcountry with CalTopo](#)

OnX app: Many hunters use the OnX mobile phone app, especially since maps can be downloaded for use when cell service is unavailable: [onX: GPS Map Apps for Hunting, Hiking & Off-Roading \(onxmaps.com\)](#)

WDFW strongly encourages hunters to read more in-depth **WDFW hunting management and planning materials** by visiting the following:

- [WDFW hunting webpage](#)
- [WDFW game management materials](#)
- [The 2015-2021 Game Management Plan](#)
 - Note: The updated Game Management Plan process began in 2023.
- [The Game Status and Trend Report](#)
- [Hunting seasons and regulations](#)

2024 Forage moisture conditions and fire

Snowpack is the most reliable indicator of moisture levels that contribute to forage persistence for large and small game through hunting seasons. This moisture level also affects the rate and intensity of the fire season, which has additional impact to forage persistence. The best measure of moisture for browse is the snow water equivalent and as a comparison to percent of normal. Going into summer, the South Puget Sound area of District 11 was at 70-89% of median normal (Figure 8). This suggests good browse and forage availability to game species for reproduction and survival as we lead into the hunting seasons. Similarly, District 11’s precipitation levels (non-snowpack) are also currently at 70-89% of median normal, which again should increase forage for game species, aiding survival and reproduction (Figure 9). For the most current information on climate trends and status for Washington, visit the [Office of Washington State Climatologist](#).

Figure 9. Washington snow water equivalent as percent of median for the period 1991 – 2020 (Natural Resources Conservation Service).

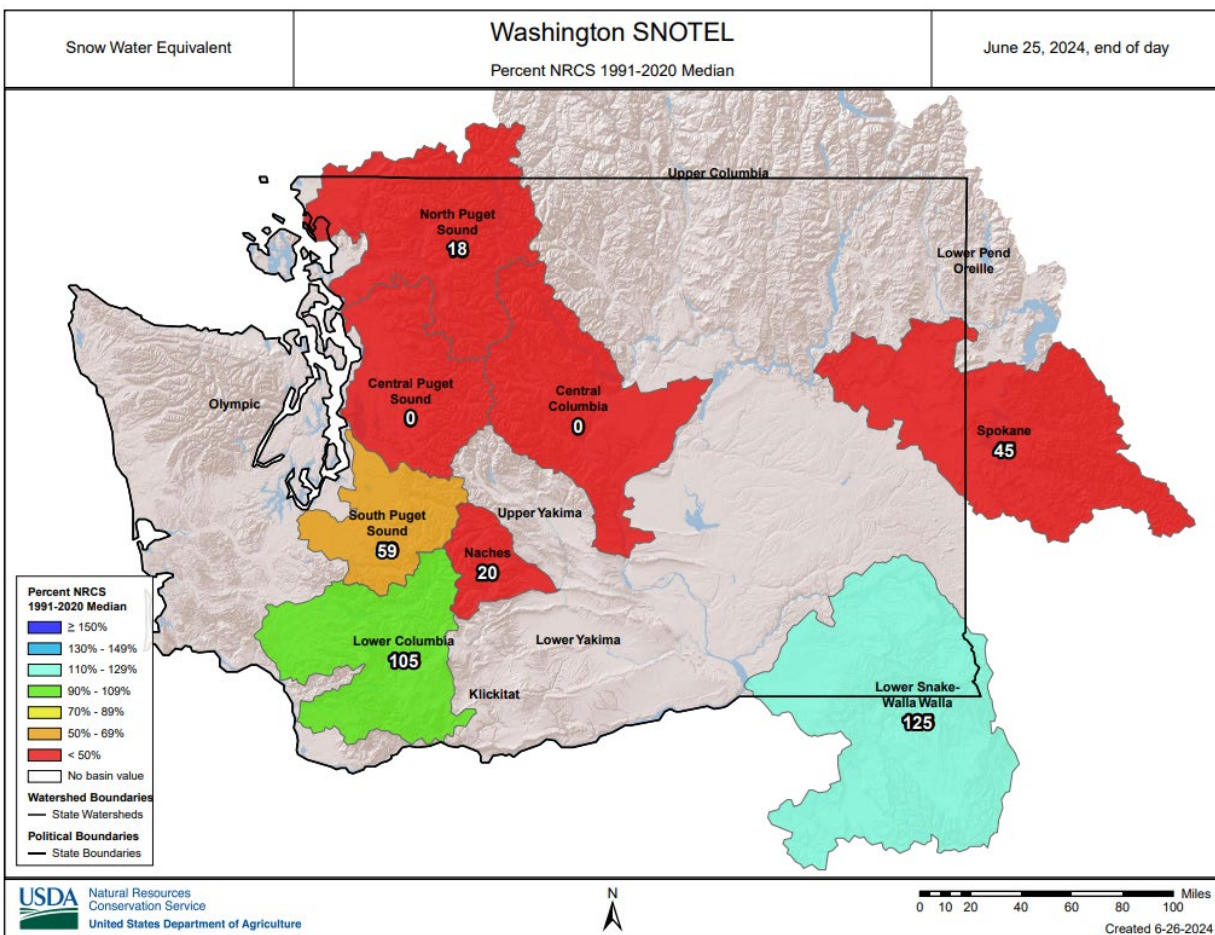
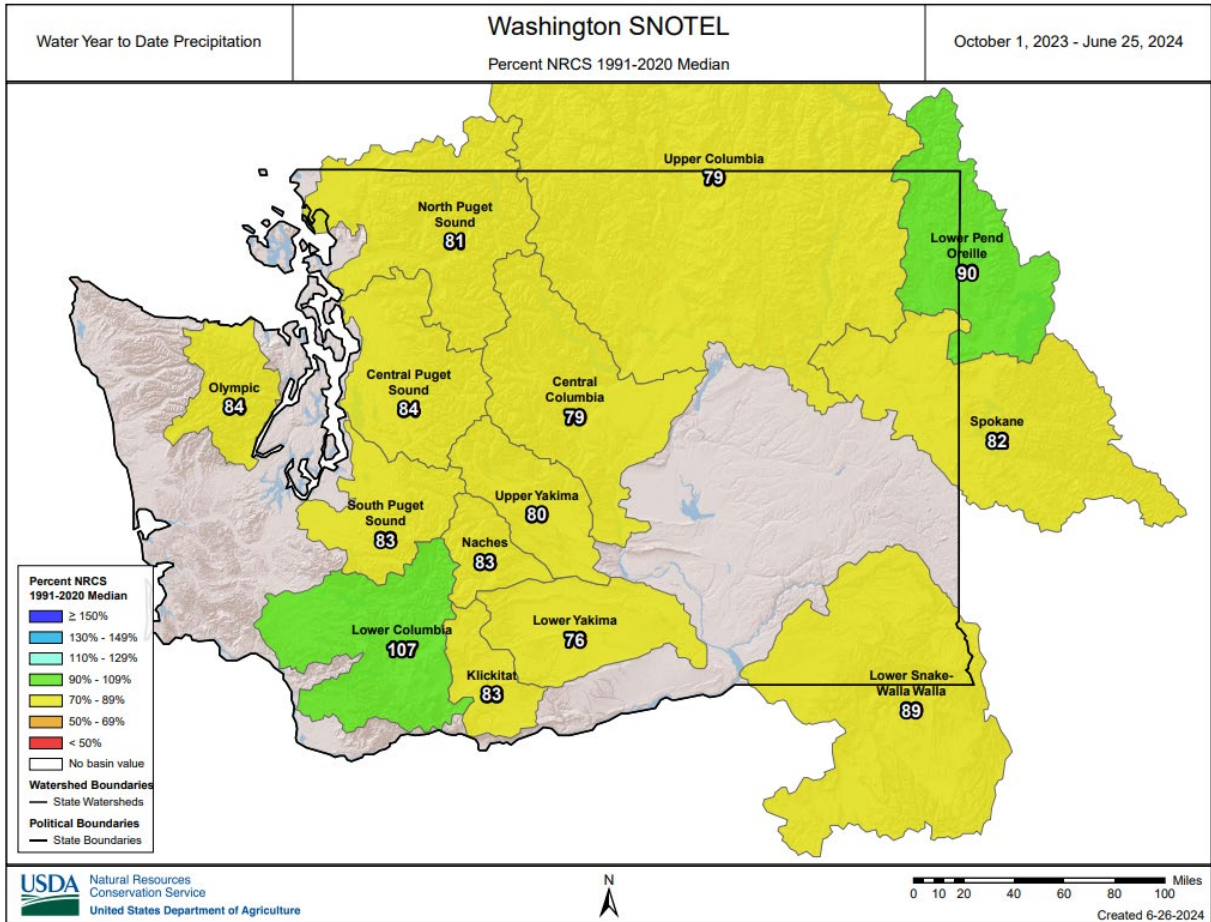


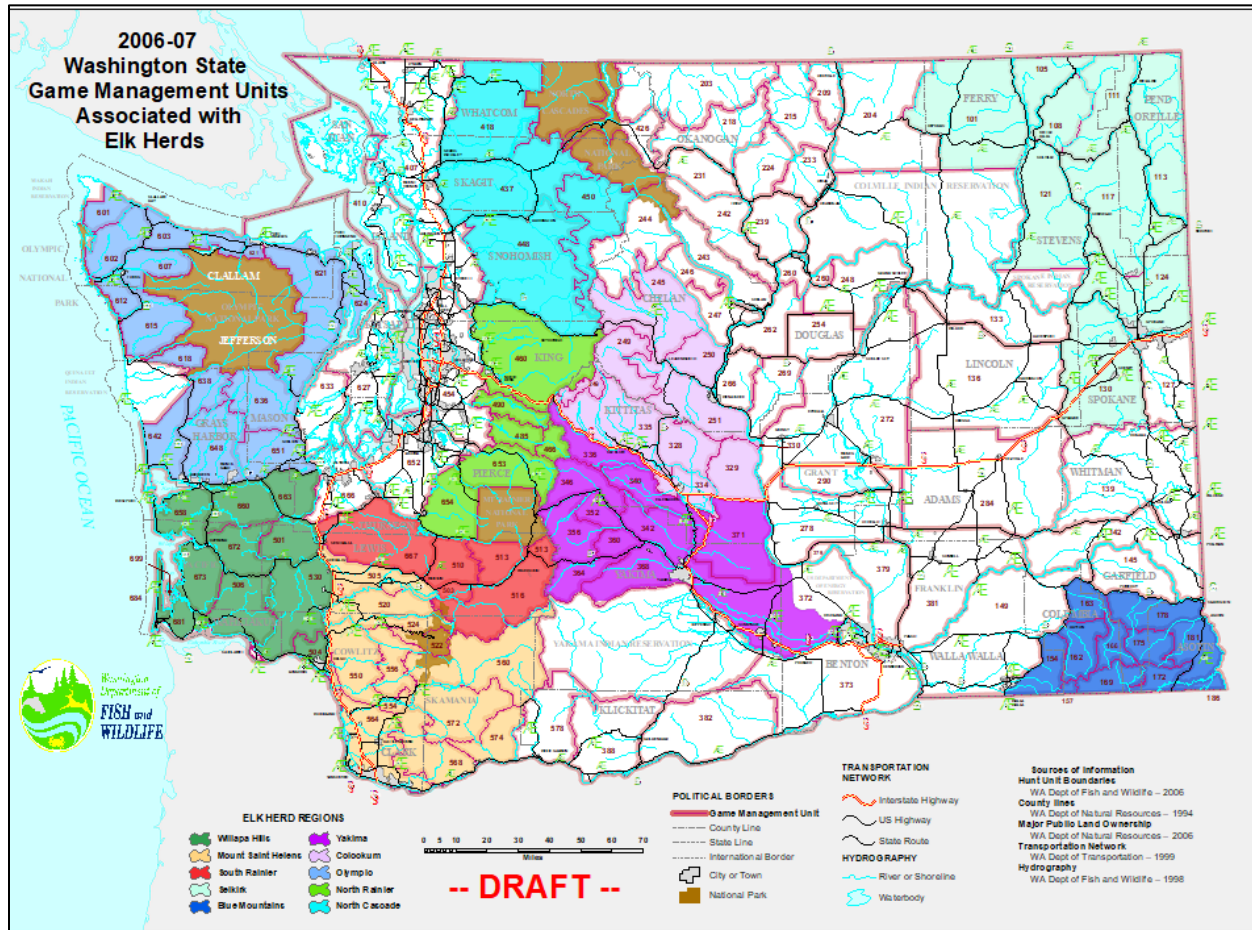
Figure 10. Washington water year-to-date precipitation as percent of median for the period 1991 – 2020 (Natural Resources Conservation Service).



Elk

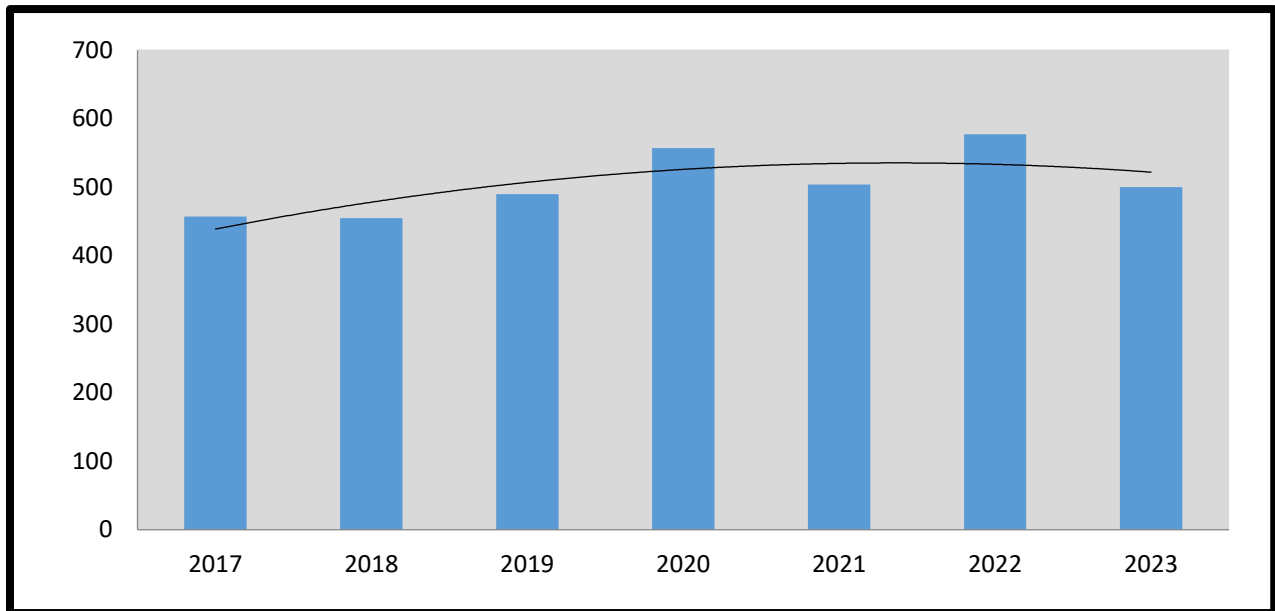
Both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainier high country and follow river drainages to low elevations. The most complete overview of each herd can be found in the [North Rainier Elk Herd Plan \(2020\)](#) or the [South Rainier Elk Herd Plan \(2002\)](#).

Figure 11. The 10 elk herds of Washington.



The long-term elk harvest trend has continued to increase in District 11 but dropped slightly in 2023 compared to 2022. Regardless, elk availability should continue to be similar to or slightly better than previous years in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier herds continue to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 20 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit recovery in the North Rainier herd. Hunters annually report quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull-only permit hunt.

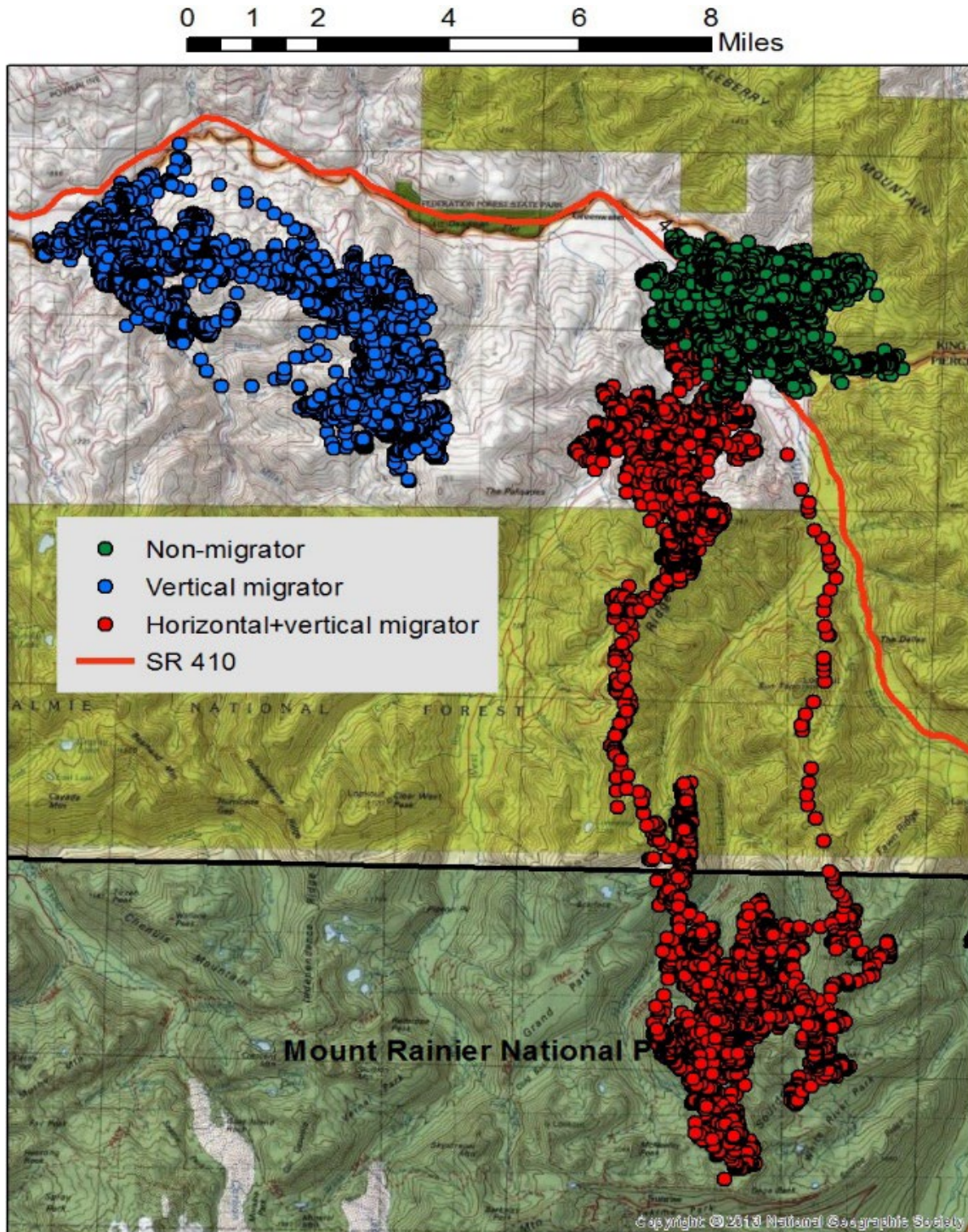
Figure 12. General season elk harvest, all weapons combined, District 11.



Some elk that summer at mid and high elevations within Mount Rainier National Park migrate out of the park to lower-elevation winter range before snowfall. Some migrate out with first snowfall, and others remain until there is deep snow. The majority migrate when there is less than a foot of snow on the ground (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe unpublished data). Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. WDFW encourages hunters to scout for elk leaving Mount Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northward into the Clearwater Wilderness Area, the White River into the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, and the Nisqually River to the southern part of the district. Hunting is not permitted within Mount Rainier National Park.

USFS lands in GMU 653 off Highway 410, including roads 71, 73, and 74, Bullion Basin/Pickhandle Basin, and Big Crow Basin east of Crystal Mountain Ski Resort (outside ski boundaries once ski season officially opens) offer good opportunity for high-elevation, rugged elk hunting with plenty of robust elk. Hunters can also access this area via the Pacific Crest Trail to the east. Elk begin to come down to the lower elevations bordering H-410 in October, when the first higher-elevation snows begin. Some resident elk remain at lower elevations year-round but will be joined by the migratory portion of each herd. The White River drainage from Haller Pass west to the White River and both north and south of that area all support high numbers of elk. The timbered areas behind the Greenwater Fire Station along H-410 frequently have elk. After the gate closes Dec. 15, hunters must walk into this area (review Road Closure section). High meadows off H-410, such as Grand Park, are traditional rut areas for elk, which may remain there until heavy snows force them lower. A bull-only permit hunt has applied to these areas in GMU 653 since 2006.

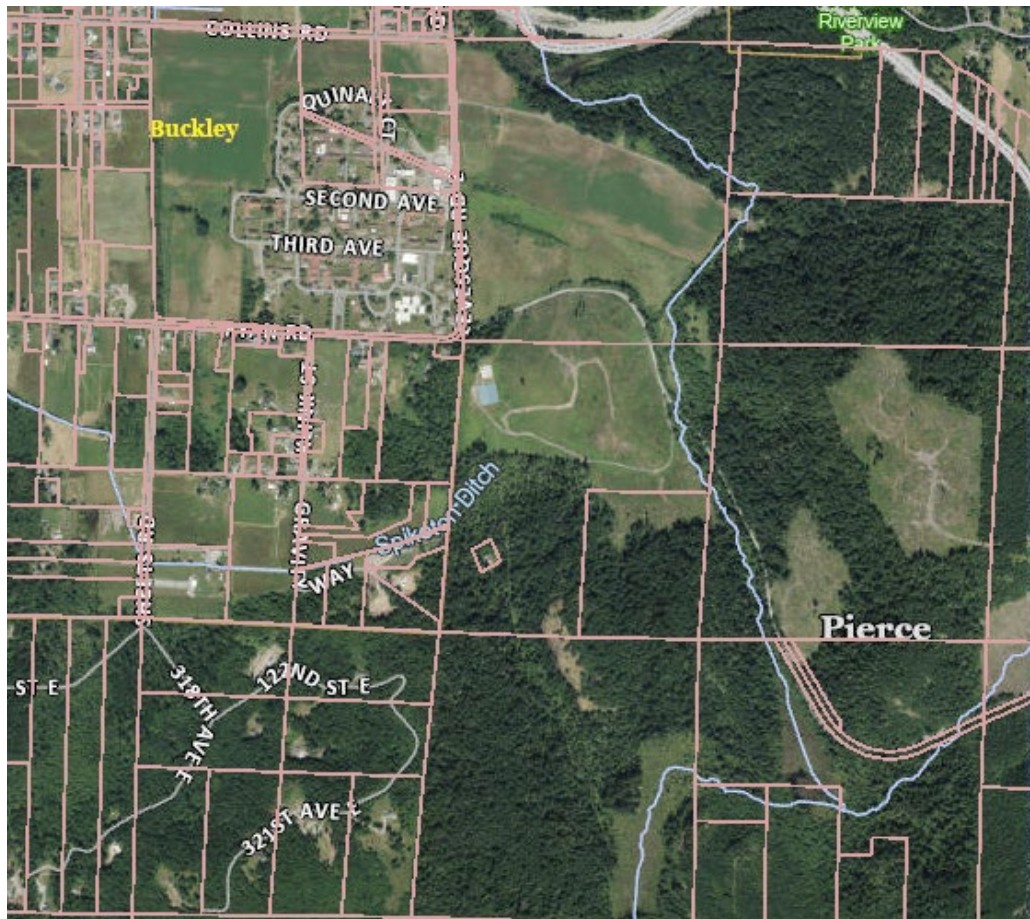
Figure 13. Examples of elk migration for three GPS-marked elk in GMU 653, showing non-migrator, vertical migrator, and horizontal+vertical migrator. The horizontal+vertical migrator (57% of study animals) moves to Mount Rainier National Park in summer. In summer, the vertical migrator (23%) moves to higher elevation that is adjacent to winter range, but also may use its winter range in summer. The non-migrator (20%) uses the same range year-round. (Muckleshoot Tribe of Indians unpublished data).



USFS, which permits the Crystal Mountain Ski Resort, reminds hunters that service roads built and maintained by the ski resort are not open to the public. Hunters may ask the resort for permission to haul out a harvested animal. Hunting is allowed in the [Clearwater](#), [Glacier View](#), and [Norse Peak](#) wilderness areas of the district [following hunting regulations](#).

Hunters are also likely to find elk outside the western boundary of Mount Rainier National Park in the Carbon River drainage in GMU 653 and accessed via USFS roads south and east of the towns of Wilkeson and Carbonado to the national park boundary. Fewer roads characterize this area, but also fewer hunters and recreationists. This landscape rises steeply to the east but provides a decent road network that may be worth scouting, especially timber harvest areas. Obey posted signs regarding quarry truck traffic and speed limit. Forestland between Highways 165 and 162 is dominated by Manulife-managed private commercial timberlands that require a fee access permit. Private commercial timberlands owned by Weyerhaeuser, Olympic Resource Management, and Fruit Growers Association in this area are NOT open for public access. A small area of fenced, non-developed public land that the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services manages along Buckley's eastern boundary is NOT OPEN for hunting.

Figure 14. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services lands open for hunting (White River School District).



The Elbe Hills and Tahoma state forests and University of Washington Charles Lathrop Pack Experimental and Demonstration Forest (Pack Forest) in GMU 654 are good prospects for deer or elk and can be accessed by foot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. Pack Forest managers caution hunters to be aware of students conducting research in the forest any time of the year. The Elbe Hills State Forest has limited vehicle access during the elk season: the entire 5 Road is closed, the 8 Road is open from Ashford to Scott Turner Road, and the 6 Road is closed except for hunters with a disabled access permit (review Road Closure section). Much of the Tahoma State Forest is also closed to vehicle access due to the ski hut management program and various road and bridge washouts. Hunters can legally walk, bike, or horse ride behind locked gates for hunting unless otherwise posted. DNR's Elbe Hills State Forest also provides access for disabled hunters through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early archery, two early muzzleloader, and two modern firearm disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on this state forest.

Sub-herds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and [Skookumchuck Wildlife Area](#) (GMU 667). WDFW encourages hunters to scout from the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is allowed only under specialized permits provided through the Landowner Hunting Permit. Only elk and waterfowl hunting are allowed on the mine; elk hunting is an escorted hunt only, and waterfowl hunting is open but is managed through a sign-up process (review Waterfowl Section). TransAlta, which owns the mine, is once again providing one senior and one disabled permit hunt on the mine for a total of 10 permits over two weekends (reference WDFW Hunting Regulations on applying for special permit hunts). The WDFW Skookumchuck Unit also provides access through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early muzzleloader, one late muzzleloader, and two modern firearm disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on the unit.

Some elk can occasionally be found and hunted on WDFW's [West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area](#) and on [Joint Base Lewis McChord](#) (JBLM) military property in Thurston County near the town of Rainier (GMU 666). JBLM changed its recreational access management system in 2023 and is now implementing a computer and smartphone-based platform called iSportsman. Learn about hunting, fishing, and other recreation [on JBLM's website](#).

In northwestern Thurston County, elk are found off Delphi Road SW and neighboring power lines (GMU 666). Elk cannot be hunted on property owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) near 123rd Avenue SW in the Black River refuge of GMU 666 (former Weaks Dairy) but can be hunted by landowner permission on private lands surrounding the refuge.

Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Orting, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Road SW). Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation. Hunters must request landowner permission to access private lands and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season. Elk Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced to encompass primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. Several hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aim to conserve elk for tribal purposes on

the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 was expanded and provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season, early and late archery and muzzleloader seasons, and three winter antlerless hunts allowing up to 10 elk per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is made up mostly of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes and supports about 150-200 elk. Access to these properties is limited and interested hunters are encouraged to obtain access before applying for these permits.

Two senior permit elk hunts (10 permits total) for controlling private property damage are also provided in the Hanaford Elk Area 6069 of GMU 667. Finally, general Coastal Region (Region 6) Master Hunter elk permits are available. Hunters drawn are often sent as needed to damage properties in the Buckley/Enumclaw and Hanaford areas and elsewhere in the region but must be available to hunt on a 24-hour notice.

General season elk harvest has increased slightly over the past seven years within GMUs 652, 666, and 667 [combined these make up Elk Population Management Unit (PMU) 62], despite a slight decline in harvest by modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters from 2022 to 2023. Prospects should remain on average in these GMUs, with the highest success possible for archery hunters based on the seven-year trend.

Figure 15. Number of elk harvested in Elk Population Management Unit 62 comprised of GMUs 652, 666, and 667.

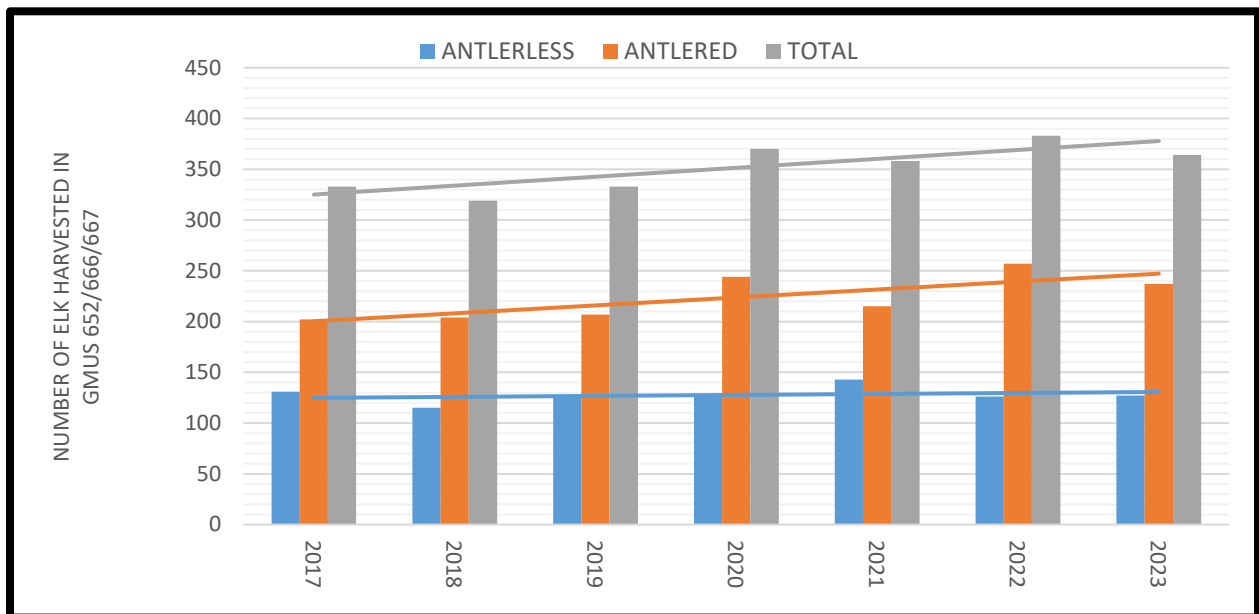
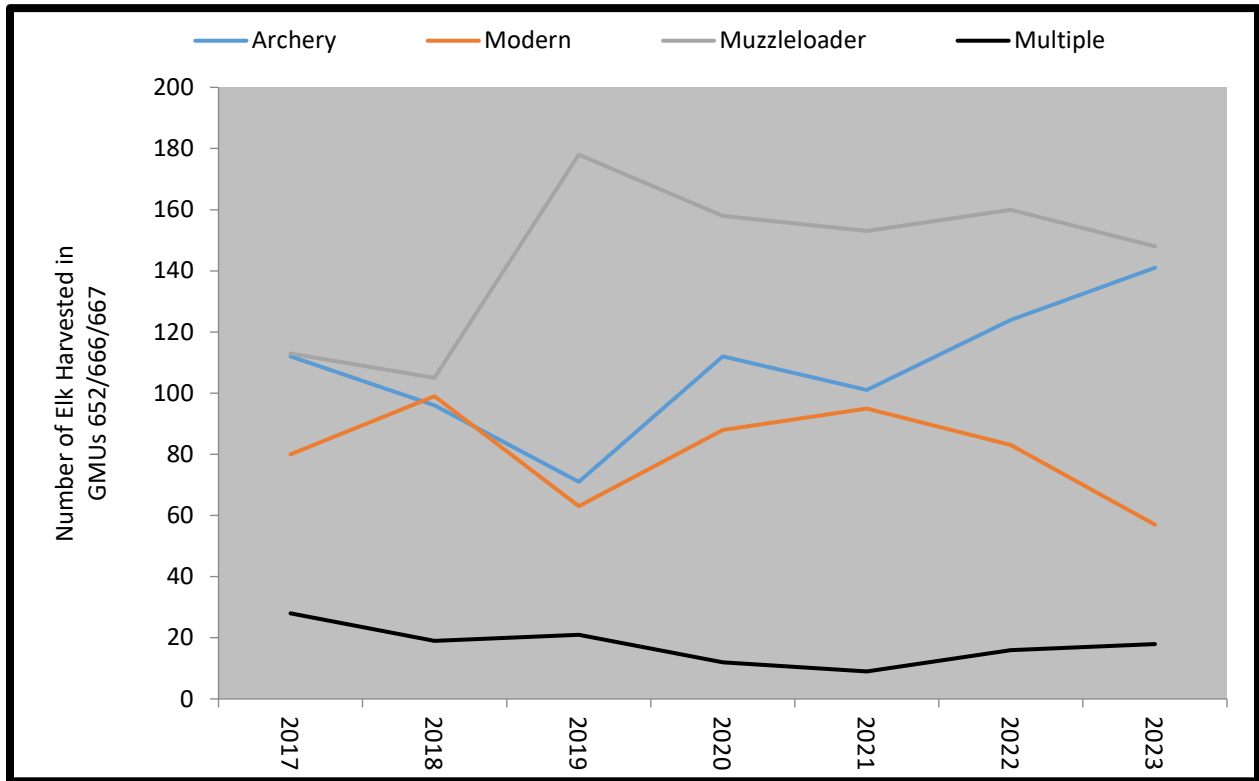


Figure 16. Elk harvest by weapon type in Elk Population Management Unit 62 comprised of GMUs 652, 666, and 667.



Elk harvest trends have also increased in GMUs 653 and 654 over the past seven years (combined these make up Elk PMU 67) but have fluctuated over the past four, including a decline in 2023. Antlerless harvest is only permitted in GMU 654 of PMU 67, and this harvest trend is increasing, slightly spurred by damage removal hunts for elk to abate increasing property damage caused by an increasing elk sub-herd. District 11 changed the boundaries of Elk Damage Hunt Area 6054 in 2019 to focus the hunt on properties experiencing damage. All weapon types experienced a harvest decline in this unit in 2023.

Figure 17. Number of elk harvested in Elk Population Management Unit 67 comprised of GMUs 653 and 654.

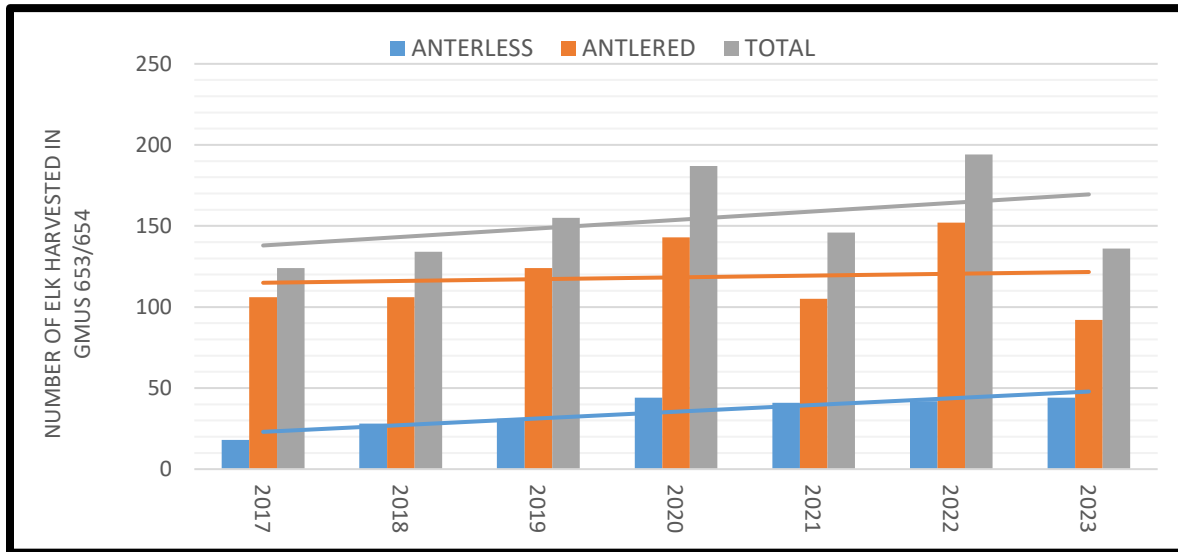
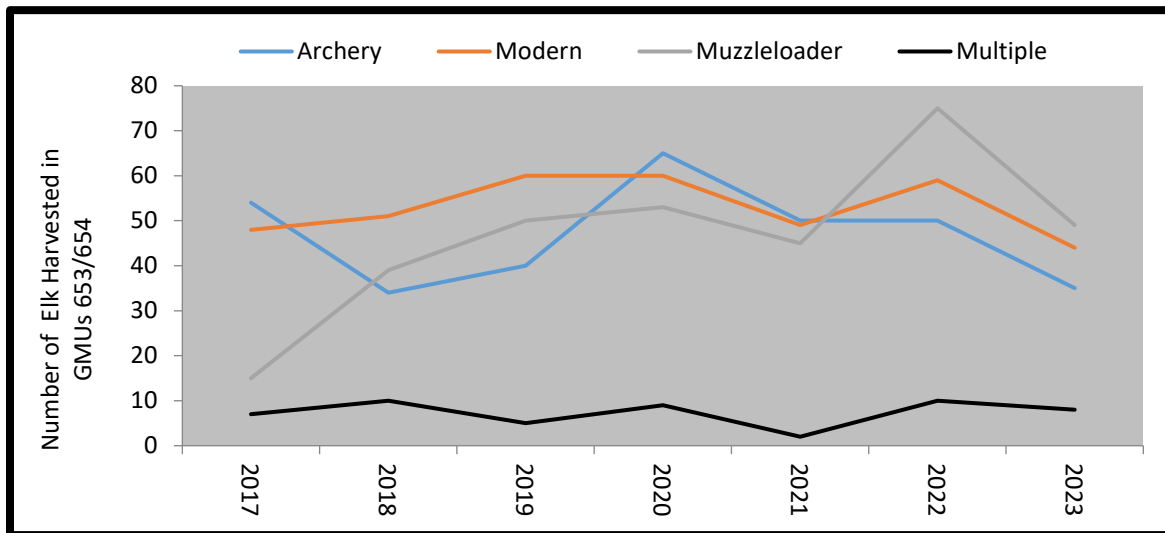


Figure 18. Elk harvest by weapon type in Elk Population Management Unit 67 comprised of GMUs 653 and 654.



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667, Manulife-managed forestland (Kapowsin in GMU 654), Hampton Lumber’s Eatonville Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Muckleshoot Indian Tribe’s Tomanamus White River Tree Farm in GMU 653 all support elk but require vehicle access permits (review Private Commercial Timberland section for information). Individuals who buy a Manulife recreational access license may enter a free drawing to participate in the GMU 654 limited elk hunt each year. Eleven recreational access licenses are drawn to hunt elk on the Kapowsin timberlands: five modern firearm, three archery, and three muzzleloader. One recreational access license holder is also drawn to hunt elk on the Eatonville timberlands under the GMU 654 elk season. No recreational access is allowed on the Buckley timberlands in GMU 653 during any bull elk season. Interested hunters who have purchased a

Manulife access license will find the drawing application [on Hancock’s website](#) (open the PDF titled “Promotional Contest of Chance”). Hunters must be drawn for a WDFW bull elk permit to hunt elk on the White River timberlands in GMU 653. The Kapowsin and Eatonville drawing occurs in early May, and once winners have been notified, names are posted on the Manulife recreation website.

District 11 hunters harvest the greatest number of elk in GMUs 652 and 654 (reference charts below). Harvest spiked in GMU 652 in 2020 — possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed hunters more recreation time, or the increase in archery and muzzleloader opportunity — but has since declined. GMU 654 saw a significant decline in elk harvest from 2022 to 2023. GMUs 666 and 667 have significantly lower harvest because of fewer elk in both GMUs and difficult access onto private properties in GMU 666. More elk in GMU 667 can be found in the southern half of the Vail Tree Farm and southward to the Centralia Coal Mine.

GMU 653 is restricted to a bull-only permit hunt during general firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. Antlerless harvest is only allowed in the section of elk damage area 6014 that overlaps GMU 653 in the northeastern portion of the GMU near Buckley. Elk harvest trends in the GMU 653 permit hunt have fluctuated slightly over the past seven years except for a slight dip in 2017 and 2020. Hunter success has averaged 60%, making it a descent prospect for those lucky enough to be drawn for the hunt.

Figure 19. GMU 652 general season harvest (all weapons combined).

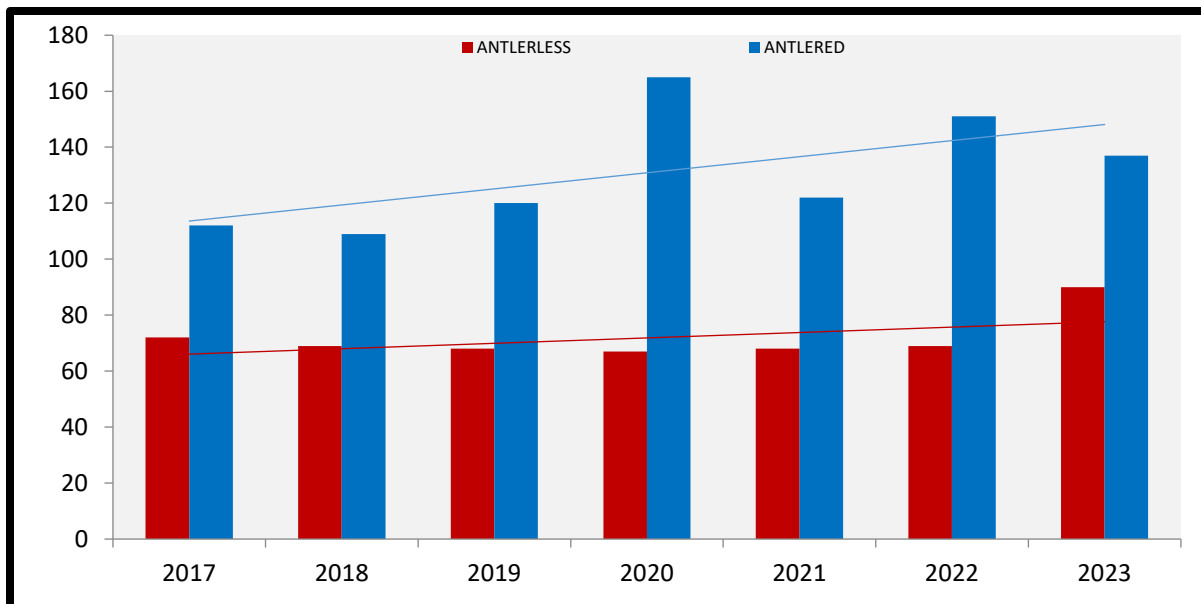


Figure 20. GMU 654 general season harvest (all weapons).

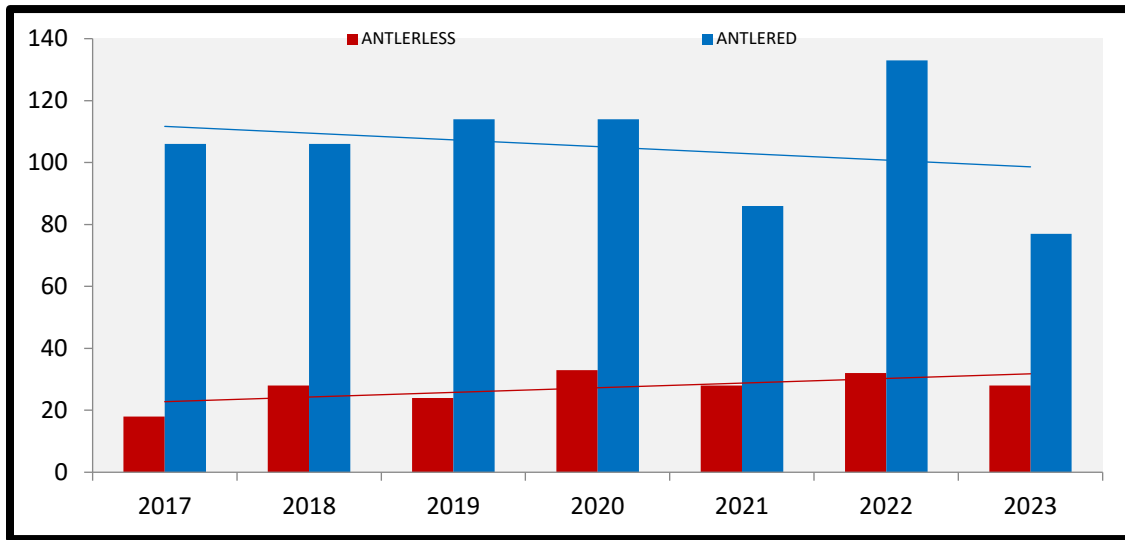


Figure 21. GMU 666 general season harvest (all weapons).

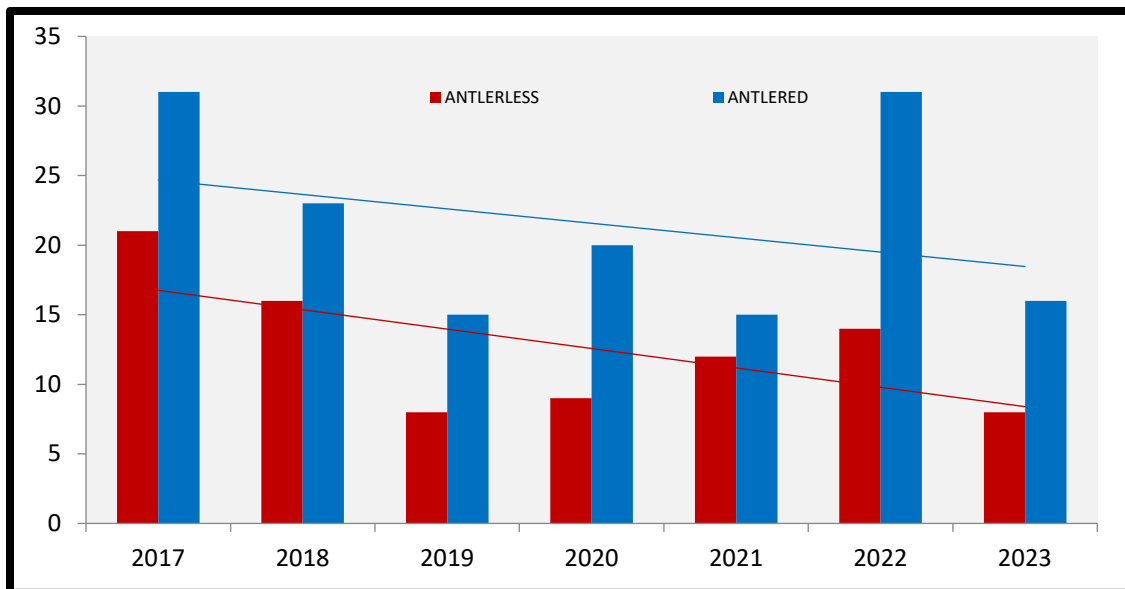


Figure 22. GMU 667 general season harvest (all weapons).

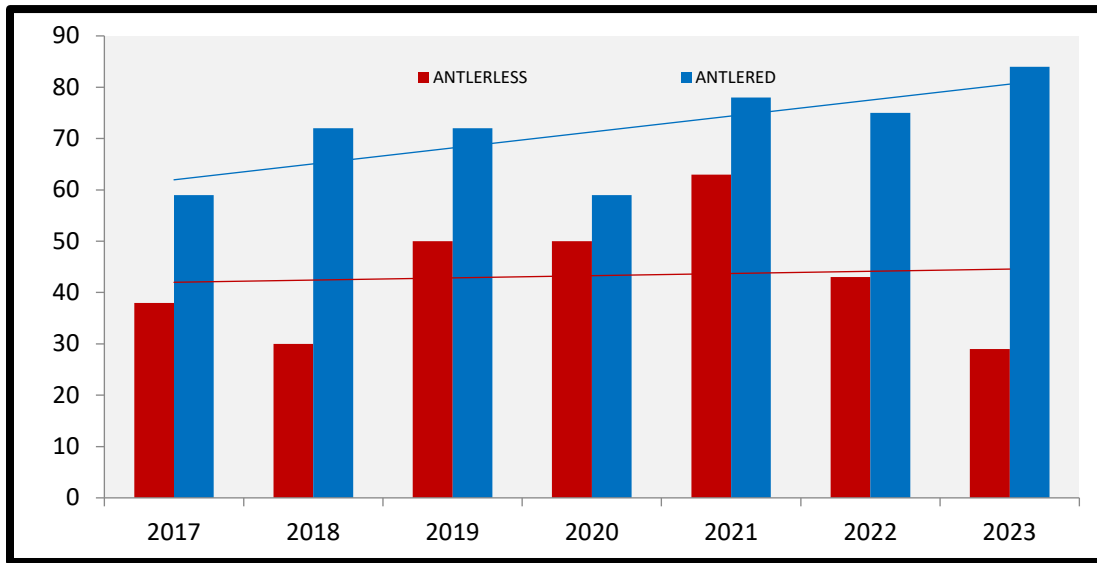
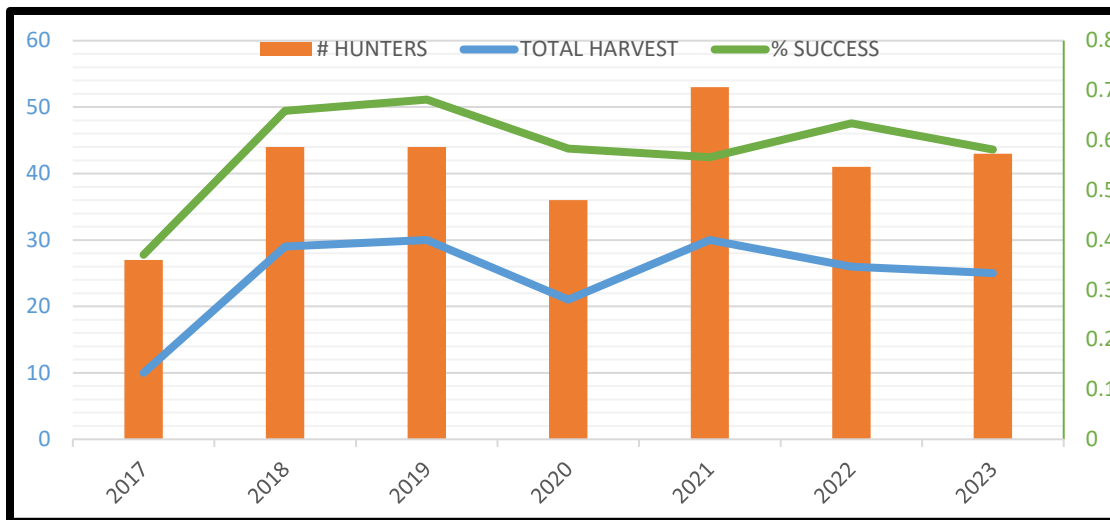


Figure 23. GMU 653 bull-only permit hunters, harvest, and success (all weapons).



Hunter success is expressed as both the percentage of hunters that reported harvesting an elk and by the number of days it took to harvest an animal and is displayed in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (GMU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk; reference charts below). While success rates in all District 11 GMUs have generally trended upward over the past seven years, only GMU 652 had an increase from 2022 to 2023. The increasing trend across the district is tracking elk population recovery in the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. GMUs 652 and 653 have the highest hunter success rate, followed by GMUs 654 and 666, with GMU 667 always the lowest. GMU 653 bull-only permit is a rugged, high alpine hunt, but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit.

Figure 24. GMU 652 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).

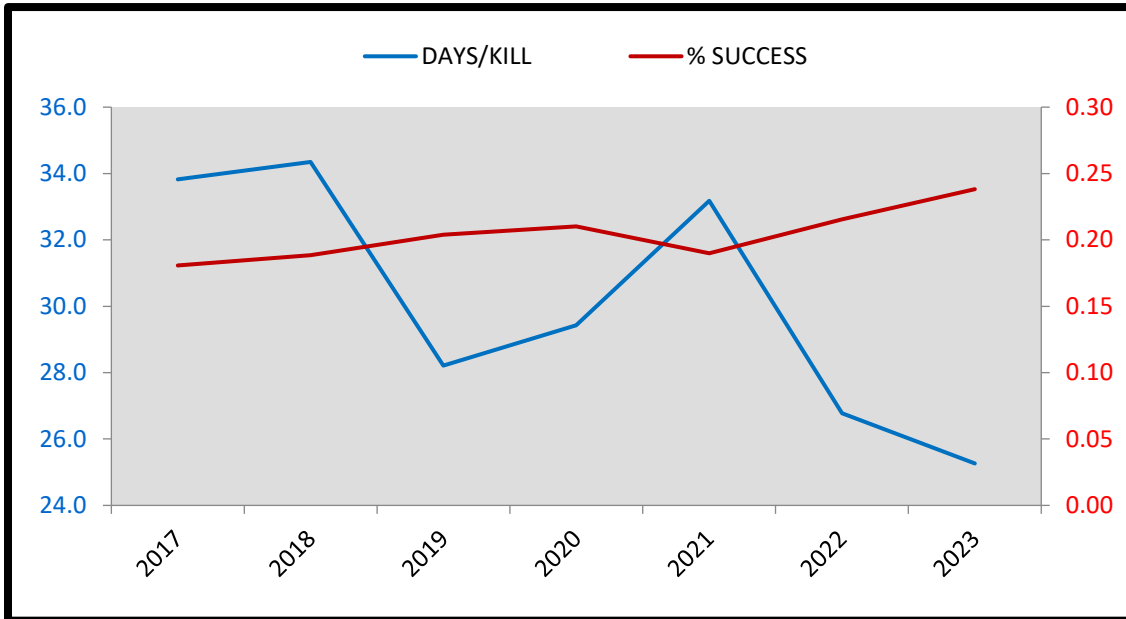


Figure 25. GMU 653 bull-only permit hunter success (all weapons combined).

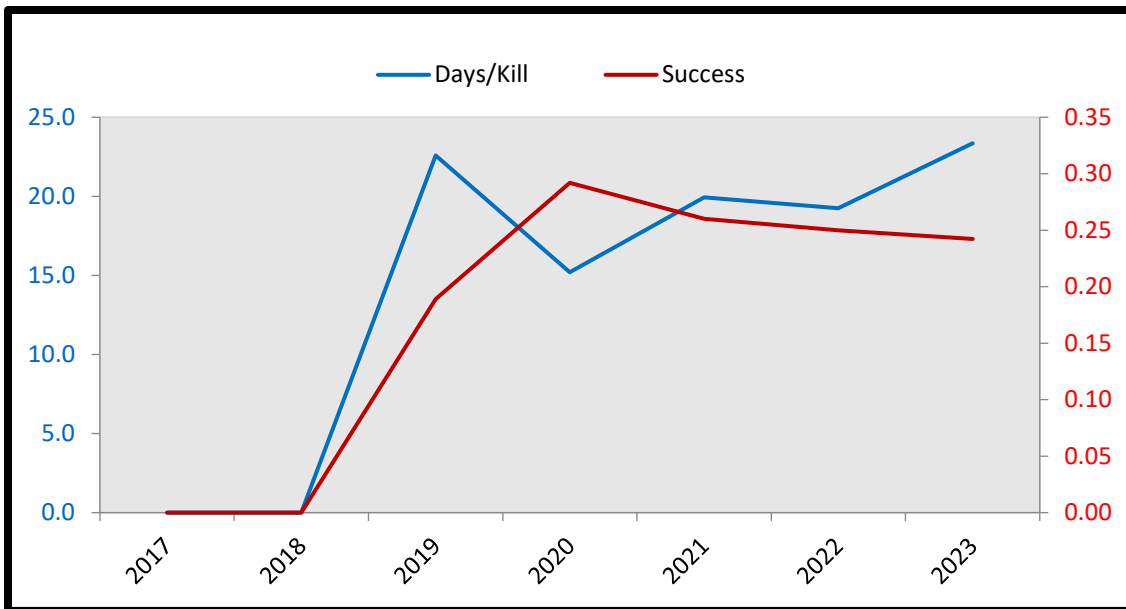


Figure 26. GMU 654 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).

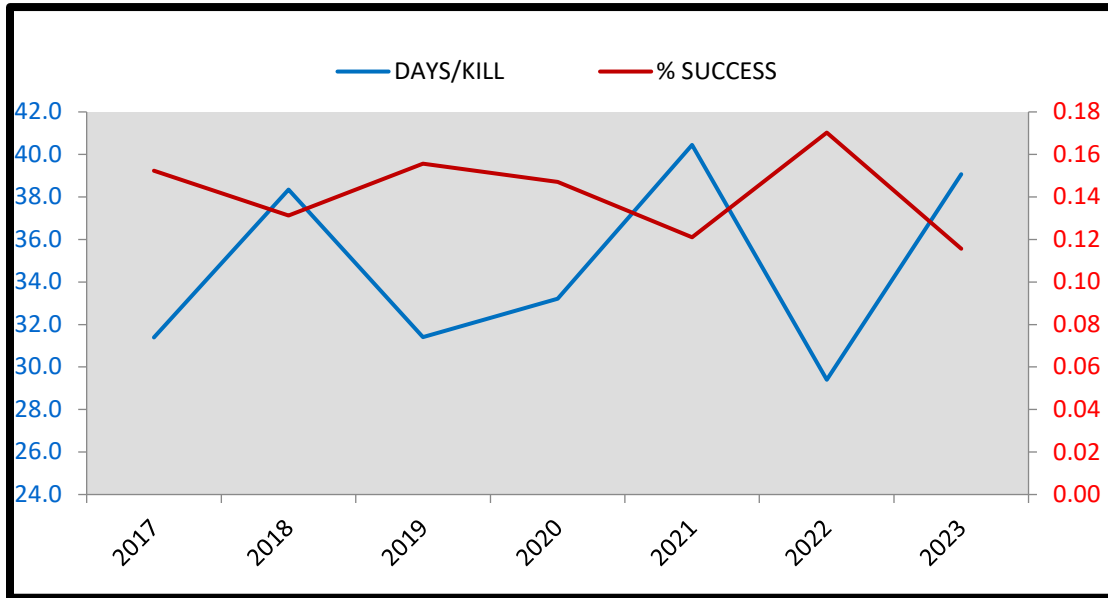


Figure 27. GMU 666 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).

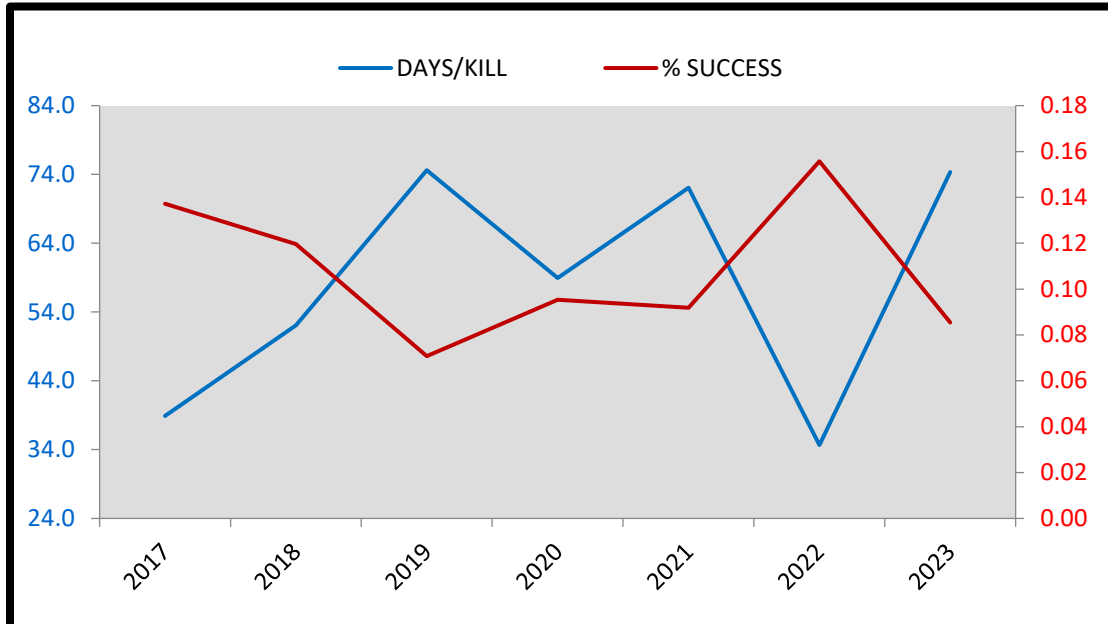
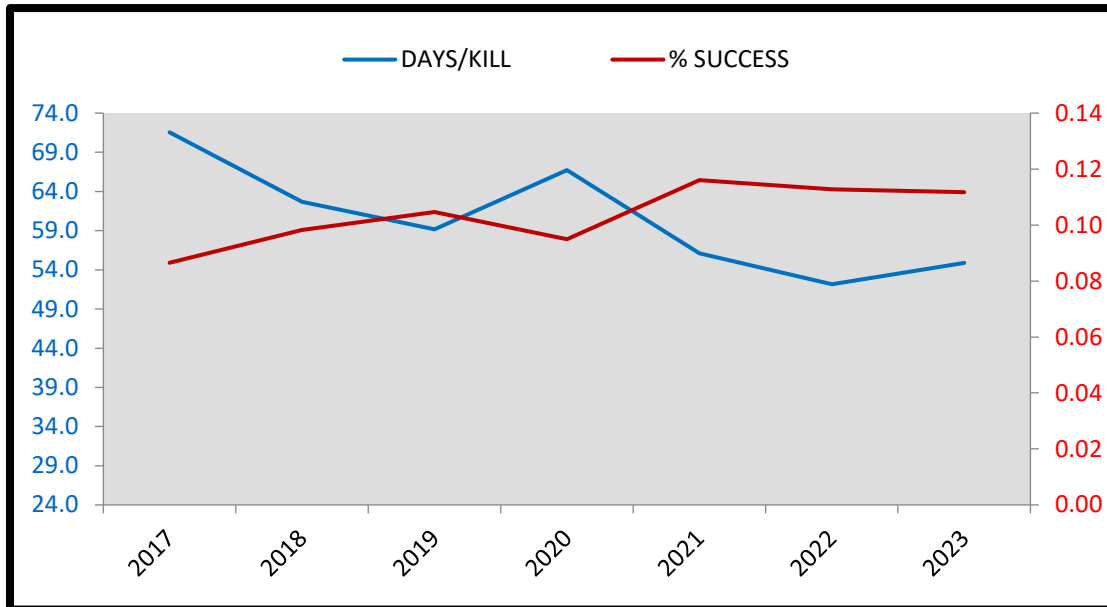


Figure 28. GMU 667 general season hunter success (all weapons combined).



Elk bacterial hoof disease — TAHD

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within District 11 (Figure 29). While elk are susceptible to many conditions that result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington, where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including the North Rainier and South Rainier herds that occupy District 11.

TAHD is more prevalent in the South Rainier elk herd of Lewis and Thurston counties in District 11 and less prevalent in the Pierce County GMUs associated with the North Rainier elk herd. This is likely due to the South Rainier herd’s proximity to the core of the disease, the Mount St. Helens elk herd. WDFW has confirmed the presence of TAHD from elk sampled in all District 11 GMUs except for Anderson Island, which has no elk.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but no evidence shows that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

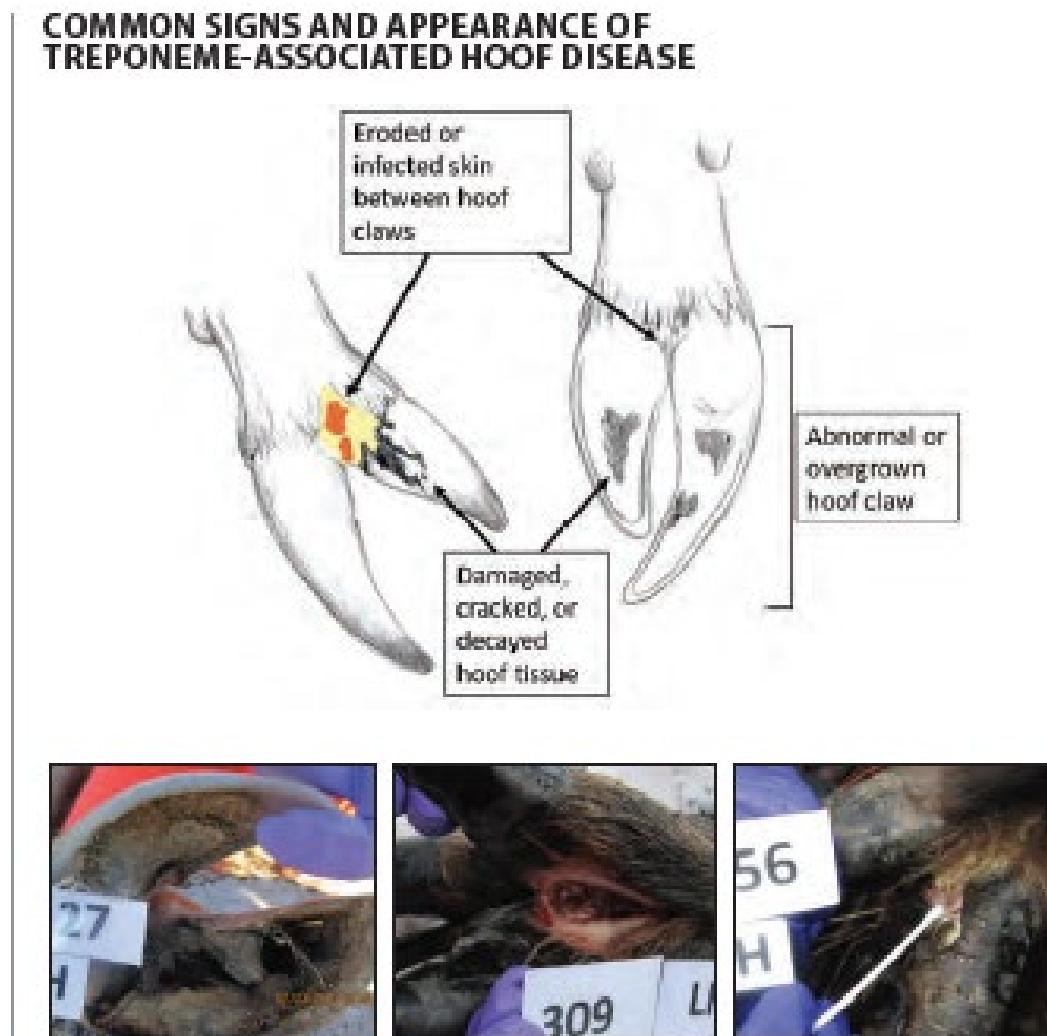
How hunters can help: WDFW has an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest elk with TAHD, thereby potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. Review the discussion of TAHD incentive hunts in the [Big Game Hunting Pamphlet](#) or [on WDFW's website](#).

What hunters can do to help:

- **Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600-series GMUs.**
- **Turn in elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in western Washington.**
- **Report elk:** Help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the Department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, Tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, reference WDFW's [website](#).

Figure 29. Treponeme-associated hoof disease signs and appearance.

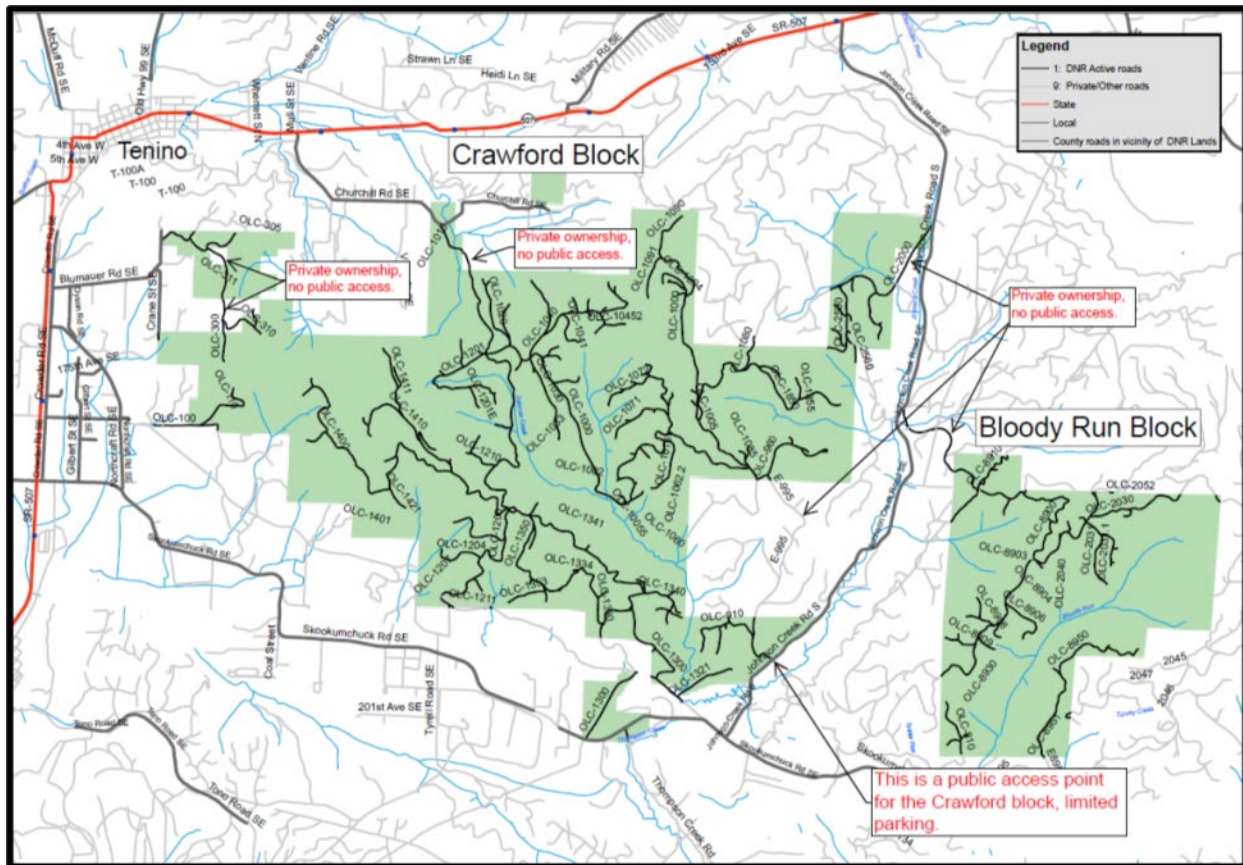


Deer

WDFW does not survey black-tailed deer every year in District 11, and surveys are typically done in the highest quality location in the district and region (Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667).

Commercial and state-managed timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout regenerating clear cuts. Timberlands particularly worthy of scouting for deer and elk include Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm and DNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks in GMU 667 (Figure 30 and 31); Manulife- and Hampton Lumber-managed properties (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654), White River and Buckley timberlands in GMU 653); DNR's Elbe Hills and Tahoma state forests (GMUs 654) and DNR- and USFS-managed lands across District 11.

Figure 30. DNR's Crawford and Bloody Run blocks.



Hancock (now Manulife) has a two-point minimum buck harvest restriction for all deer seasons and weapon types on all its timberlands. Further, the Kapowsin [Manulife and Eatonville (Hampton Lumber)] permits do not allow general season antlerless deer hunting. Antlerless deer harvest is only allowed if the licensee is drawn from the youth, disabled, or 65 and over WDFW special permit categories. Manulife's reasoning is "an effort to increase deer populations over time and ultimately provide a better hunting experience, long term." There are no deer hunting restrictions on Muckleshoot Indian Tribe's Tomanamus White River Tree Farm.

Figure 31. Weyerhaeuser's Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667.



Hunters can find high-elevation trophy black-tail in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654. Hunters can access these areas via USFS road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View wilderness areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (review description under Elk). DNR's Elbe Hills State Forest in GMU 654 provides access through the [Disabled Hunter Program](#). One early archery, six modern firearm, two late modern firearm, one late muzzleloader, and two late archery disabled hunters are drawn from the pool to receive vehicle access behind locked gates on this state forest.

District 11 deer harvest is average for the state but high for Western Washington. Deer harvest across the district held steady through 2022 but increased in 2023 among all four weapon types (reference graphs below). Harvest declined in GMUs 652, 654 (although steady last six years), 655 (from spikes in 2018-19), and 666 (although steady last four years). One factor in these trends is the decreasing number of deer hunters in the district; deer hunters declined from approximately 10,000 in 2000 to just over 5,000 by 2022. GMU 653 has a fluctuating but increasing trend. GMU 667 has remained stable over the past seven years and has significantly higher harvest than any other District 11 GMU. Hunter harvest has remained stable across the district except for GMU 654 over those same years.

Harvest regulations have changed somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the years, playing a role in harvest trends. Limited access, combined with antler and doe restrictions, may ultimately increase deer numbers over time. Comparing hunter harvest success between GMUs is a useful tool to understanding deer status and harvest prospects. In general, in District 11, GMUs 653 and 654 have success rates near 15%, compared to roughly 20-25% in GMUs 652 and above 30% in GMUs 666 and 667. GMU 655 deer harvest continues to trend upward and is currently around 55% — the highest in the district. Public

property is very limited on Anderson Island, making access difficult and leading to higher deer numbers and deer that may be more vulnerable to harvest. Lack of access combined with the need to take a ferry to the island reduces the overall number of hunters, but those lucky enough to obtain access onto private lands on the island have a high success rate. GMU 655 has a much lower overall harvest than other GMUs in the district. GMU 667 consistently has the second-highest harvest success in District 11 (currently above 30%), suggesting that, while Weyerhaeuser’s access permit requirement limits hunters overall, those that obtain a permit are doing well. GMU 667, which includes Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm, hosted approximately 2,100 hunters in 2023 and is the district’s most heavily hunted deer area. GMUs 652 and 666 are comparable in number of hunters and hunting success, which is not surprising considering they are both urbanized.

Figure 32. General season deer harvest in District 11 (all weapons combined).

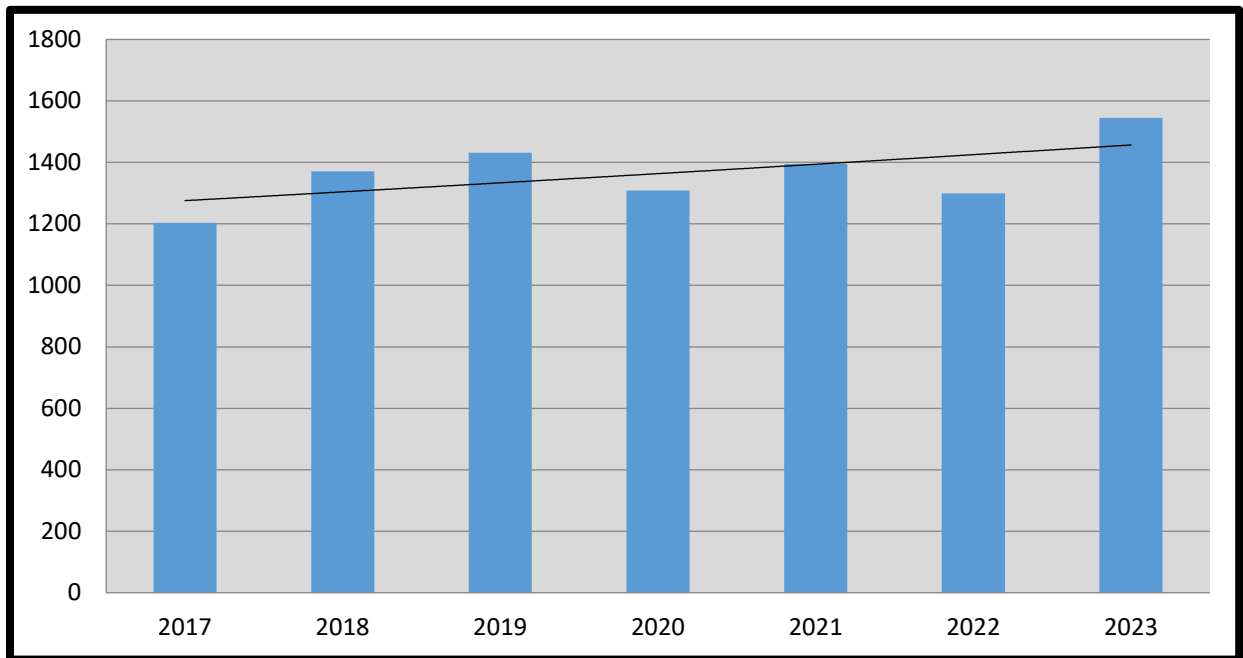


Figure 33. Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 62 (comprised of GMUs 652, 655, 666, and 667). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.

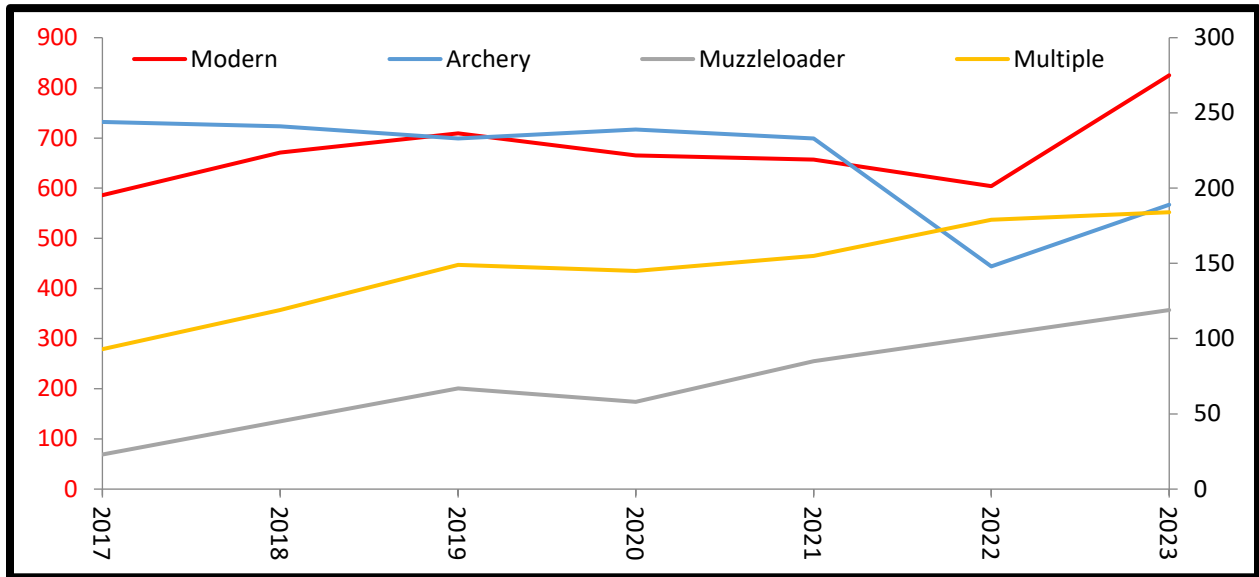


Figure 34. Total deer harvest by weapon type for PMU 67 (comprised of GMUs 653 and 654). Modern firearm is scaled on the left and all others scaled on the right.

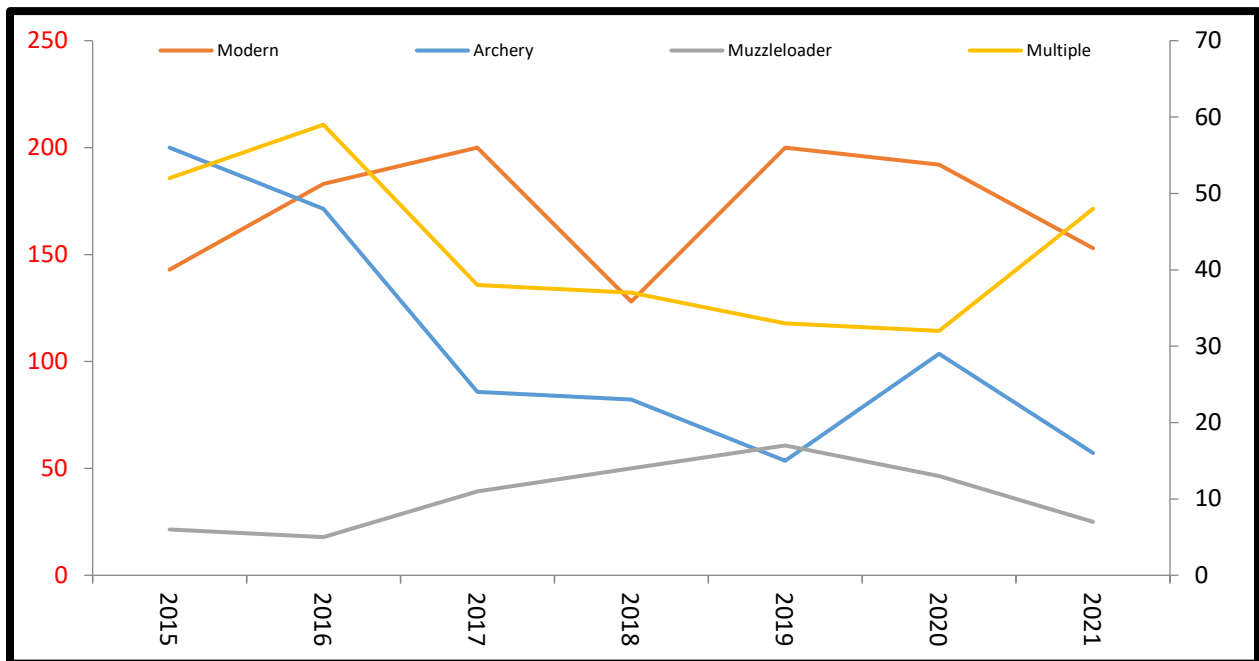


Figure 35. GMU 652 (Puyallup) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).

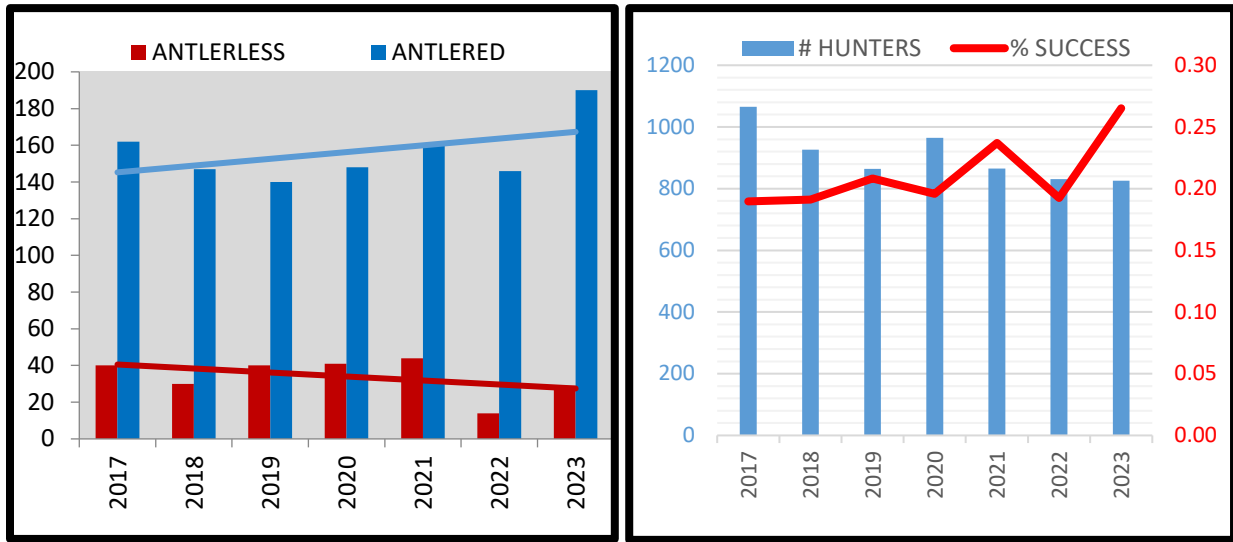


Figure 36. GMU 653 (White River) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined). There is no antlerless hunting in 653.

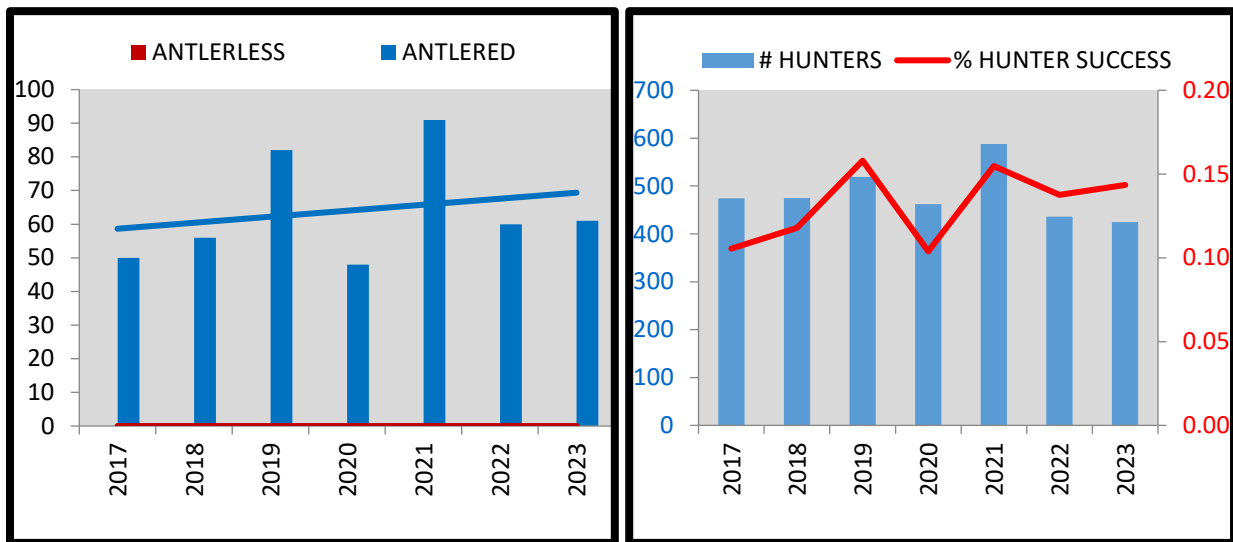


Figure 37. GMU 654 (Mashel) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).

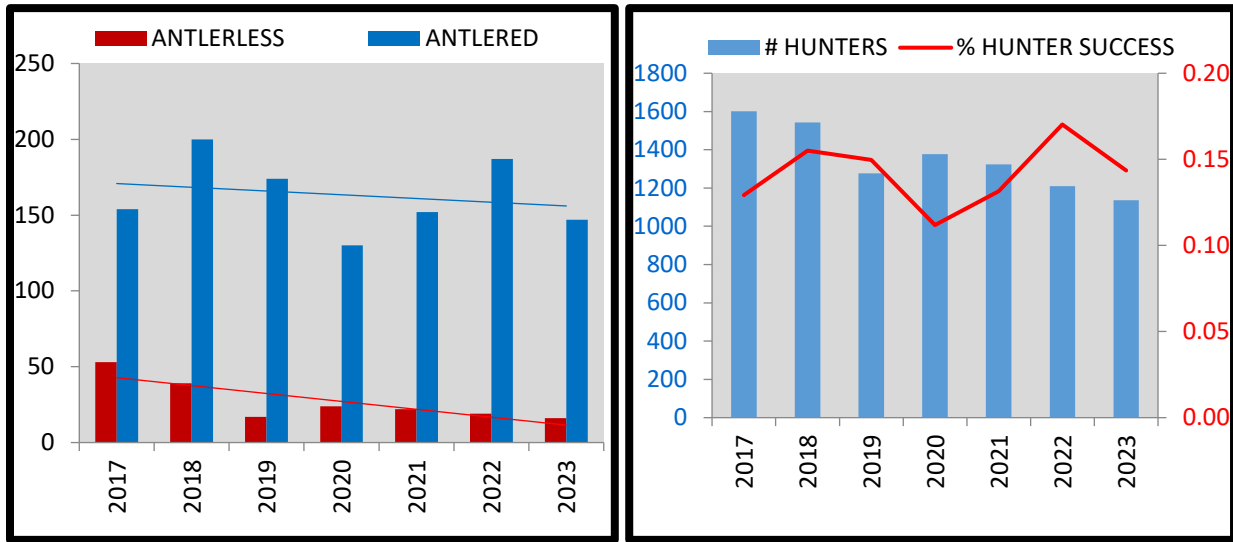


Figure 38. GMU 655 (Anderson Island) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).

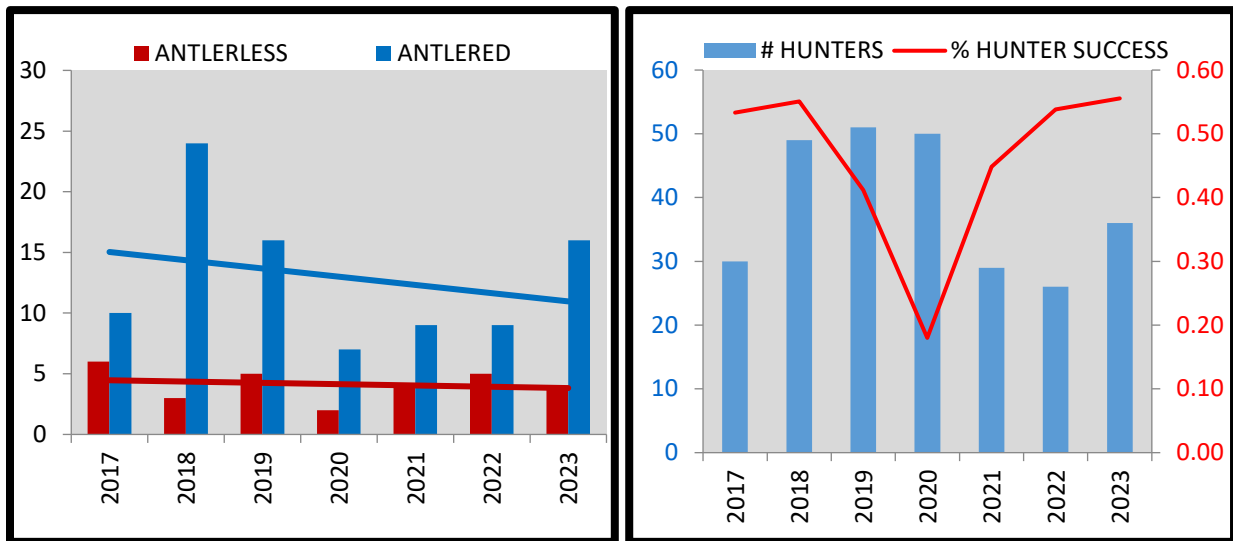


Figure 39. GMU 666 (Deschutes) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).

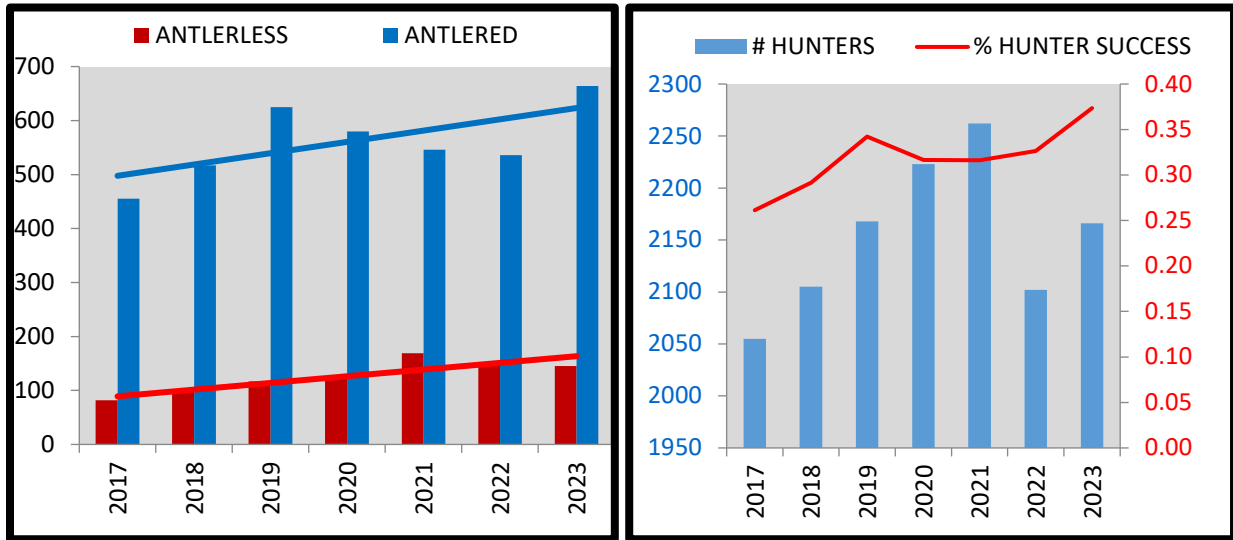
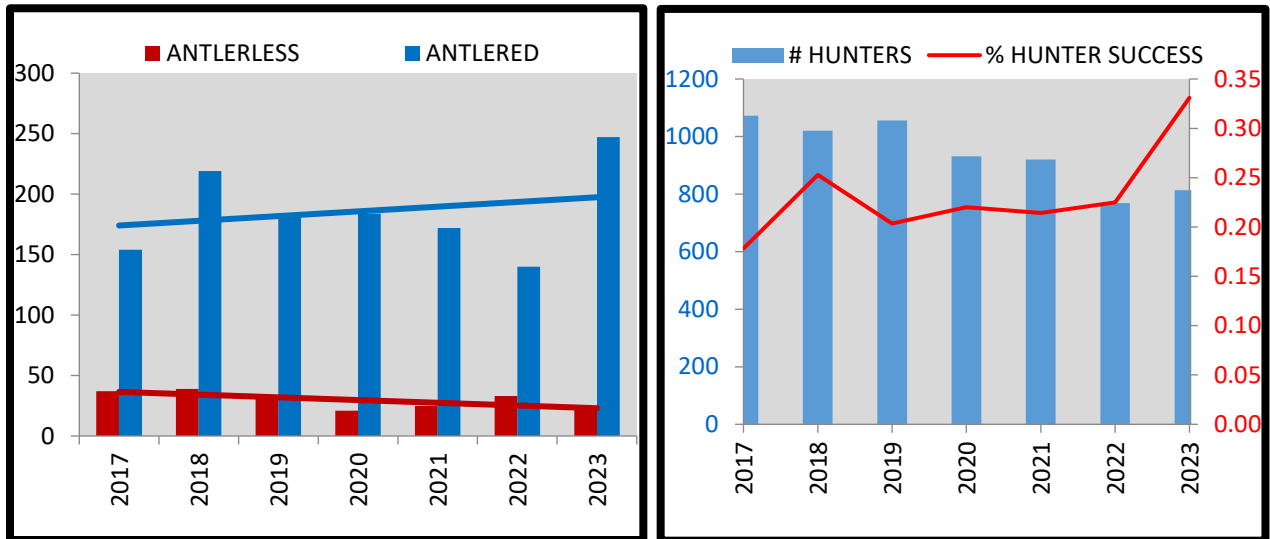


Figure 40. GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) deer harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons combined).



Black bear

WDFW's goals for black bear management are to:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage black bears and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize threats to public safety from black bears, while maintaining a sustainable and viable bear population.
3. Manage black bear for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography.
4. Manage populations statewide for a sustained yield. Wildlife managers use three statistics to assess black bear harvest:
 - Proportion of females harvested (no more than 35-39% of harvest)
 - Median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years)
 - Median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years)

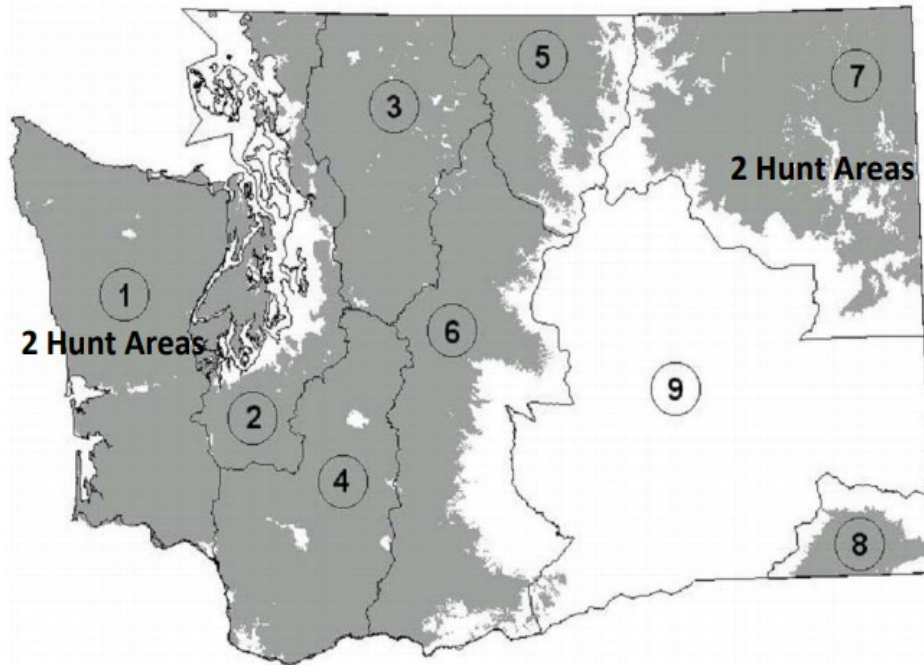
WDFW does not conduct annual surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size and instead uses harvest data trends for population estimates or indices. Black bears inhabit all of District 11 except for urban centers and high alpine areas of Mount Rainer. The district's bear population is stable, with the highest number of bears found on commercial timberlands in GMUs 653 and 654.

In 2019, WDFW developed a rigorous monitoring protocol to estimate black bear population densities on a large scale. Using the results of the North Cascades density analysis (Welfelt et al., 2019), WDFW developed a sampling design that relies on selecting two to three project areas annually across the 17 districts where bears occur. Within each project area, the Department establishes density estimates based on non-invasive DNA collection through bear hair samples.

As wildlife managers conduct more surveys, additional capture results will further inform the model, making density estimates more robust. In 2020, District 11 applied this protocol within GMU 654 to obtain a more accurate bear density estimate. The resulting density estimate was 16.9 bears per 100 square kilometers, and the estimated population obtained by extrapolating that density across available habitat in GMU 654 was 142 (with 114 older than 1 year). For GMU 654, the seven-year average harvest per year has been 20 bears, which equates to an average harvest rate of 14% of the estimated GMU population. Up to 15 bears are taken annually for timber damage removals for a combined mortality rate up to 25% of the estimated population in that unit. The district is eager to conduct the same project in its remaining five GMUs over time to aid bear management and harvest analysis.

The state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions. District 11 contains parts of two BBMUs: South Cascades (BBMU #2 containing GMUs 653 and 654) and Puget Sound (BBMU #4 containing GMUs 652, 655, 666, and 667). Each of these BBMUs also contains additional GMUs outside the boundaries of District 11. A [spring bear hunt](#) is currently not provided in Washington.

Figure 41. Black bear management units (BBMUs) in Washington.



Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. WDFW encourages hunters to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Manulife-managed lands (Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands in GMU 654, Buckley timberlands in GMU 653), Muckleshoot Indian Tribe’s White River Tree Farm in GMU 653, Elbe Hills and Tahoma state forests (GMU 654), and JBLM offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district.

General fall season bear harvest in the GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (652, 655, 666, and 667) has remained stable over the past seven years except for 2018, which saw a significant decline. Although bear hunting is legal in GMU 655 (Anderson Island), bears have never been reported harvested and only one hunter reported hunting the island for 10 days in 2014 with no success. The number of hunters using this BBMU has declined since 2017, which may have increased success rates for those that continue to hunt this BBMU. Success across District 11’s portion of this BBMU averaged 5% over the past seven years, primarily driven by success in GMU 652 (seven-year average 8%) and GMU 653 (seven-year average 9%). For the 2024 season, prospects are good for harvesting bears in GMUs 652, 653, and 654 but much less so in GMUs 666 (4%) and 667 (5%). Last winter’s snowpack and the resulting soil moisture levels should result in good berry and mast production this year.

Figure 42. Puget Sound BBMU general fall bear harvest (GMUs 652, 666, and 667 combined).

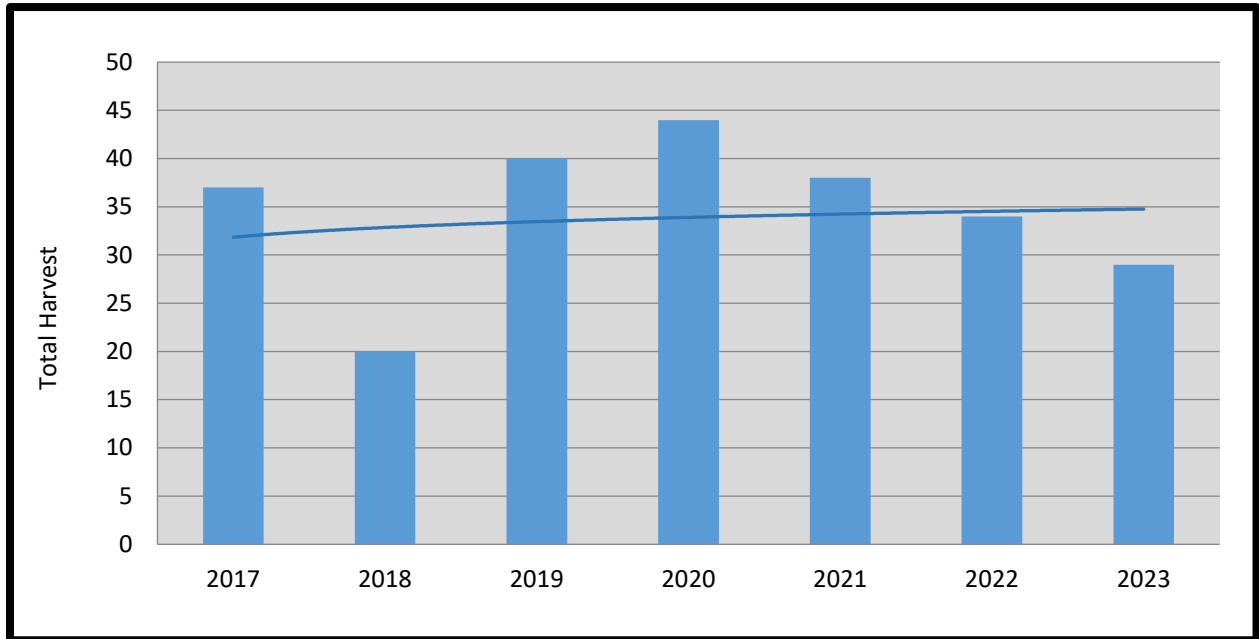


Figure 43. Puget Sound BBMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMUs 652, 655, 666, and 667 combined).

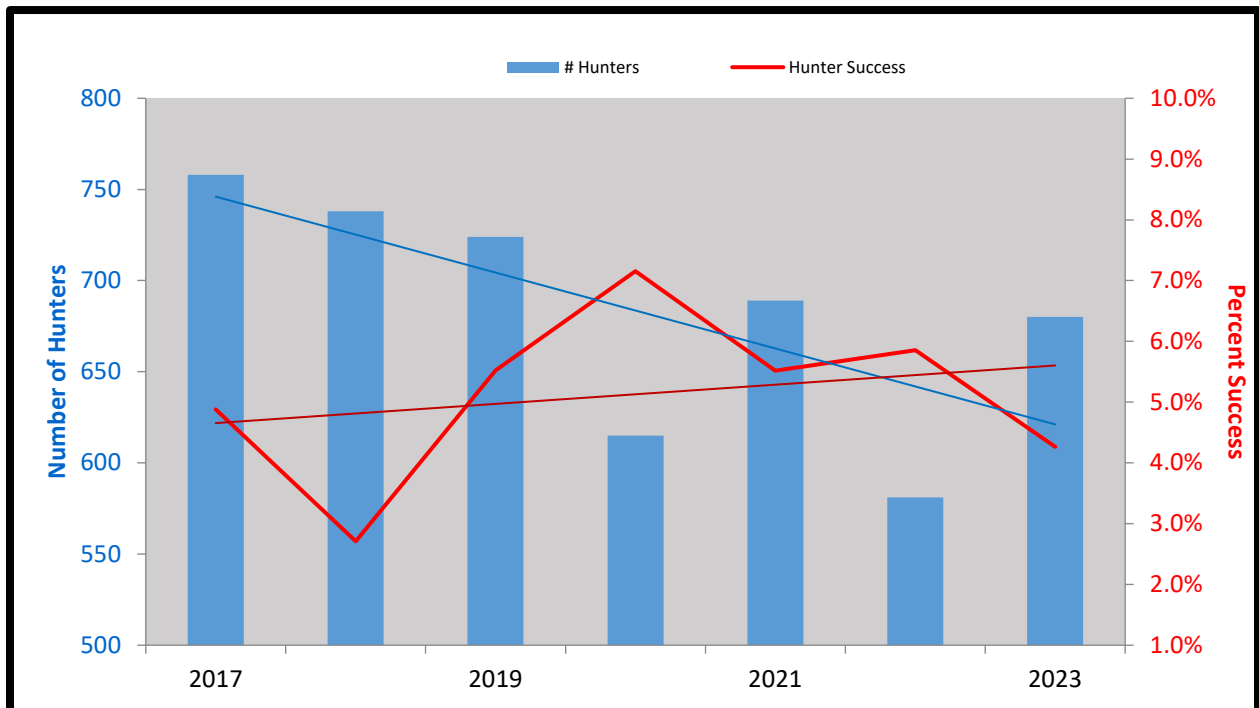


Table 2. Black bear harvest statistics by GMU for the Coastal and South Cascades BBMUs, past seven-year averages.

BBMU	GMU	Average fall male harvest	Average fall female harvest	Total Average harvest	Average number of hunters	Average hunter success	Average days/kill
Coastal #2	652	8	4	12	157	8%	135
Coastal #2	655	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coastal #2	666	2	2	4	117	4%	403
Coastal #2	667	14	5	18	410	5%	231
S. Cascades #4	653	11	6	17	189	9%	84
S. Cascades #4	654	13	6	20	361	6%	203

Bear harvest in District 11’s portion of the South Cascades BBMU (GMUs 653 and 654) increased threefold in 2019 in response to an earlier start date (Aug. 1) and a new two-bear bag limit statewide. Harvest declined in 2020 and has stabilized over the past three seasons. Spring bear season was eliminated in Kapowsin in 2020 (previously averaging six bears harvested per year) and statewide in 2022. Annual number of hunters declined in 2020 but has stabilized at around 550 hunters annually, while average success is holding steady at around 6.5% for the past three years.

Figure 44. South Cascades BBMU bear harvest (GMUs 653 and 654 combined. Kapowsin spring bear permit season was eliminated in 2020).

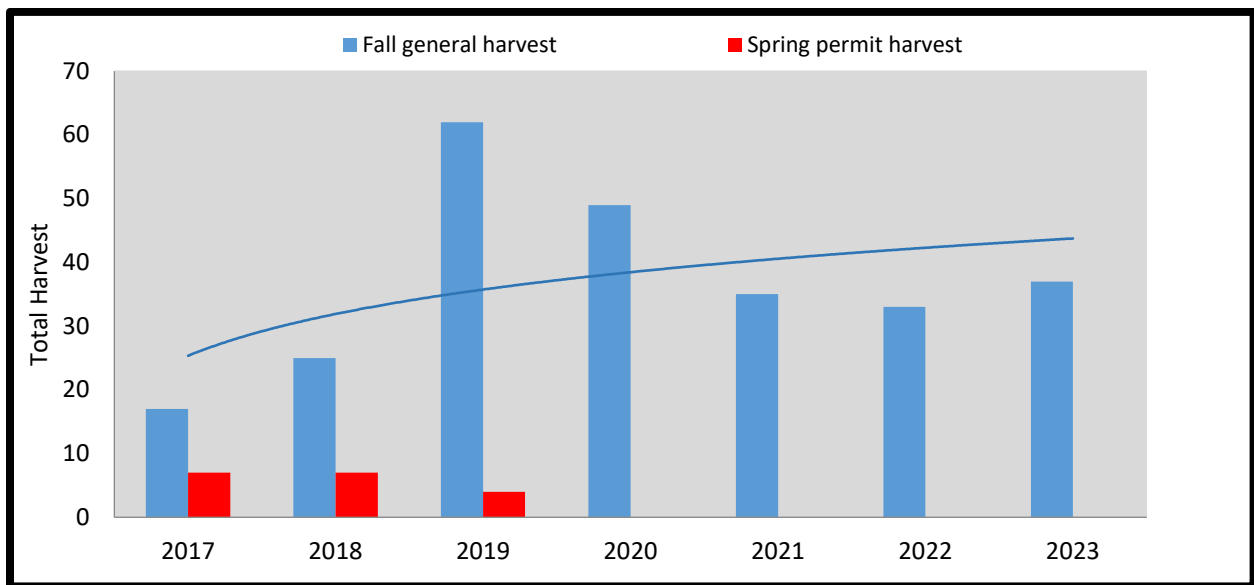
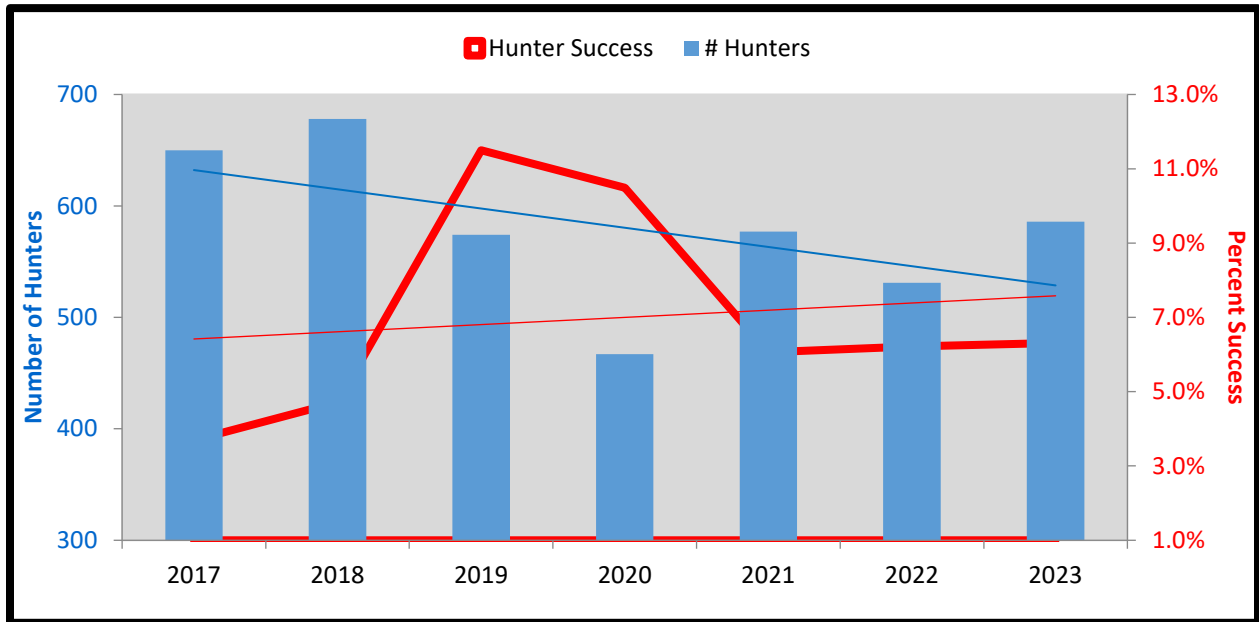


Figure 45. South Cascades BBMU general fall bear hunters and percent success rates (GMUs 653 and 654 combined).



Important bear hunting considerations

WDFW strongly urges bear hunters not to shoot sows with cubs. Cubs tend to lag behind sows and may not be easily seen. Cubs may also be present in trees or hidden in dense vegetation in the vicinity.

Observe and be patient before shooting. The past few seasons, several orphaned cubs were reported in WDFW’s Coastal Region (Region 6). Some were captured and taken to rehabilitation facilities. However, space and funds are limited for rehabilitation, so hunters should avoid this by **NOT shooting sows with cubs**.

Hunters who harvest a bear must submit a premolar tooth for aging (per [WAC 220-415-090](#)). The use of hounds and/or bait to hunt black bear is prohibited statewide ([RCW 77.15.245](#)).

Cougar



Youth hunter B. Sparkes with his cougar harvested with special cougar tag. Photo by permission of S. Sparkes.

Cougars are widespread in the forestlands of District 11. Areas that support a lot of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for harvesting cougar. The statewide goals for cougar are:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage cougar and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize human-cougar conflict.
3. Manage cougar for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography.
4. Manage statewide cougar populations for a sustained yield.
5. Improve our understanding of predator-prey relationships.

WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012 by shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intent was to have a longer season, without any hunting implement restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a guideline. The harvest guideline was based on cougar social structure research dynamics. WDFW administers this hunt structure within 50 PMUs. District 11 includes three PMUs comprised of GMUs containing similar habitats and having similar cougar population objectives: GMUs 652/666, GMUs 653/654, and GMU 667. Cougar hunting is not provided in GMU 655.

New for 2024

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently adopted a new cougar harvest rule that replaces previous harvest guidelines. That rule includes the following changes:

1. Cougar hunting season will begin Sept. 1, 2024, and end March 31, 2025.
2. A cap on harvest will be included in all PMUs that currently have a harvest guideline. The cap will be based on the best available estimates of cougar density and growth rate; currently those parameters are estimated at 2.3 cougars per 100 square kilometers and a 13% intrinsic growth rate.
3. If the harvest cap of 13% is reached during the hunting season, that PMU will close.
4. In PMUs that reach the harvest cap of 13% prior to the recreational hunting season, the cap will be increased to 20% to provide hunting opportunity.
5. Mortalities will be counted starting April 1 and ending March 31 of the following year.
6. All human-related cougar mortalities of cougars 18 months old and older (including harvested cougars, cougars killed to resolve conflicts, and any other form of human-caused cougar mortality) shall count toward the 13% or 20% harvest cap.
7. Managers may close hunting in any PMU prior to the cap being reached, upon consideration of factors such as disease, suspected additional mortality, or any other issue affecting the cougar population.

Under this new system and beginning in 2024:

- GMUs 652 and 666 will have no cougar harvest cap.
- GMUs 653 and 654 will have a cap of five (at the 13% cap) or eight (at the 20% cap).
- GMU 667 will have a cap of four (at the 13% cap) or six (at the 20% cap).

WDFW advises anyone planning to hunt cougar to confirm the season is open in the desired hunting area by calling 1-866-364-4868 or visiting the [WDFW website](#).

Following a high year in 2018, cougar harvest has remained steady at three cougars harvested annually in District 11 since 2019 (all mortality combined). Annual harvest is often a reflection of hunter participation and winter conditions; a poor snow year can significantly affect cougar harvest. Downward trends may reflect the annual hunting pressure more than a reduction in the cougar population. Three

cougars were reported killed in the district in 2023, not including tribal harvest. The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the district. Prospects for hunting cougar in the district remain fair.

Figure 46. Cougar harvest in District 11 general season and other mortality combined.

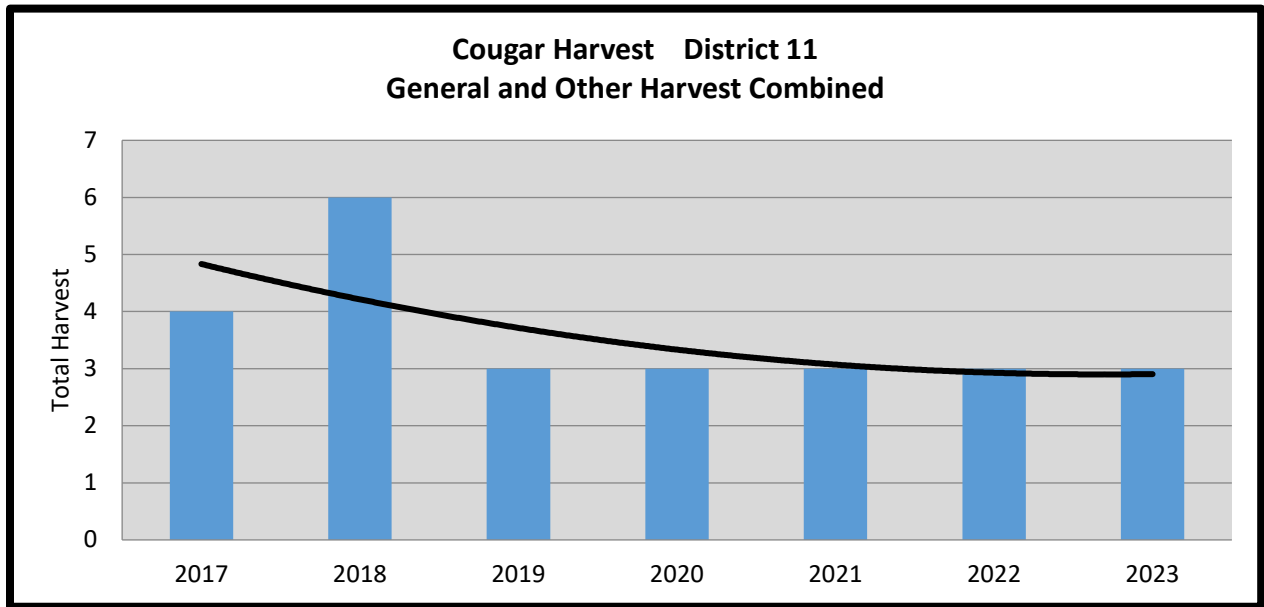
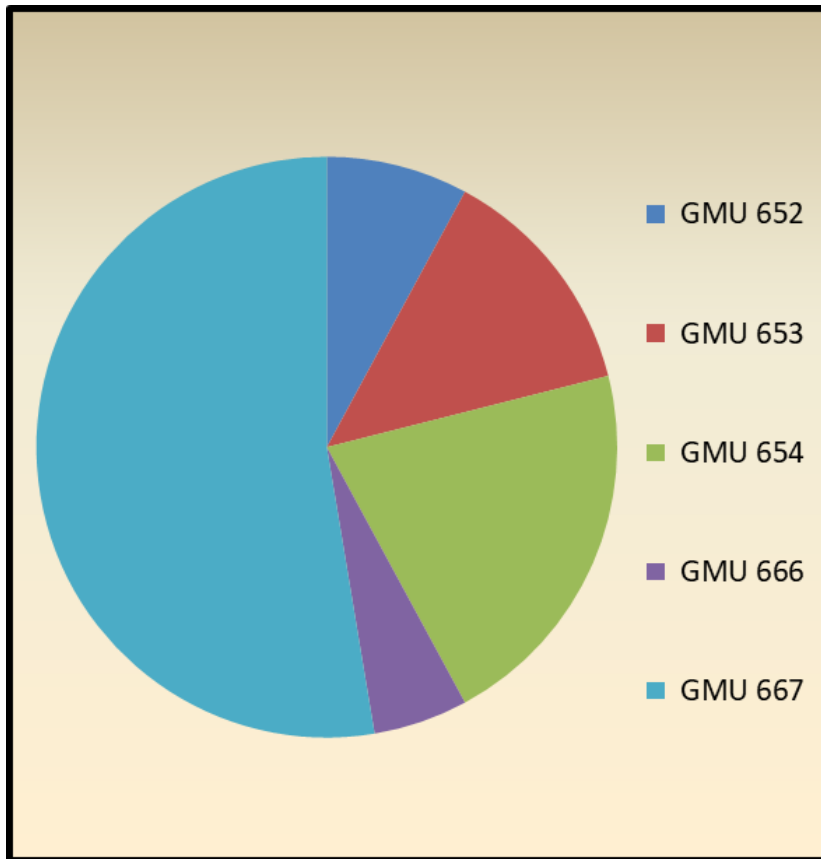


Figure 47. District 11 cougar harvest ratios by GMU, 2016 to present (all mortality).



Important considerations

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually less than 80 pounds) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. WDFW strongly encourages cougar hunters to check for multiple sets of tracks when pursuing an animal. Female cougars may have kittens in trees or in dense vegetation nearby. Please be very observant and patient before shooting. During the 2015 – 2016 season, WDFW enforcement officers and biologists captured two orphaned cougar kittens near Joyce. One kitten later died, and the other will remain in captivity at a zoo. Remember, if you harvest a cougar, there are mandatory reporting and sealing requirements. Voter Initiative 655 banned the use of hounds to hunt cougars in the state in 1996. Hunting with hounds is only allowed during cougar management removals authorized by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Mandatory reporting/sealing

All successful cougar hunters must report their harvest to the cougar hotline at 1-866- 364-4868 within 72 hours of harvest and have the cougar pelt sealed within five days of notification. This is the same hotline hunters can use to check if Cougar Hunt Areas are open or closed. A premolar tooth and tissue sample will be taken. Reference the [Washington Big Game Hunting Seasons and Rules](#) for details about cougar sealing requirements.

Cougar outreach and education

Fatal cougar encounters are extremely rare. With increasing human populations, development patterns, and increasing human presence in rural areas, it is essential to raise public awareness and keep both people and cougars safe. Please reference [WDFW's Cougar website](#) including the section on Preventing Conflict to learn more about cougar-human interactions.

Small game

NOTE for all small game data provided below: WDFW fundamentally changed the method for small game data collection and analysis in 2023 (for 2022 data). The change should increase the accuracy of small game harvest and hunter data and provide a measure of true annual variation. However, because this is a new method, comparing 2022 data to previous years should be done with caution (i.e., changes in trend may reflect the method rather than the actual harvest/hunter effort). County-level estimates should be compared relative to each other or as proportions of the statewide estimate and not to past estimates (but comparing to long-term averages could be appropriate). Moreover, estimates are likely lower in 2022 than prior for some species/counties both for statewide and county small game data due to the change in method. It is unknown at this time if this new method will become the norm as it will be tested in 2023 and 2024.

Bobcats



Local District 11 hunter J. Nash with his 2023 bobcat. Photo by M. Tirhi.

Bobcats are plentiful in the wooded lands across District 11, and many hunters harvest bobcat each season. Bobcat may be hunted statewide with no bag limit from Sept. 1 to March 15. A small game license is required to harvest a bobcat. Bobcats are exempt from hunting hour restrictions, except it is unlawful to hunt bobcat at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons in October and November. Hunting or pursuing bobcat with dogs is prohibited in Washington. **Successful bobcat hunters or trappers must contact a WDFW office to have the bobcat pelt sealed and submit the associated harvest report to WDFW by April 20 of each year.** The bobcat hide must not be frozen so a seal may be attached. No one may possess an open WDFW bobcat seal unless it has been cut by a licensed taxidermist or fur dealer who has received and invoiced the pelt for processing.

Generally, more bobcats are harvested through hunting than trapping in Region 6 (reference charts below). Pierce and Thurston counties provide great opportunity for harvesting bobcat and typically have the highest rates of harvest in the region. Bobcat harvest declined in 2023 in District 11, but prospects for hunting or trapping in 2024 remain good compared to other Western Washington counties. Public and private forests remain the best locations for locating and harvesting bobcat in the district and the region.

Figure 48. WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by trapping by county.

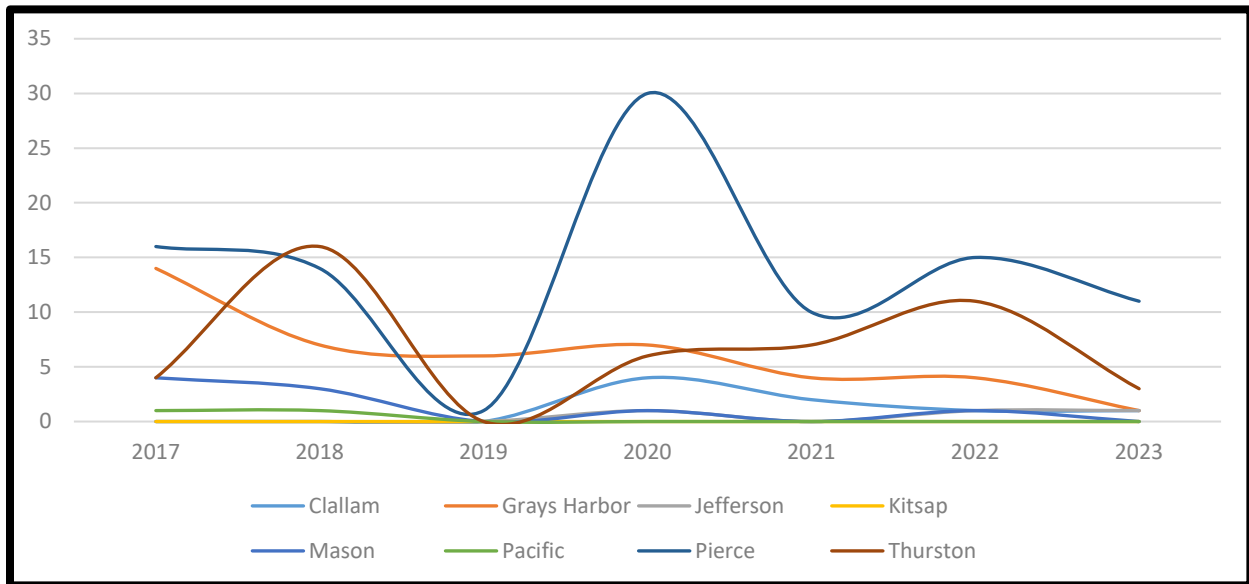
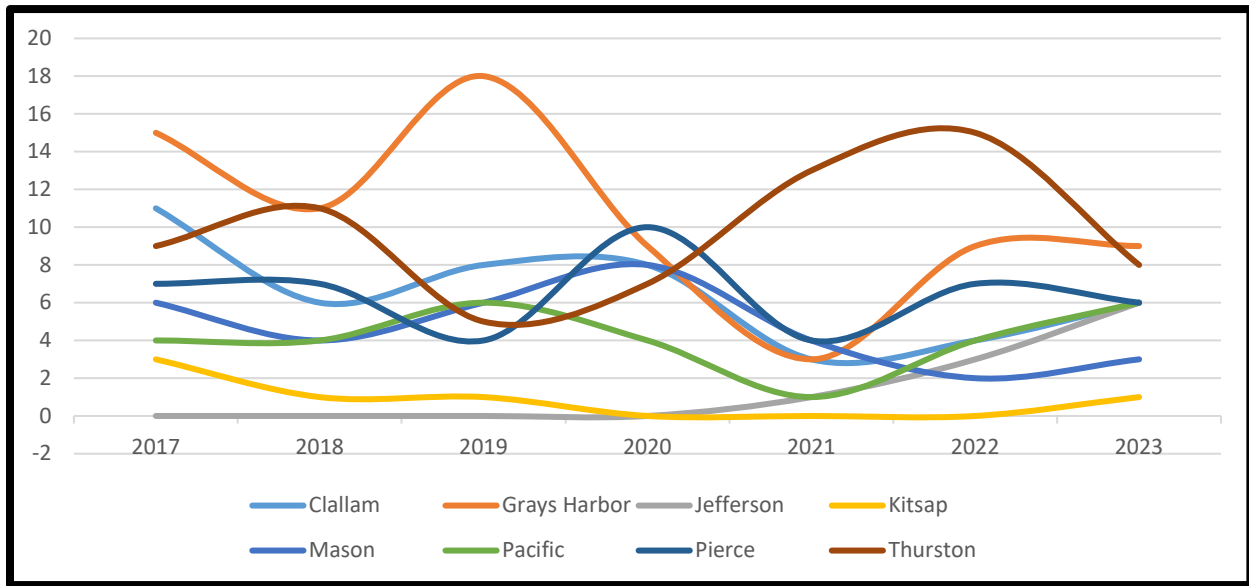


Figure 49. WDFW Region 6 bobcat harvest by hunting by county.



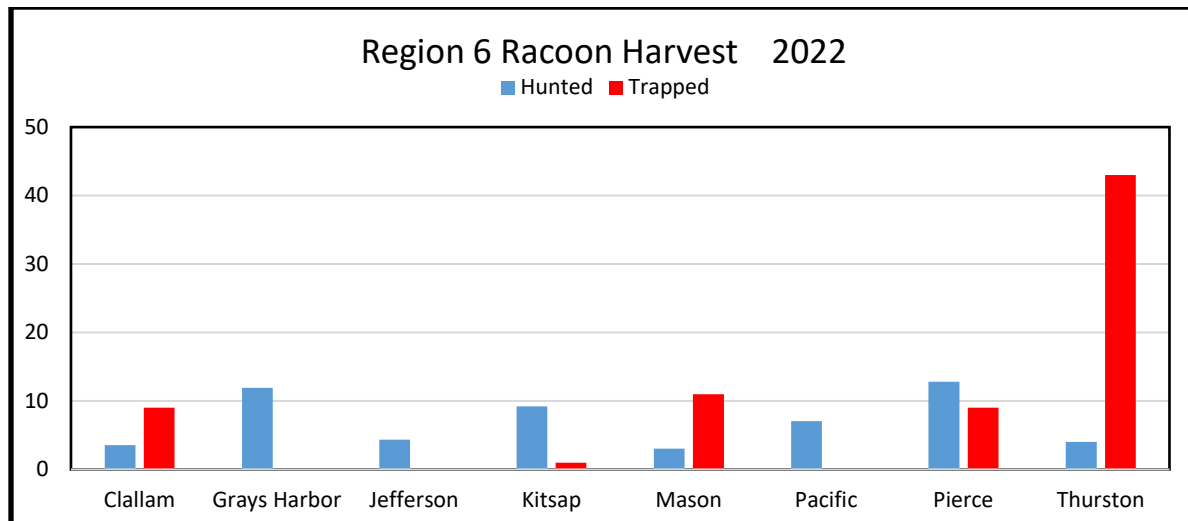
Red fox

Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is native to the central and eastern Cascades but introduced in the western Cascades. Although not considered abundant, they may be found on farmlands, developed areas, and forested areas of District 11. People can hunt them with a small game license and no bag limit from Sept. 1 to March 15 across the district except for the exterior boundaries of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and Gifford Pinchot national forests. Very few red foxes are harvested across Region 6, including District 11. The Cascade red fox (*Vulpes cascadenensis*) is an endemic subspecies that occupies alpine and subalpine habitats in the southern Cascade Mountains, including Mount Rainer in District 11. It is a [species of greatest conservation need](#) and a [priority species](#) and cannot be hunted.

Raccoons

Raccoons are also very plentiful across District 11, particularly around suburban neighborhoods where they feed on garbage, fallen fruit, pet food, pond fish, and other opportunistic food sources. They are helped by a lack of natural predators within these areas. Raccoons are also found in the less-developed forests of the eastern district. Raccoons can be hunted across the district with a small game license and no bag limit from Sept. 1 to March 15. Raccoons may be hunted at night and using dogs, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt with dogs or at night in October and November during dates established for modern firearm deer and elk general seasons. Raccoon harvest data prior to 2022 had low precision but a new analysis started in 2022 is more accurate and is provided below. In 2022, most raccoon harvest was via hunting, with only a few trapped as nuisance animals annually except for Thurston County. Raccoon harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

Figure 50. WDFW Region 6 racoon harvest by hunting by county, 2022.



Coyotes

Coyotes are another small game animal abundant across District 11, both in urban and non-urban areas. They have also benefitted from a lack of large predators in urban and suburban areas. Coyote is an unclassified species and can be hunted or trapped without a bag limit year-round under a small game or big game hunting license. Coyote may be hunted at night with lights year-round, EXCEPT it is unlawful to hunt coyote at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons in October and November. The use of dogs to hunt coyote is prohibited.

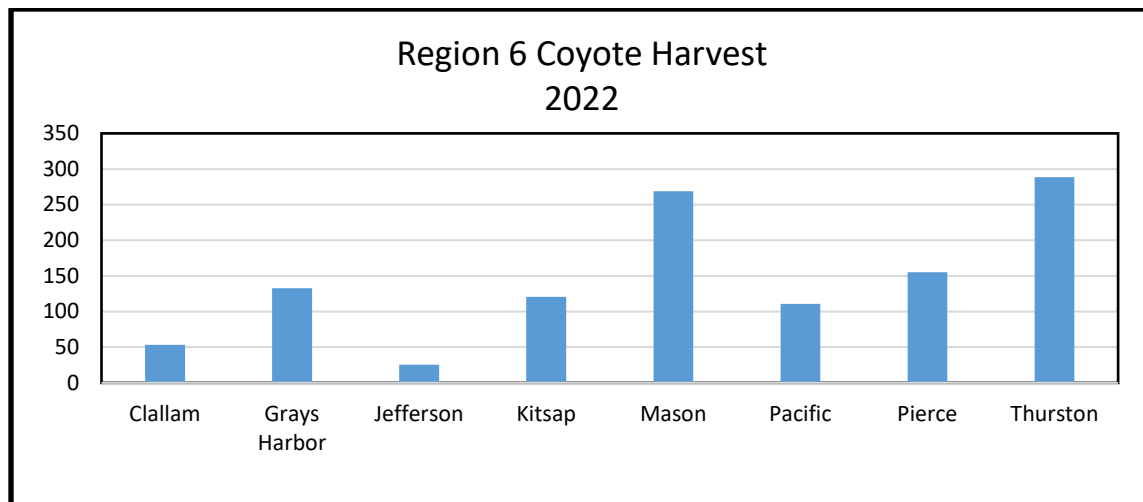
Hunters could mistake wolves, especially juveniles, as coyotes (Figure 51). Wolves are protected under federal and state law and MAY NOT be shot or killed. Be sure of identification if you are hunting coyote. Report all wolf observations.

Most coyote in the state are harvested via hunting, with very few killed via trapping as nuisance animals. Coyote harvest data prior to 2022 had low precision but a new small game analysis started in 2022 is more accurate and is provided below. Coyote harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication. Thurston County in District 11 provides some of the most coyote hunting opportunities.

Figure 51. Gray wolf vs coyote distinguishing characteristics.



Figure 52. WDFW Region 6 coyote harvest by hunting by county, 2022.

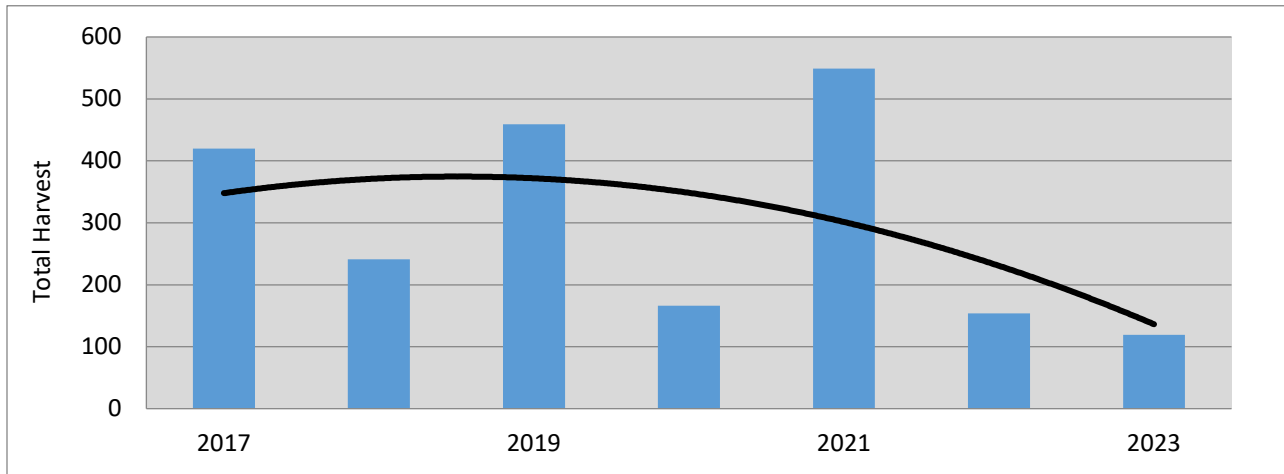


Cottontail rabbits

District 11 provides the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in Region 6, and some of the best in Western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce, Thurston, and northcentral Lewis counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the district fluctuates depending on annual hunter participation. The average harvest in Pierce and Thurston counties combined over the past seven years was 300 annually. Harvest significantly declined in 2022 and 2023, possibly due to fewer hunters participating. Cottontail populations cycle from highs to lows, but normally on a seven- to 10-year basis and not annually; so, this

data reflects participation and success more than natural population cycles. Pierce and Thurston counties' success rates are comparable most years but do vary, as Pierce normally has more hunters than Thurston. Lewis County has much less harvest than Pierce or Thurston. Prospects for cottontail hunting in District 11 remain high.

Figure 53. Cottontail rabbit harvest, Pierce and Thurston counties combined.

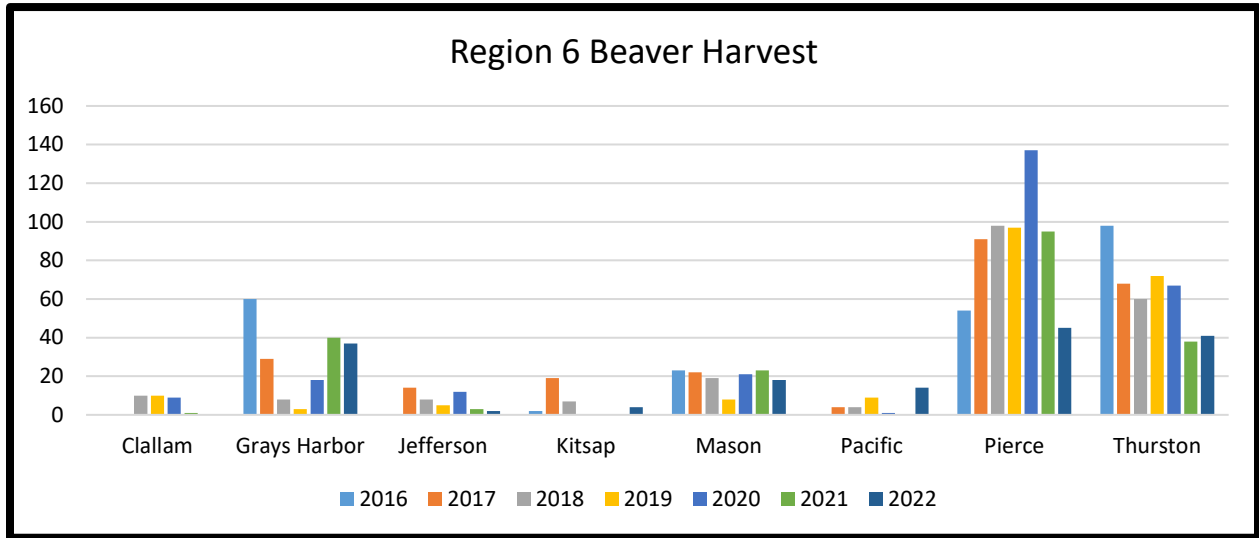


Beaver, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk, and river otter

These species are all plentiful across Region 6, including District 11. Long-tailed weasels occur primarily on pasture, cropland, fields, and grasslands, although few are harvested in the district or region. Hunters may only harvest beaver, weasel, marten, muskrat, and river otter by trapping with a [trapping license](#) during the trapping season (Nov. 1 to March 31). Skunks are an unclassified species and can be hunted or trapped year-round without limit.

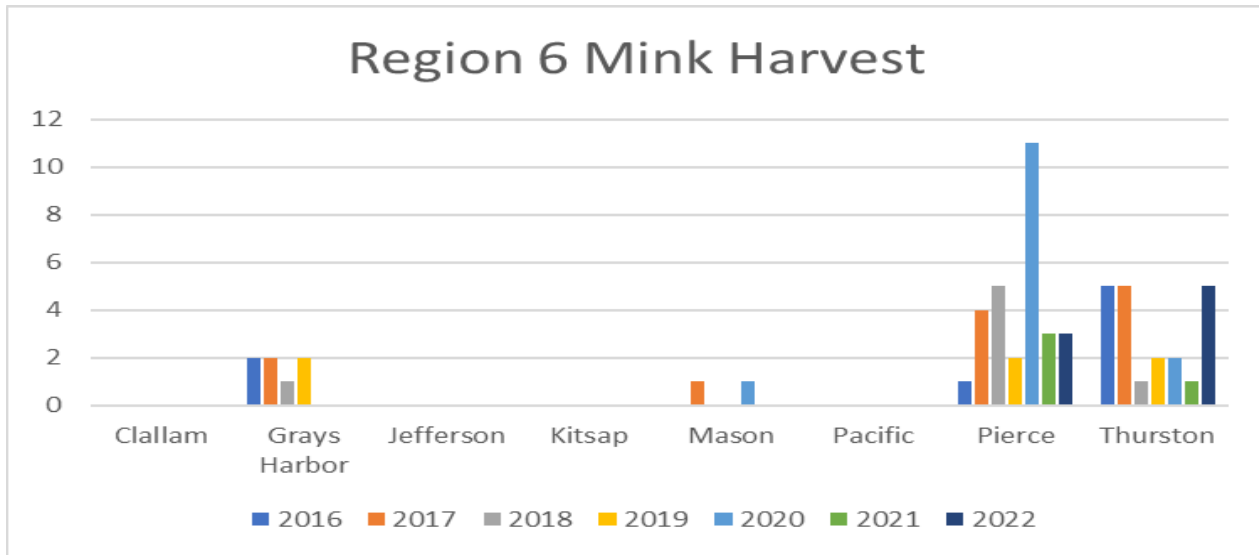
Beaver harvest in Thurston and Pierce counties (District 11) is the highest in Region 6 by a significant amount. Considering lakes, wetlands, and waterways exist across the region, the difference is likely due to more hunter participation and more removal of nuisance beaver in these highly urbanized counties. Beaver harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

Figure 54. WDFW Region 6 beaver harvest by trapping by county.



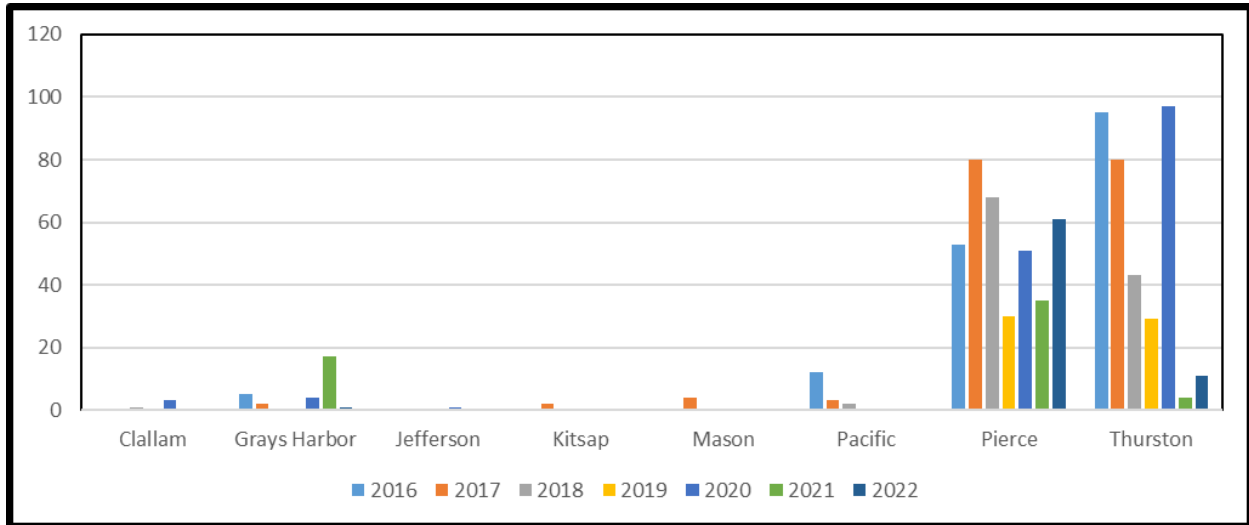
Mink is common across Region 6 but not plentiful. Regardless, District 11 typically provides the most, and sometimes only, annual harvest in the region. Mink harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

Figure 55. WDFW Region 6 mink harvest by trapping by county.



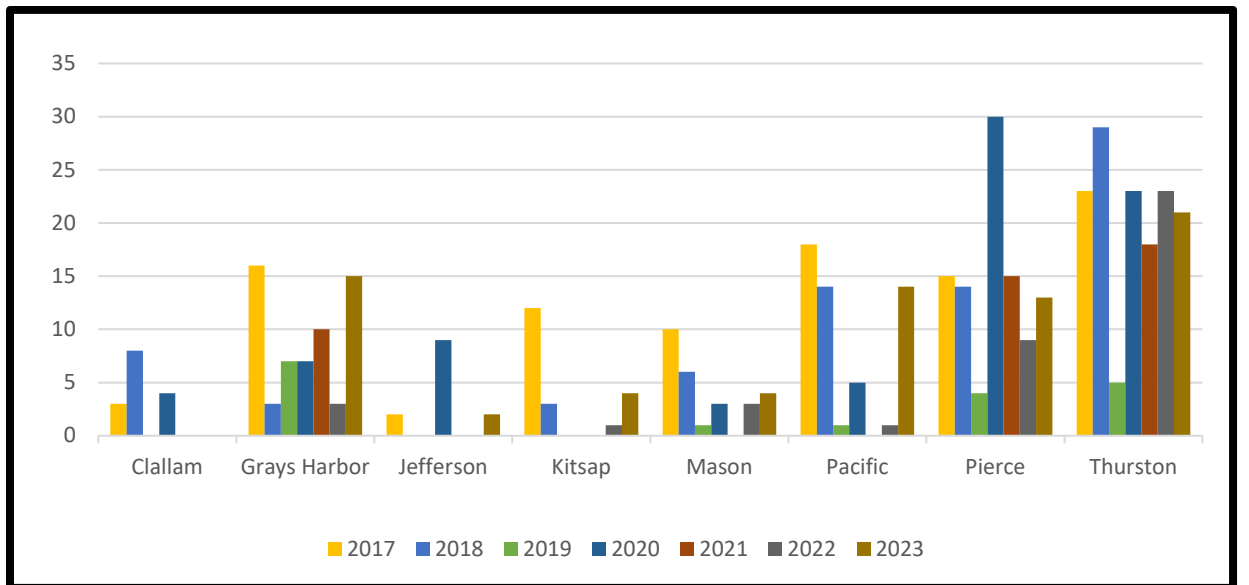
Muskrats are also common across Region 6, but few hunters specifically target them, and most are likely trapped incidentally to other species. District 11 typically provides the most annual harvest in the region. Muskrat harvest data for 2023 was unavailable at the time of this publication.

Figure 56. WDFW Region 6 muskrat harvest by trapping by county.



River otters (*Lontra canadensis*) are plentiful in freshwater lakes, streams, and wetlands across District 11 and less so in the saltwater of the Puget Sound inlet. Sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*) are found in the saltwater of Puget Sound and the outer coast and cannot be trapped or hunted. **Successful river otter trappers must contact a WDFW office to have their otter pelt(s) sealed and submit the associated harvest report to WDFW by April 20 of each year.** Pelts must be presented in a way that the hide can be sealed. No frozen hides or carcasses will be accepted (reference). Pierce and Thurston counties consistently provide some of the highest trap rates for river otter within Region 6.

Figure 57. WDFW Region 6 river otter harvest by trapping by county.



American marten

American martens inhabit eastern District 11 as part of the Cascades population, which is considered stable. American martens are difficult to trap; none were reported harvested from 2018 to 2022. Fishers may be misidentified as martens; fishers are protected under federal and state law and MAY NOT be trapped or killed. Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten. Report all fisher observations [through WDFW's online form](#) or wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov.

Figure 58. Identification of fisher and marten in Washington.

Identification of Fisher and Marten in Washington


Fishers are protected under both federal and state law and may not be trapped or killed.
Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten or mink.


Pelage Colors
Fisher — dark brown with lighter shading on head, back of the neck and back.
Marten — light brown to brown (cinnamon, russet), with creamy brown/ beige face and occasionally chest with darker brown legs, feet and end of tail.

Size
Fishers are bigger, darker and have noticeably longer and fuller tails than marten. Fishers tails average 14-15 inches in length and Martens tails average 6.5-7.5 inches in length.

Ear Shape
Fishers — rounded "teddy-bear" shaped ears
Martens — more pointed ears

Elevation
Fishers and martens overlap in elevation. Therefore, elevation should not be used as an indicator of species presence.

FISHER

Photo by Paul Bannick

MARTEN

WDFW Staff

Trapping Information
Use cubby boxes, with a closed front and 2.5 inch entrance hole, to avoid catching fishers.

Ducks

The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, primarily Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. According to the USFWS Waterfowl Population Status report for 2023, habitat conditions during the 2023 Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey declined relative to 2022. For the latest information regarding waterfowl species status, reference the USFWS' [2023 Waterfowl Status report](#).

Figure 59. Waterfowl flyways of North America.



Total duck breeding population estimates in Washington for 2023 declined by 7% compared to 2022 but were 4% higher than the long-term average (2010–2023). Prospects for waterfowl hunting in District 11 remain good.

Information on the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Surveys and the Mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory can be found on the [USFWS website](#).

Table 3. Breeding population estimates for ducks that occur in District 11 for 2023. Long-term average is 1955-2022. Mallard estimates provided only for Washington; all remaining species represent U.S. totals.

Species	Breeding population estimate
Mallard (Washington only)	102,000, which was 17% above the 2022 estimate and 12% above the long-term average
Green-winged teal	2,504,000, which was 16% above the 2022 estimate and 15% above the long-term average
Gadwall	2,562,000, which was 5% below the 2022 estimate and 25% above the long-term average
American widgeon	1,890,000, which was 14% below the 2022 estimate and 8% above the long-term average
Northern shoveler	2,859,000, which was 6% below the 2022 estimate and 28% below the long-term average
Northern pintail	2,219,000, which was 24% above the 2022 estimate and 43% below the long-term average
Scaup (combined)	3,519,000, which was 4% below the 2022 estimate and 29% below the long-term average
Canvasback	619,000, which was 6% above the 2022 estimate and 5% above the long-term average

Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, off Anderson Island (GMU 655), and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in South Puget Sound. Duck harvest in District 11 has increased over the last two years following a noticeable decline in 2018 and 2019.

Figure 60. Duck harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties combined and all species included).

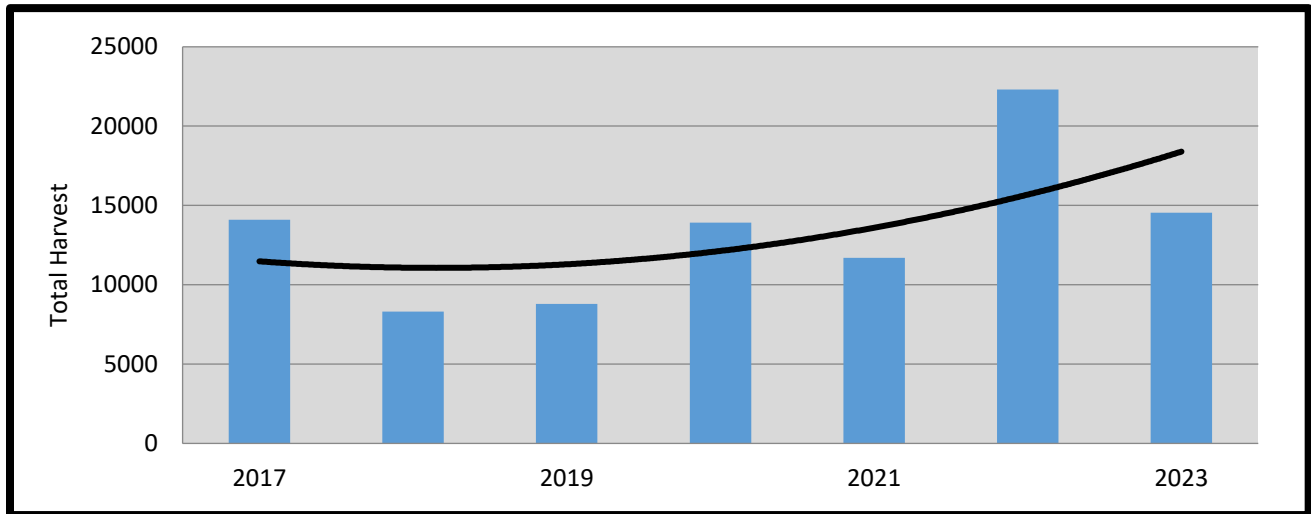
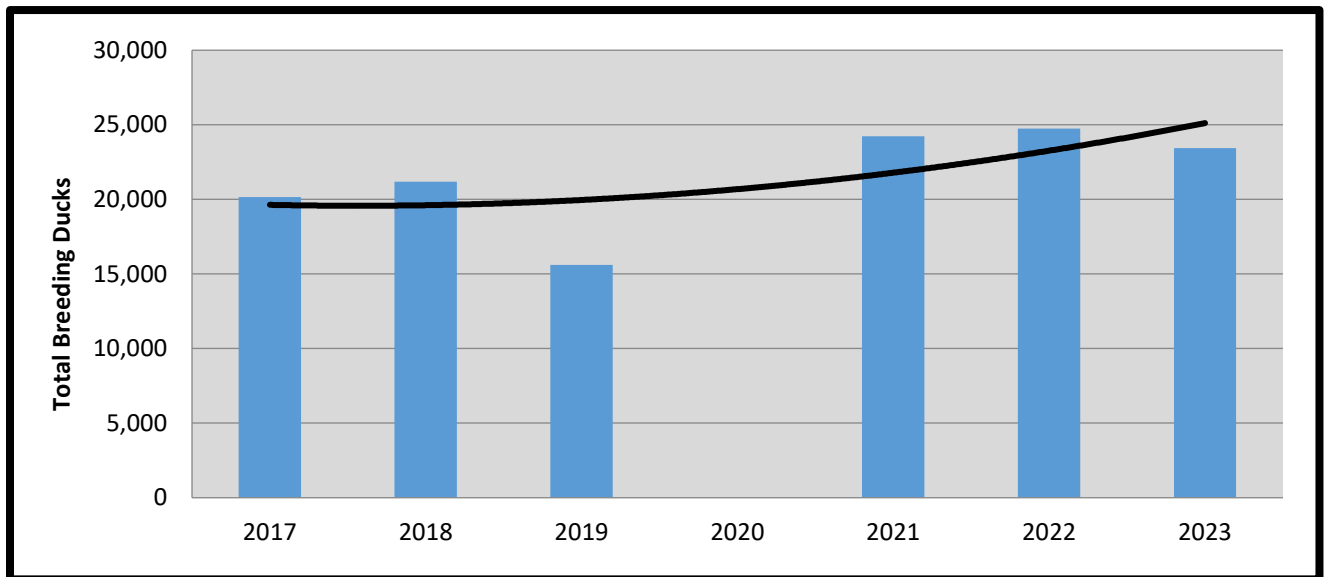


Figure 61. WDFW breeding duck survey, South Puget Sound.



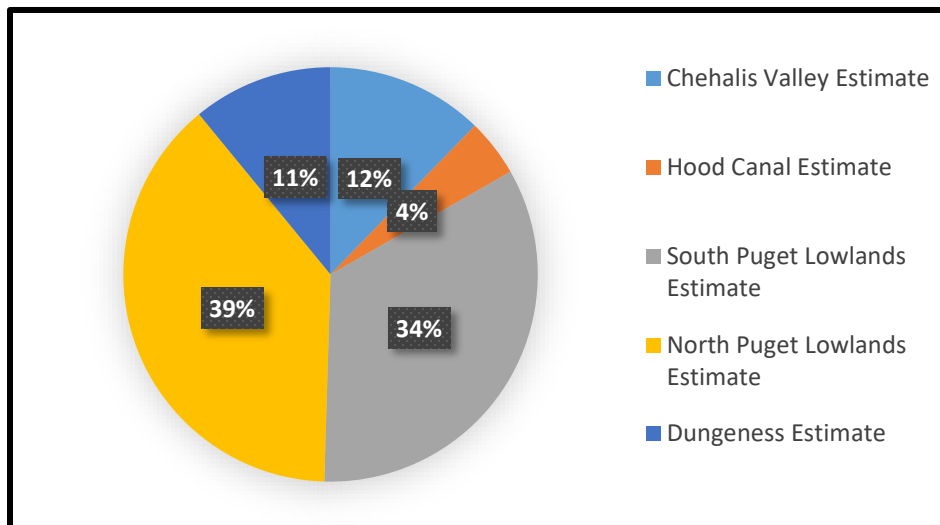
Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily because of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. Hunting prospects for waterfowl remain good in the district in 2024, with the best prospects being in Thurston County.

The Washington Duck Breeding Population Survey is the basis for tracking trends in breeding waterfowl and can be read in detail in the annual [WDFW Game Status and Trends reports](#). The Western Washington total breeding duck population estimate is 69,493 (SE 8,511) in 2024. Mallards were the highest for the 2024 survey at 43,225 (SE 7,815), followed by green-winged teal at 6,434 (SE 2,110), wood duck at 5,222 (SE 737), and Northern shoveler, gadwall, ring-necked duck, and bufflehead all around 2,000. The greatest factor influencing brood production in the district continues to be habitat

loss due to development and increasing human disturbance. Wildlife managers expect waterfowl numbers to remain stable in District 11.

The South Puget Sound lowlands have the second-highest percent of breeding ducks in Western Washington, according to WDFW's annual breeding duck surveys. Typically, breeding season duck estimates are highest in North Puget Sound, with Hood Canal having the lowest. District 11 — being within the South Puget Sound lowlands — normally supports the next-highest concentrations of breeding ducks, making the district a great place to hunt for waterfowl.

Figure 62. WDFW breeding duck survey results for Western Washington, 2024.

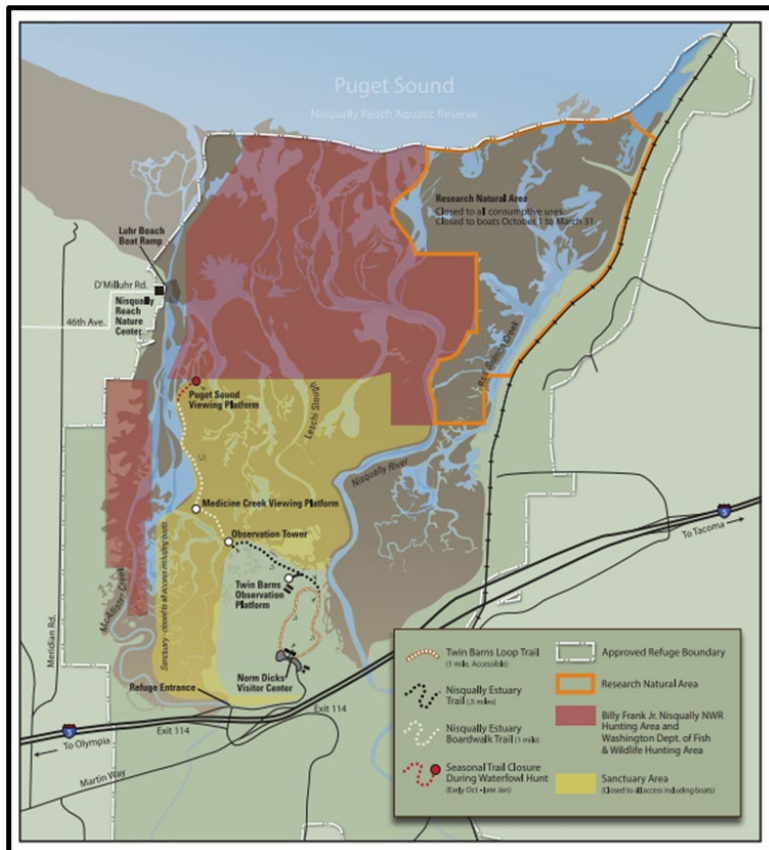


Where to hunt waterfowl in District 11

Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

One of the best waterfowl hunting areas in District 11 is the [Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge](#), located on the border between Pierce and Thurston counties. USFWS has 570 acres of refuge waters and tidelands open to waterfowl hunting at the refuge. This includes an expanded area in 2020 that extends north of and adjacent to the previous hunt area. This provides a total of 1,197 acres of USFWS- and WDFW-managed lands within the refuge boundary that are open to waterfowl hunting. Hunting access is by boat only. The estuary restoration area (sanctuary) and research natural area remain closed to hunting and boating to provide adequate wildlife sanctuary. Full regulations and the refuge hunting brochure can be downloaded and printed on the [refuge hunting page](#).

Figure 63. Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge recreation map.



Centralia Mine

Centralia Mine provides limited entry quality hunting opportunity as a sign-up on a first-come basis. In early September, the mine sends a notice to all its employees (TransAlta employees) with the date and time the sign-up will open. Only TransAlta employees are allowed to sign up for the first week the calendar is released, after which the public may sign up for hunting any calendar dates still available. All hunters must sign up in person at the main Centralia Mine security gate shack. Hunting is allowed on Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays that fall within the waterfowl season. Hunters must check in at the security gate on their day of hunting. They cannot sign up for other people and are limited to two days per person. Toward the end of the season, they can sign up for an additional two days if there are still dates available. Hunters must sign a waiver and may only hunt on one site located in a hay field immediately east of the mine facilities (reference map below). Digging pit blinds is not allowed. Hunters can only hunt waterfowl and not big game. Hunters can send questions to bill_scheer@transalta.com.

Figure 64. Centralia Mine waterfowl hunting area map (waterfowl hunt area outlined in bright green).



Lakes and flooded agricultural fields

The following lakes and agricultural fields have the highest mid-winter waterfowl counts in District 11 and may be good sites to scout. Be advised of those in **firearm restriction areas**—review Introduction section.

Pierce County: American Lake, Lake Bay, Flett Dairy, Hylebos Waterway, Kreger Lake, Lake Chalet, various fields around McKenna, Puyallup Valley ag fields, Spanaway Lake, Steilacoom Lake, Waughop Lake.

Thurston County: Black Lake, Capitol Lake, Case Road at 113th, Evergreen Valley, Lake Lawrence, Long Lake, McIntosh Lake, Pattison Lake, Smith Prairie, Zeller Loop Road.

Puget Sound shorelines: District 11 has abundant marine shorelines both on the mainland and the various islands of South Puget Sound. The small inlets associated with those shorelines support high numbers of ducks and seabirds and may be hunted provided they are not within firearm restriction areas.

Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies surrounded by housing. Hunters are urged to obey all regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county firearm restriction area (review Introduction). [Rapjohn Lake](#) in Pierce County has a Register to Hunt Program and requires hunting from two established blinds. Registration for the blinds is on a first-come basis and is established by parking in one of the two mandatory parking lots at the WDFW Rapjohn Lake Access Site.

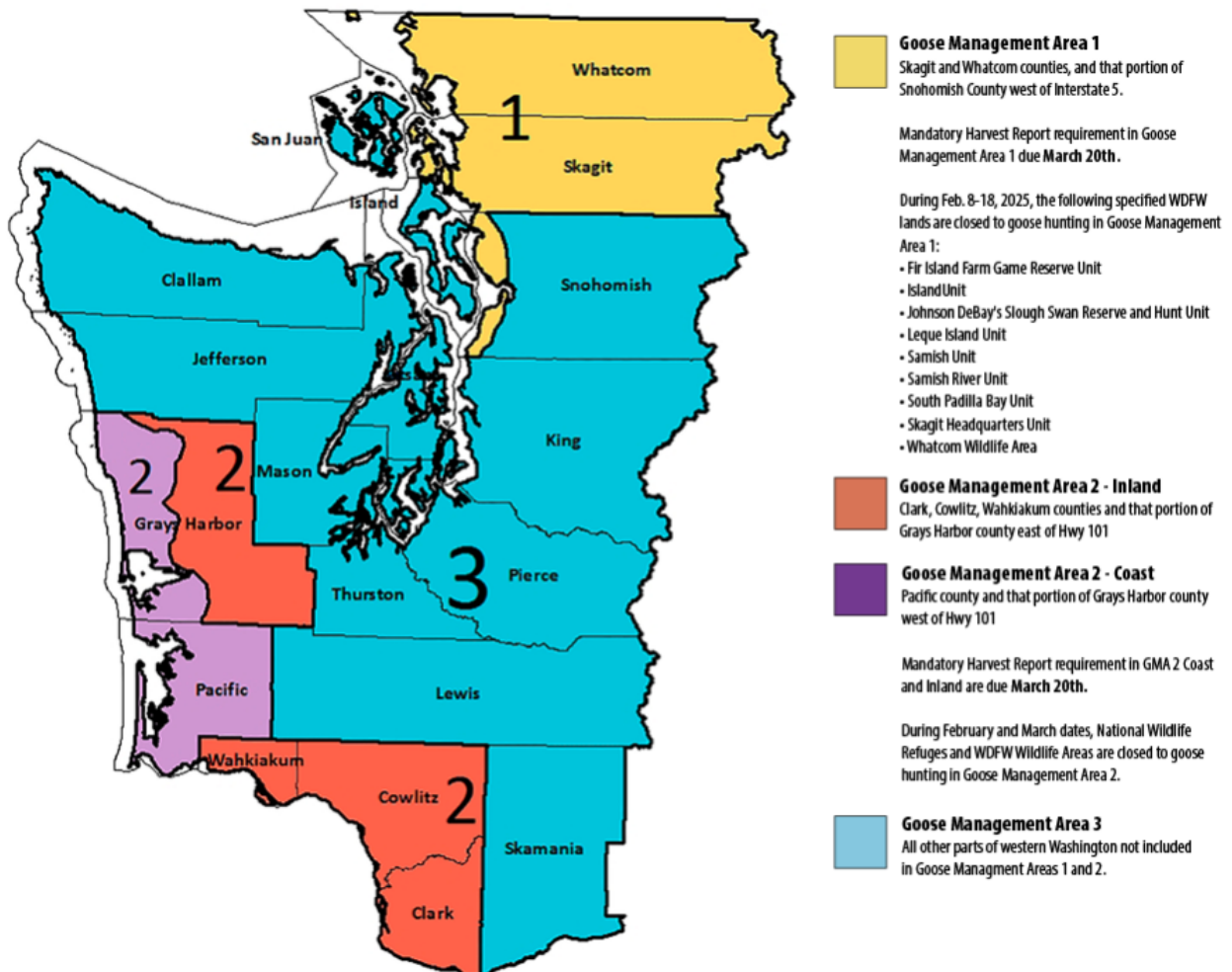
New for 2024 – 2025: Harlequin duck hunting permit

Thirty-eight permits were made available to eligible applicants through an August drawing; the application period was July 1 to Aug. 14. To apply for a Harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington small game hunting license, migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. For more information, visit the WDFW [Harlequin duck hunting permit page](#).

Geese

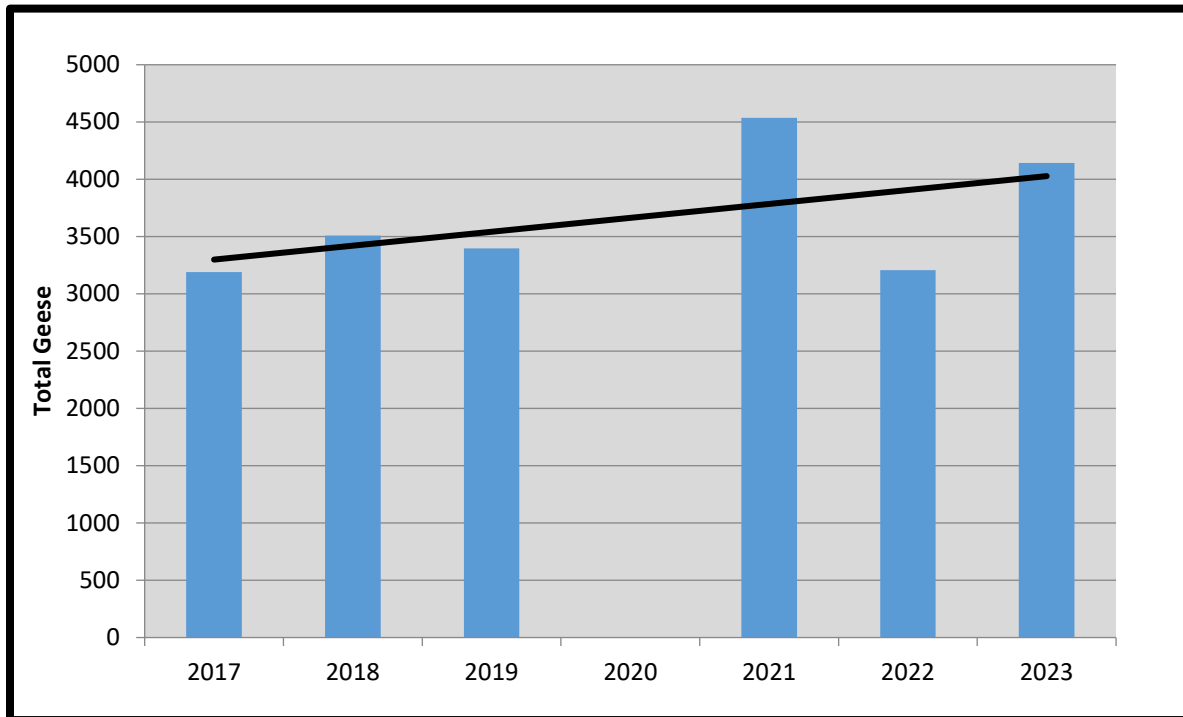
Most goose hunting opportunity in District 11 is for Canada geese. All of District 11 is within Goose Management Area 3. The season is open Oct. 12-24 and Nov. 2 to – Jan. 26 with a daily bag limit of four Canada geese, 10 white-fronted geese, and 10 white geese and a season possession limit for the same of 12, 30, and 30, respectively. Canada geese include cackling, Taverner's and Aleutian geese. White geese include snow and Ross' geese.

Figure 65. Western Washington goose management areas.



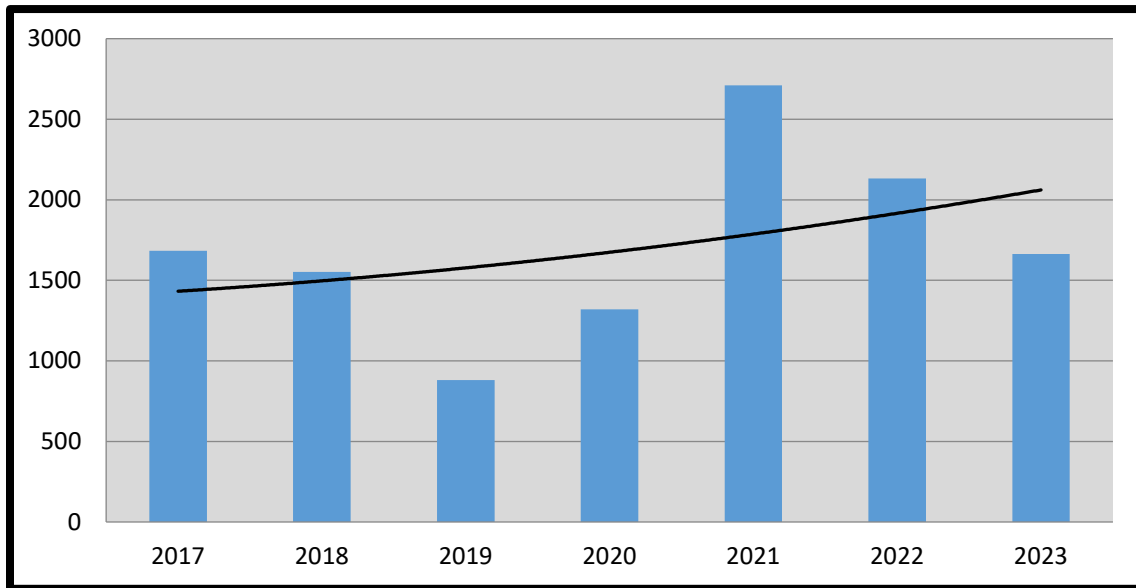
Resident geese are increasing in distribution, especially within urban and rural areas. Goose breeding survey trends have increased in South Puget Sound since 2017 (note: surveys not conducted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic). Prospects for goose hunters in District 11 are good for 2024.

Figure 66. Breeding goose survey, South Puget Sound.



Areas reported earlier for good waterfowl hunting include good goose hunting, particularly the inland (western) agricultural fields of Pierce, Thurston, and Lewis counties. Goose harvest in the district rose sharply in 2021 but declined in 2022 and 2023. Regardless, prospects for goose hunters are higher than in the past.

Figure 67. Canada goose harvest in District 11.



Swans are protected by federal and state laws and are closed to hunting statewide. WDFW encourages all waterfowl hunters to know all identification features for swans as compared to snow geese.

Figure 68. Swan identification.



Mourning dove

For general information regarding upland bird hunting, please visit:

- [Upland bird hunting](#)
- [The Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#)
- [Where to go upland bird hunting](#)

WDFW uses the annual USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status Report to analyze trends in mourning dove populations. The report summarizes trends in the number of doves heard and seen per route from the all-species Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and provides absolute abundance estimates based on band

recovery and harvest data. Harvest and hunter participation are estimated from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP). The 2024 report, which will include data for 2023, was not yet available at the time of this publication.

BBS data suggests the abundance of mourning dove decreased over the last 57 years in the western management units, comprised of the seven western states, including Washington, but remained unchanged during the past 10 years. Estimates were lowest in 2019 and 2022. The most recent estimates indicate there were 161 million mourning doves in the U.S. immediately prior to the 2021-22 hunting season. Abundance estimates were highest in the central and eastern U.S. management units in 2022 and lowest in the western management units.

Figure 69. Estimates and 95% confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the western management units combined, 2003–2022. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data.

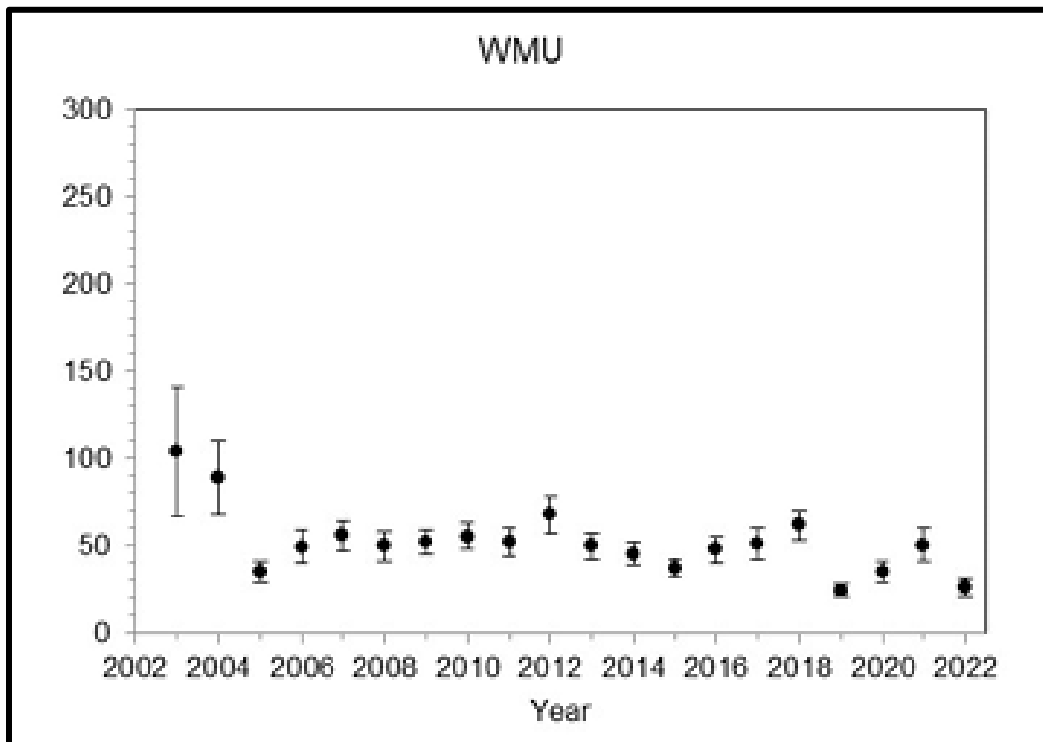
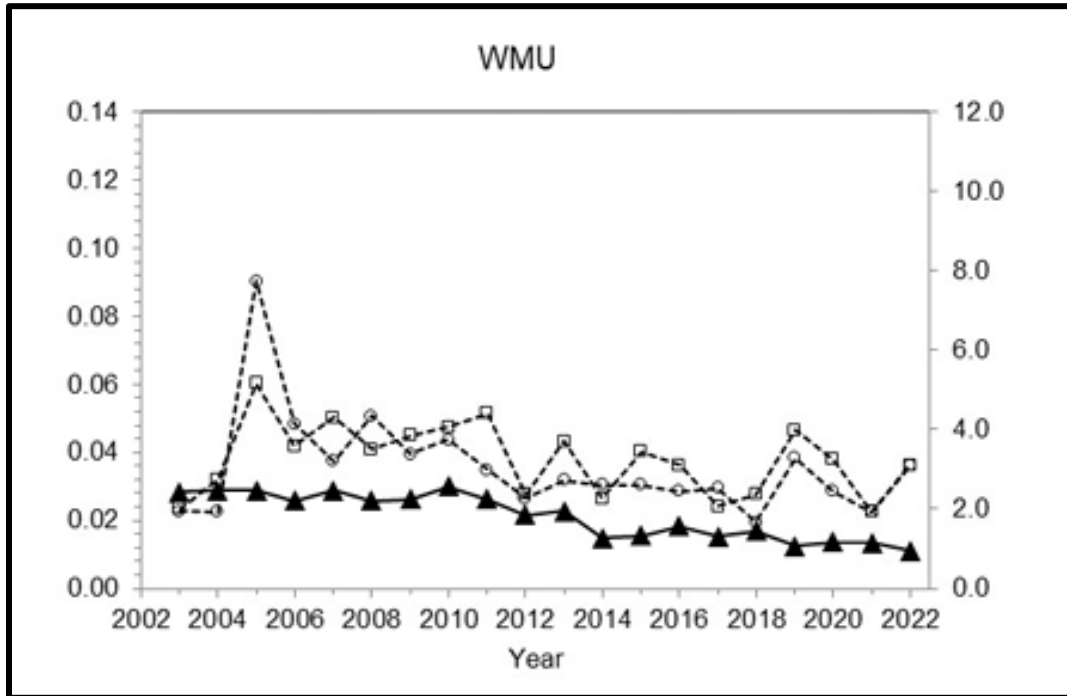


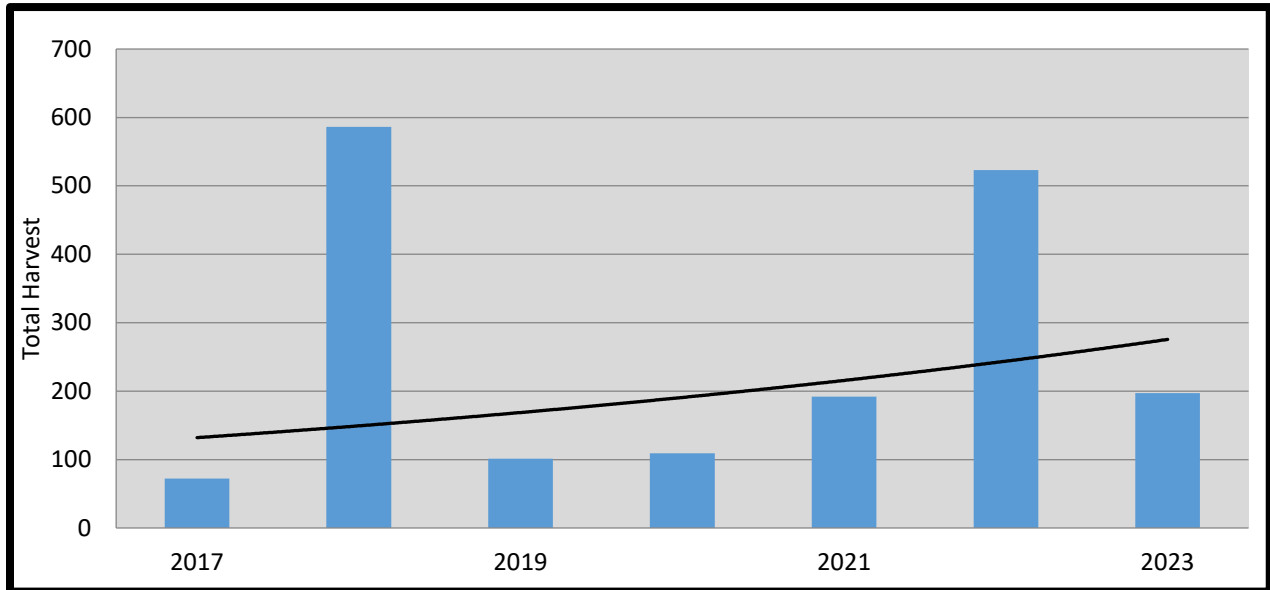
Figure 70. Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove in the western management units combined, 2002–2022. Harvest rates presented separately for hatch-year and after-hatch-year (USFWS, 2022).



Approximately $3,400 \pm 500$ active hunters harvested $31,100 \pm 5,000$ mourning doves in the 2021-22 season in Washington, for an average of 9.1 ± 1.9 doves per hunter according to the USFWS report. This is a slight decrease over 2021-22 estimates. More information on mourning dove and other migratory bird harvest and data collection can be found.

District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area, averaging 254 doves harvested per year over the past seven years. The chart below includes only Pierce and Thurston counties, since GMU 667 of Lewis County cannot be separated from the remainder of that county. Mourning dove harvest exponentially increased in 2018 and 2022 in District 11 and declined again in 2023. Lewis and Thurston counties traditionally provide higher harvest than Pierce County. Harvest depends greatly on hunter participation, which fluctuates year to year. Using the new WDFW harvest data collection and analysis methodology (review explanation provided under Small Game section), the harvest estimates for 2023 were 90, 111, and 86 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties, respectively. A total of 73 hunters reported hunting dove in District 11 in 2023, compared to 81 in 2022 (Lewis County included). The best locations for dove hunting in the district are agricultural areas, especially orchards.

Figure 71. Mourning dove harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).



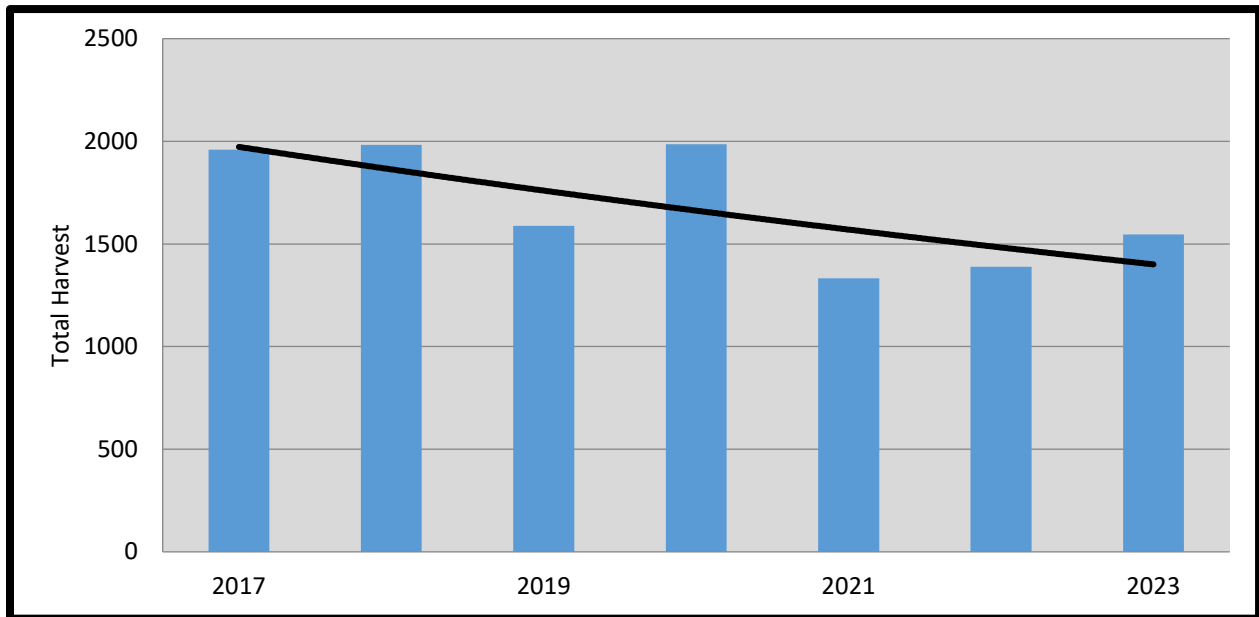
Forest grouse

For general information regarding upland bird hunting, please visit the weblinks listed previously under Mourning Dove.

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. Harvest prospects for sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails, and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting is near fruiting shrublands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Forest roads used to support timber harvests are particularly good locations, since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust they use to discourage mites and other biting parasites. Look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse. Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, particularly in forest habitats near streams and rivers, young forests (5 to 25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Elbe Hills and Tahoma state forests (GMU 654), Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 663).

Forest grouse harvest has trended downward in District 11, especially since 2021, but increased slightly in 2023. Harvest averaged 1,683 grouse annually over the past seven years. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and then Thurston counties.

Figure 72. Forest grouse harvest in District 11 (Pierce and Thurston counties only).



A hunter must buy either a big game or small game license to hunt grouse. Forest grouse season runs Sept. 15 through Jan. 15 statewide, with a daily bag limit of four of any species [to include not more than three dusky or sooty grouse (combined), three spruce grouse, and three ruffed grouse] and a possession limit of 12 [to include not more than nine dusky or sooty grouse (combined), nine spruce grouse, and nine ruffed grouse].

WDFW collects wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse (spruce, ruffed, dusky, and sooty) during the Sept. 1 to Jan. 15 hunting season. The goal is to build estimated population trend datasets for each species to evaluate harvest changes. Grouse hunters can help by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse harvested into wing collection barrels placed around the state or by bringing them to the closest WDFW district or regional office. Wing and tail collection locations and instructions can be found on [WDFW's website](#). Hunter participation in wing submission remained stable 2023 and has averaged 58 wings submitted annually. The annual analysis and results of wing monitoring can be found in the [game status and trend reports](#).



WDFW grouse wing barrel collection station. Photo by E. Butler.



WDFW grouse wing barrel collection instructions. Photo by WDFW.

Table 4. Number of wing bags collected by month in 2023 at District 11 barrels.

Barrel Name	Collection Month					
	September*	October	November	December	January	Total
North Vail	0	23	3	5	5	36
Skookumchuck	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Vail	0	20	1	3	0	24
Total	0	43	4	8	5	60

*Sites not checked in September 2023.

Pheasant



Youth pheasant hunt. Photo by Nick Eisenmann.

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining pheasant populations, primarily due to the wet climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting in Western Washington is dependent upon pheasant releases in the fall. District 11 is fortunate to contain three of the 24 pheasant release sites in Western Washington. For that reason, hunters continue to have great prospects for harvesting pheasant in this district. In addition, WDFW often releases pheasants into District 11 via the network of collaborators used across the state. The shorter distance means less travel time, stress, and fatigue for the birds prior to release. According to WDFW’s pheasant production manager, this equates to more consistency and stronger birds at release, which should improve opportunity for District 11 hunters.

Game farm-produced pheasants will be released this fall; sites are described and mapped on the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) and [upland bird hunting](#) webpages. The release program uses state- (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federally (JBLM) managed lands in District 11.

To protect wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is now required for all upland bird, dove, and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. Hunters visiting any of these release sites may possess and use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Some sites have further restrictions. Reference the [Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) for more information.

Table 5. 2024 pheasant seasons in Western Washington.

Season	Dates	Notes
Youth	Sept. 14-15, 2024	
65 and older and disabled	Sept. 16-20, 2024	
General	Sept. 21-30, 2024	Last pheasants released Thanksgiving morning.
Extended	Dec. 1-15, 2024	Includes both Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck wildlife areas. No pheasants released.

Western Washington pheasant hunters must choose between odd-numbered or even-numbered weekend days from 8-10 a.m. at all units of Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek wildlife areas, with a daily bag limit of two (either sex) and possession limit of 15 (either sex). Hunters must indicate their choice of odd-numbered or even-numbered weekend days on the Western Washington Pheasant Permit by choosing "odd" or "even." Hunters who select the three-day option, those possessing a valid disabled hunter permit, those 65 and older, and youth hunters may hunt in the morning on both odd-numbered and even-numbered weekend days.

Youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult, and the adult must have an appropriately marked pheasant permit if hunting. An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at the Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek wildlife areas and JBLM release sites from Dec. 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as the general season. Pheasants are **not** released as part of the extended season. Pheasant hunters need a Western Washington pheasant license. Additional information can be found on the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program website noted above.

Pheasant release in Western Washington will be similar to last year, with an estimated 37,000 pheasants to be released at 25 pheasant release areas in 2024, compared to 35,741 in 2023. These are estimates only; seasonal temperature fluctuations and other mortalities could affect total production. Approximately 1,800 pheasants (5% of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays from Sept. 14 through Thanksgiving morning. Approximately 3,600 pheasants (10% of total production) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 120-135 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays.

WDFW pays close attention to balancing management of [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#) and the recovery of [state and federally listed species](#) on WDFW-managed lands while maintaining and maximizing recreational access and opportunity. This is particularly true where native prairie remains on WDFW wildlife areas in South Puget Sound, including Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, where some areas are off limits to hunters. Please **obey all posted signs**. The same balance of needs is a goal on the federally managed JBLM remnant prairies. While WDFW and JBLM have been able to keep lands open for pheasant hunting, some areas must be closed to access seasonally or permanently to allow for species and habitat recovery.

Approximately 4,800 pheasants (13% of total production) will be released on JBLM training areas as those areas become available. Military training and listed species management dictate which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. During the 2022 season, 4,782 pheasants were released on JBLM. The Department anticipates the number of birds released to increase by 3% in 2024, but it will depend on military, recreation, and environmental scheduling.

NOTICE: JBLM changed its recreational access management system in 2023 and is now implementing a computer- and smartphone-based platform called iSportsman. To learn about hunting, fishing, and other recreation on JBLM, visit the [JBLM hunting and fishing webpage](#). JBLM recreation managers stress the following for 2024:

- Access for pheasant release events is now managed by JBLM Fish and Wildlife. MWR is no longer a part of the process besides being available for basic in-person account assistance.
- All users must create accounts and purchase permits at jblm.isportsman.net/Default.aspx.
- Account validation is required for all new users, and an email with instructions is sent immediately after account registration. Permits will not display prior to completing the validation step.
- Watching a safety brief video is still required, but proof of vehicle registration or insurance is no longer required.
- Firearms must be registered with the Provost Marshal's office (home.army.mil/lewis-mcchord/index.php/my-Joint-Base-Lewis-Mcchord/all-services/weapons-registration).
- During the season, hunting dates and locations are posted to jblm.isportsman.net/Alerts.aspx.
- Reservations are required for all pheasant releases and can be made through each user's account the day before each hunt. Instructions are posted on the Alerts/News page during the season.
- After making a reservation, hunters must check in to their reserved area on the day of the hunt. This is also covered in the posted instructions.

JBLM pheasant release

Hunting at the JBLM pheasant release site will consist of a morning hunt (8–11 a.m.) and an afternoon hunt (1–4 p.m.). On Wednesdays, federal holidays, and Thanksgiving through the following weekend, areas are a single release all-day hunt. Pheasant hunt reservations will start in the morning the day before the hunt on a first-come, first-served basis. WDFW reminds pheasant hunters to wear a minimum of 400 square inches of blaze orange visible front and back. All individuals MUST park by the designated sign-in board. Parking in any other area is prohibited. On residual non-release days, you may park anywhere, but ensure that parking doesn't impede safety or conflict with other hunters. Pheasant release sites and a list of areas open for both pheasant and waterfowl hunting can be found at the iSportsman site.

JBLM youth and senior pheasant hunt

Youth hunt (under 16); senior hunt (65 and older): Check state regulations for September dates. A state hunting license and successful completion of the Washington Hunter Education Program are required. Youth must be accompanied by an adult. Volunteers will be assigned to assist all youth, and hunting dogs will be available. Normal sign-up/reservations are required as well as a JBLM registration permit. A special pheasant area will be set aside for senior hunters, in accordance with state regulations, if enough sites are available to the public.

Youth pheasant hunt dates will be identified in accordance with state regulation. All youth who qualify must also register with iSportsman. Youth hunters may sign up for the hunt 14 days in advance. Call the Northwest Adventure Center with questions (253-967-5200). Pheasant hunters are not allowed to enter their hunting area prior to one hour before start time of the morning or afternoon hunt and must sign in and out by the posted official time.

Quail

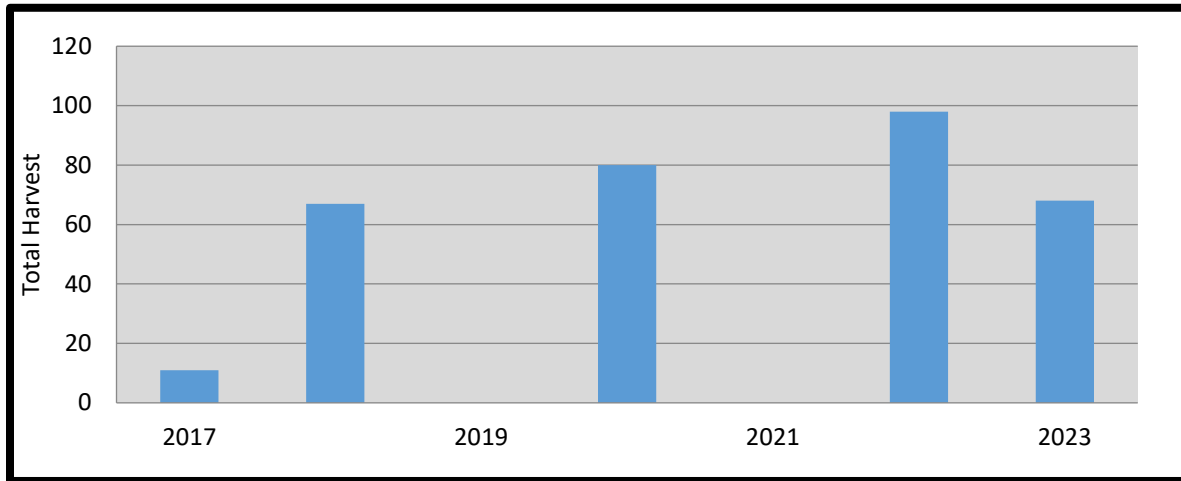
For general information on hunting quail, please visit WDFW's [quail hunting webpage](#).

For general information regarding upland bird hunting, please visit the websites listed previously under Mourning Dove.

Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout Western Washington. Quail harvest in the district fluctuates annually, depending on the number of hunters participating and often reaching zero (as in 2019 and 2021). As an example, only eight people hunted quail in the district in 2017 and the harvest reflects that effort. Regardless, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in Western Washington where people hunt quail. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of the Key Peninsula, Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. Where

private property access is limited, seek out state (DNR) and county forestland. The Western Washington California (valley) quail season runs end of September through end of November, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs the same dates, with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four (either sex).

Figure 73. Quail harvest in District 11.



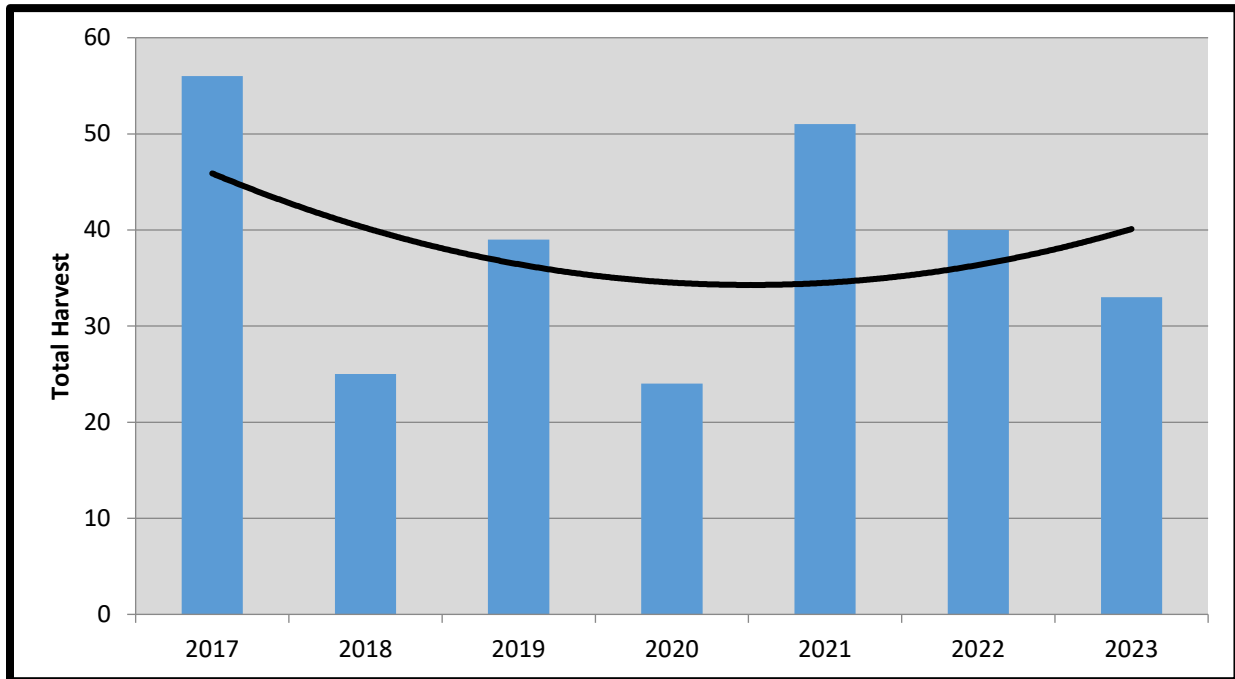
Turkeys

General information on hunting turkey can be found in the [2024-25 Washington Game Bird Hunting Regulations](#) and WDFW's [Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) booklet.

Turkeys are rare, dispersed in District 11, and not managed specifically for hunting opportunity in this district. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern subspecies of wild turkey in the district, and harvest reflects hunter participation year to year. Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Unit 50, which includes District 11, has fluctuated since 2017, averaging 38 turkeys annually over the past seven years.

WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula, Pierce County; Rochester, Grand Mound, and Tenino, Thurston County; and along the Johnson Creek corridor, Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. Annually, most turkey harvest occurs in the Skookumchuck Unit (GMU 667), followed by a few in Deschutes (GMU 666) and Puyallup (GMU 652).

Figure 74. Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Management Unit 50, which includes District 11.



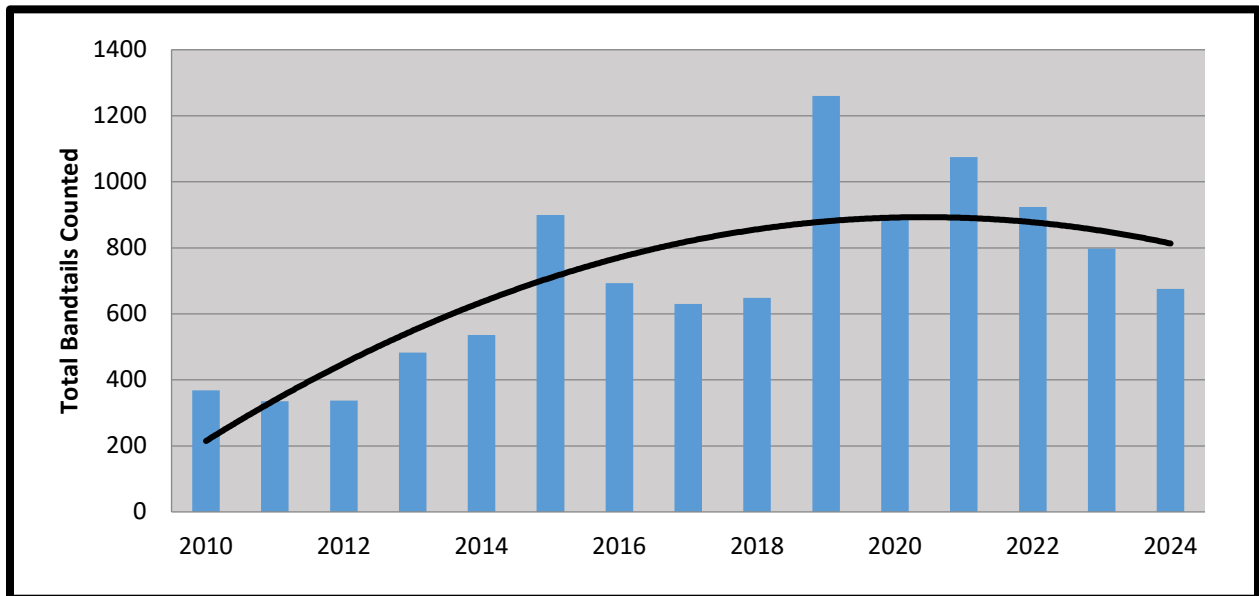
Band-tailed pigeons

For general information regarding upland bird hunting, please visit WDFW’s upland bird hunting [page](#), the [Basics of Upland Bird Hunting in Washington](#) booklet, and [where to go upland bird hunting page](#).

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest pigeon species in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they feed mainly on berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits. Band-tailed pigeons frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in 5- to 10-year-old timber harvests, where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests used by band-tails is hard to predict. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites. Upon finding a good site, sit patiently and wait for pass shooting opportunities. Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season. **Please contact WDFW if you know of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Pierce, Thurston, or Lewis counties.**

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at the 16 mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities. Band-tailed pigeon estimates based on mineral site surveys have trended downward over the last three years in District 11, after reaching a 10-year high in 2019 and 2021. The prospect for harvesting band-tails in District 11 in 2024 remains decent but not outstanding.

Figure 75. Annual band-tailed pigeon mineral site survey results, Pierce and Thurston counties only.



The total band-tailed pigeon harvest in Western Washington in 2023 was 169 birds, which is much lower than estimated population size, so hunters have plenty of opportunity to harvest band-tails. Pierce County harvest is traditionally much higher than Lewis or Thurston counties. The best hunting locations for band-tailed pigeons in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines.

Figure 76. Band-tailed pigeon harvest comparison by county for District 11.

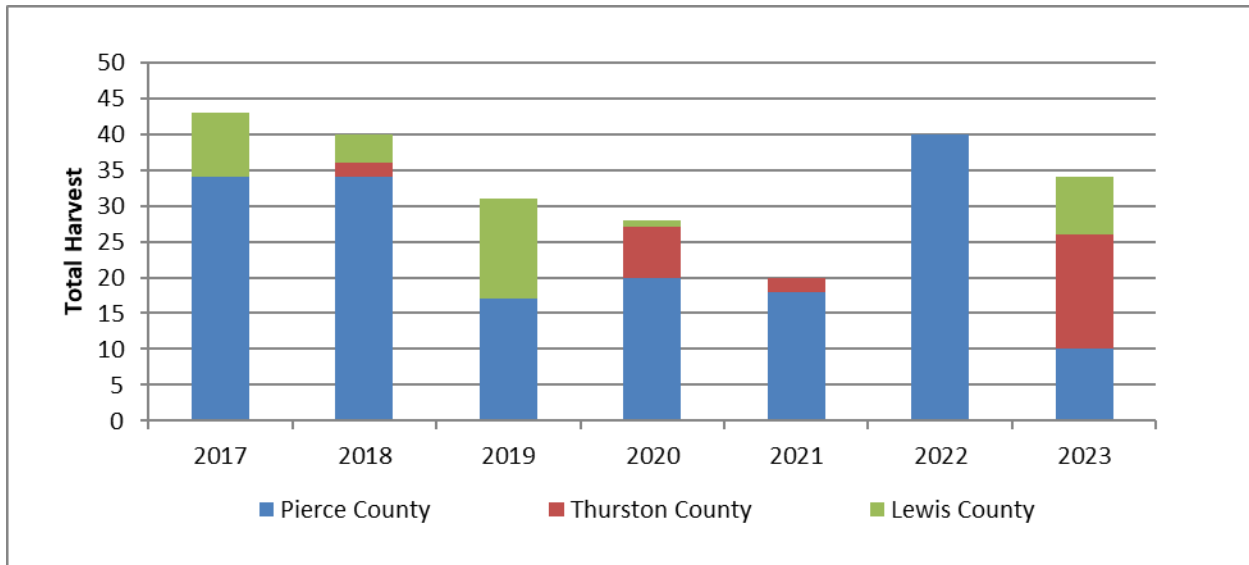
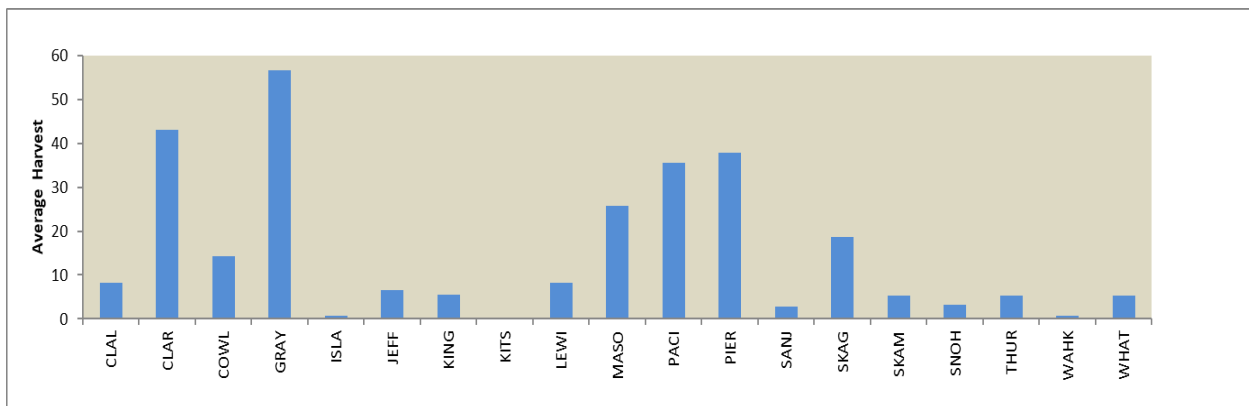


Figure 77. Average annual band-tailed pigeon harvest for each Washington county from 2004-2023.



Special regulations

Since band-tail seasons re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization. Harvest cards must be submitted to WDFW after the season has closed. Hunters should review the 2024 Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

Research

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of Districts 16 and 17. WDFW fitted 11 birds with transmitters that it programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.

The goal is to conduct research on band-tailed pigeons in areas without identified mineral sites, which could allow WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

1. Identify new mineral sites to allow the agency to more accurately index our statewide population via mineral site surveys.
2. More expertly manage our band-tailed pigeons harvest seasons to potentially allow expanded hunting opportunity.
3. Provide detailed information on resource selection to inform managing habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research project has led to the discovery of a new mineral site location in Grays Harbor County. Hunters and members of the public fund this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. The existing project is expected to continue through 2025 across various districts within Region 6.

2024 District 15 Hunting Prospects

Mason, Kitsap, and east Jefferson counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

September 2024

2024 District 15 Hunting Prospects

Mason, Kitsap, and east Jefferson counties

Author

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Cover photo by Bryan Murphie.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 15 general overview

District 15 includes Mason, Kitsap, and the eastern part of Jefferson counties, and is one of four districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that constitute the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Coastal Region, or Region 6. District 15 consists of all or portions of six game management units (GMUs): 621 (Olympic), 624 (Coyle), 627 (Kitsap), 633 (Mason), 636 (Skokomish), and 651 (Satsop). A portion of GMUs 621 and 624 fall within District 16. A portion of GMUs 636 and 651 fall within District 17.

A range of species provide hunting opportunities in District 15, including elk, deer, bear, cougar, waterfowl, grouse, and a variety of other small game. The extent, frequency, and type of monitoring varies by species, but for many the most consistently collected information comes from harvest statistics. Hunting opportunities exist from alpine meadows above timberline to marine areas at sea level in Hood Canal and Puget Sound, including public and private lands. The most hunted landscape in District 15 is industrial forestland, commonly characterized by multi-aged forests consisting primarily of Douglas fir and red alder. Recreational access on most industrial forestland is subject to specific rules or requirements depending on who owns the land, and all District 15 GMUs have some level of access limitations.

The following sections provide a summary of current knowledge for several species with the intent to provide hunters with the best information to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 15, as well as what they can expect to encounter regarding potential for success, competition with other hunters, and access.

For more information on the status of Washington's hunted wildlife, hunters should read the [Game Status and Trend Report](#), which is published annually and available for download on the Department's website.

Elk

General information, management objectives, and population status

All elk in District 15 are Roosevelt elk. Only three GMUs (621, 636, and 651) offer reliable elk hunting. There are no known herds in GMUs 627 or 633, but the Department occasionally receives reports of elk sightings in these units. Elk in GMU 624 reside mostly near the city of Sequim, where harvest is conducted through WDFW's Wildlife Conflict Section. Periodically WDFW receives reports of elk (individuals or small groups) elsewhere in this unit, but nothing that suggests reliable elk hunting exists away from the Sequim herd.

As for GMUs 621, 636, and 651, the quality of elk hunting is fair. These units are usually within the targeted range for bull to cow ratios in the post season (12-25 bulls per 100 cows) but are below population size objectives in all three GMUs. Although we are currently below objectives in the number

of elk across these GMUs, individual herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict. Treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is present in GMUs 636 and 651 and may affect calf productivity in these units, as we have recorded lower than expected spring calf to cow ratios in recent years, averaging around 25 calves per 100 cows. In 621, only two elk have tested positive for TAHD.

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

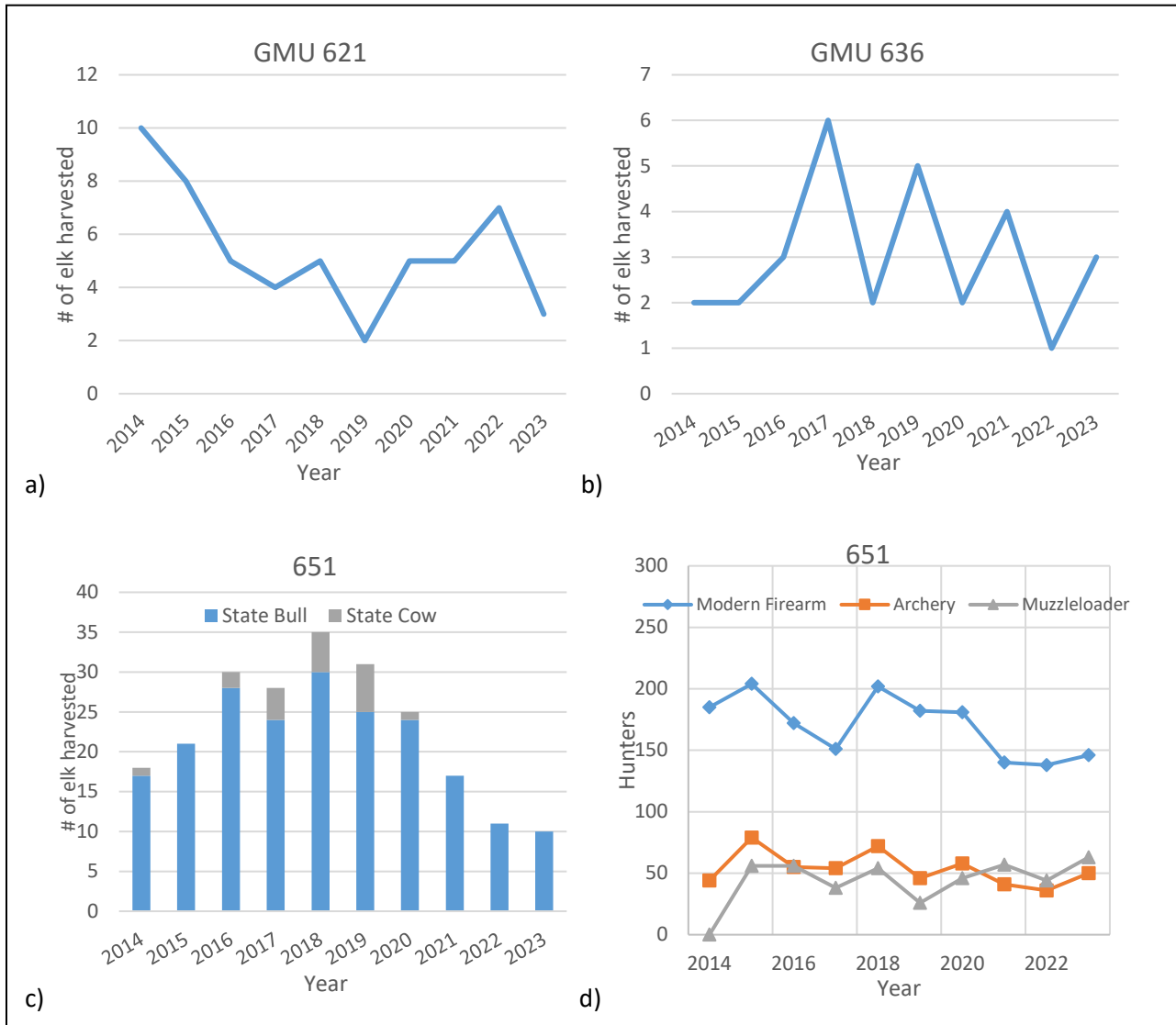
It depends. If you are looking for a special permit bull hunt and do not mind navigating the intricacies of hunting around small private land parcels, you might select GMU 621. If you'd prefer to hunt elk where there are few hunters and decent public land hunting, you might apply for a special bull permit hunt in GMU 636. If you are looking for a general season hunt and have the resources to buy a timberland access permit, GMU 651 is your choice in District 15.

Elk hunting in GMUs 621 and 636 is limited to a special permit draw for bulls only. The number of permits available changes slightly every year, but on average there are 13 permits in GMU 621 and eight permits in GMU 636 distributed among modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader hunters. Although a bit misleading due to the small number of permits, hunter success is pretty good, averaging 62% for archery, 43% for muzzleloaders, and 61% for modern firearm hunters in GMU 621. In GMU 636, muzzleloader hunters report the highest success at 80%, followed by rifle hunters at 70%, and archery hunters at 10% during the last five years. Bull harvest averages seven in GMU 621 and three in GMU 636 (Figure 1).

GMU 651 is open for general season hunting during the early archery, modern firearm, and late-muzzleloader seasons. This is a three-point minimum bull unit for all seasons, except antlerless elk are legal in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. The number of hunters and elk harvest are declining in this unit (Figure 2). Five-year average hunter success by weapon type in this GMU is 7% for archery, 6% for muzzleloaders, and 8% for modern firearm hunters.

Tribal hunting occurs in District 15, often accounting for 50% or more of the total elk harvest in the district. Thus, actual hunting pressure in these units may be higher than expected and hunters looking for an elk in any of these GMUs could encounter tribal hunters.

Figure 1. Bull elk harvest in GMUs 621 (a) and 636 (b), and elk harvest (c) and hunter numbers (d) in the Satsop GMU (651), 2014–2023.



What to expect during the 2024 season

The general and permit elk hunting seasons are similar to last year. There are seven modern firearm, four archery, and three muzzleloader permits available in GMU 621. There are six modern firearm, five archery, and one muzzleloader permits available in GMU 636. Each permit season provides additional days to hunt compared to the general season.

Hunters in GMU 621 must navigate a challenging mix of public and private land ownerships. Although elk may be found elsewhere, the most consistently observed groups live along four main river drainages that flow into Hood Canal, including the Dosewallips, Duckabush, Hamma Hamma, and North Fork Skokomish rivers. Elk in the Dosewallips and Duckabush areas are the most reliably found and remain in the lower river valleys and on nearby valley ridges year-round or migrate to summer range in Olympic

National Park (ONP). Recently, some elk from the Duckabush herd have moved south to new areas between the Hamma Hamma and Duckabush rivers. Hunting either of these groups will likely require permission to hunt on private lands.

The other areas with the most reliably found elk groups in GMU 621 occur along the Hamma Hamma River and in the Lilliwaup Swamp east of Lake Cushman and the North Fork Skokomish River. These areas provide decent public land access on Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) managed land; however, recent attempts to observe these elk have not been successful, suggesting hunters may also have a challenging time finding elk here. Although these elk have been non-migratory in recent years, seasonal movements into ONP and the Mount Skokomish Wilderness Area have been documented for these elk in the past and may be occurring now.

Elk in GMU 636 can be found in the upper Wynoochee River valley around Lake Wynoochee, the South Fork Skokomish River valley, and near the community of Matlock. A Green Diamond Resource Co. access permit is recommended for hunting near Matlock.

Consistent with last year, GMU 651 is open to general season hunting for all weapon types, including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. Hunters will need a Green Diamond Resource Co. access permit to hunt where most elk reside in this GMU.

Elk areas

There are two elk areas in District 15: Elk Area 6061 (Twin Satsop) and Elk Area 6071 (Dungeness). Elk Area 6061 was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic elk damage issues, while Elk Area 6071 was established to limit elk hunting to support public safety.

Current hunting regulations allow the harvest of 3-point minimum bull or antlerless elk during the general early archery season in Elk Area 6061, while elk harvest in Elk Area 6071 is conducted on a limited basis through the Wildlife Conflict Section by landowner and Master Hunter permits.

Notable hunting changes

None.

Deer

General information, management goals, and population status

Black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) is the only deer species in District 15. The Department's objective for deer in District 15 is to maintain productive populations while providing for multiple uses, including recreational, educational, and aesthetic (WDFW Game Management Plan, 2008). Buck harvest is any antlered buck, while antlerless harvest is limited to certain weapon types and/or by permit.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 15. Instead, harvest trends (harvest, hunters, success, and harvest per unit effort) are used as an index to trends. WDFW recognizes the limitations of this approach and is currently evaluating new techniques for monitoring black-tailed deer populations independent of harvest data.

Which GMU should deer hunters hunt?

There are ample general season opportunities for deer hunters in District 15. All GMUs in this district have general and permit season hunting opportunities, starting in September with the early archery season and the Olympic Wilderness high buck hunt, which is open to modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters.

Field observations and recent harvest trends suggest good deer hunting potential exists in GMUs 621, 627, and 633. GMU 651 remains a popular hunting unit, but portions owned by Green Diamond Resource Co. require an access permit. Hunters may find good deer hunting in lower-elevation habitats in GMU 636, but deer density in this unit appears to decline at higher elevations. Hunters need a Green Diamond Resource Co. access permit to hunt some areas in GMU 636 around Matlock; elsewhere no access permit is required, and much of the unit is U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land.

What to expect during the 2024 season

It is uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 15, where severe winter weather resulting in large die-offs rarely occurs. Hunter numbers also typically don't change dramatically from one year to the next. Consequently, the best predictors of future harvest during general seasons are recent harvest trends, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Figures 2 through 4 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information to make an informed decision on where to hunt in District 15, as well as what they can expect to encounter regarding hunter success and hunter numbers.

Deer areas

Deer Area 6020 is in GMU 624 and was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic damage issues. This GMU is open to general season, any deer harvest for all three weapon types. Additionally, 40 second deer permits are available for archery hunters in this area.

Notable hunting changes

Very few changes are anticipated for deer hunting in District 15, although the Department adjusted permit levels for some hunts.



A black-tailed buck in an alpine meadow. Photo by Bryan Murphie.

Figure 2. Trends in the total number of buck (blue) and antlerless (gray) deer harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons combined, 2014–2023. Total deer harvest (black line) includes harvest from state general and permit seasons plus tribal harvest. Tribal harvest from 2023 not included.

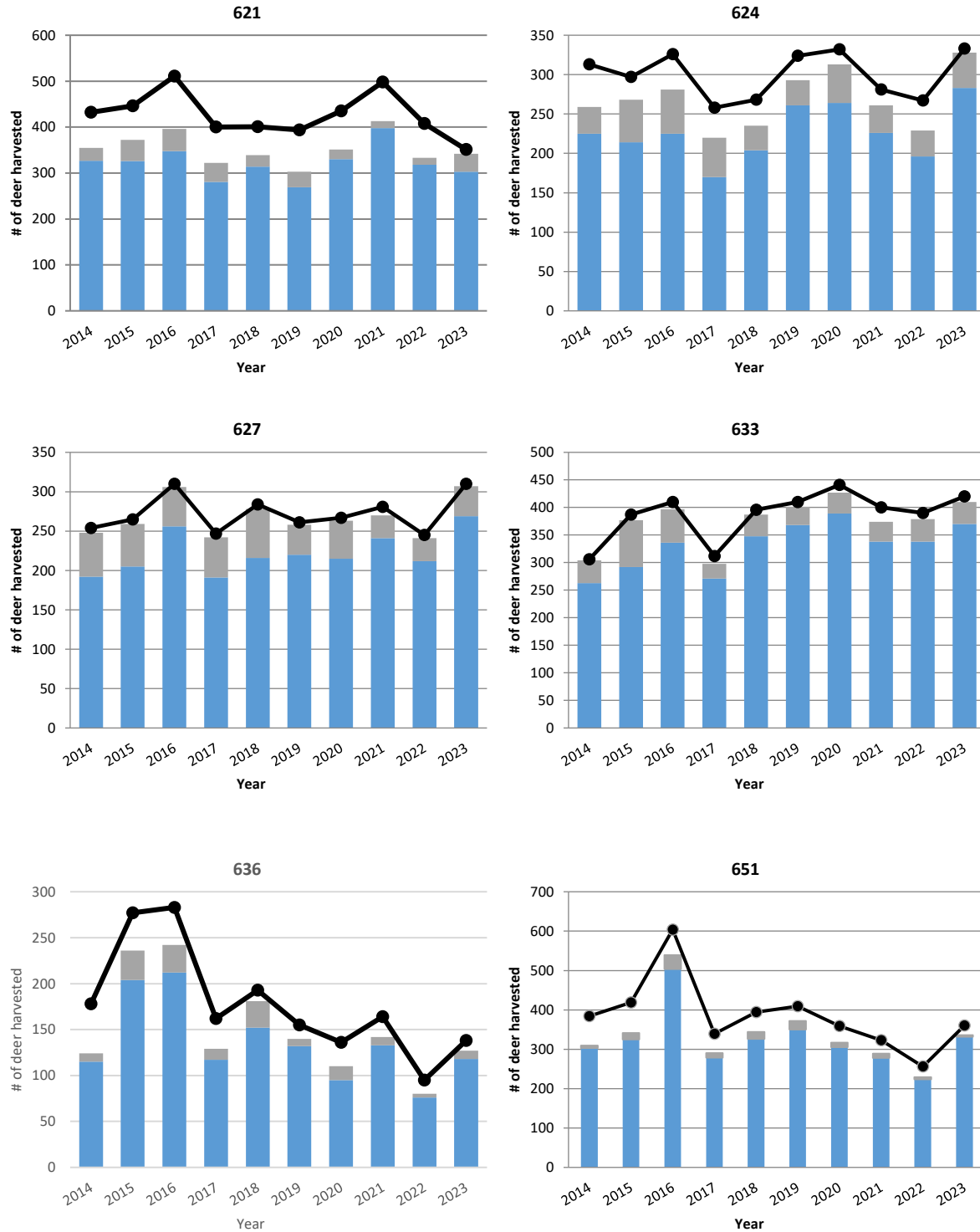


Figure 3. Trends in hunter numbers during general modern firearm (blue diamond), archery (orange square), and muzzleloader (gray triangle) deer seasons in District 15, 2014–2023.

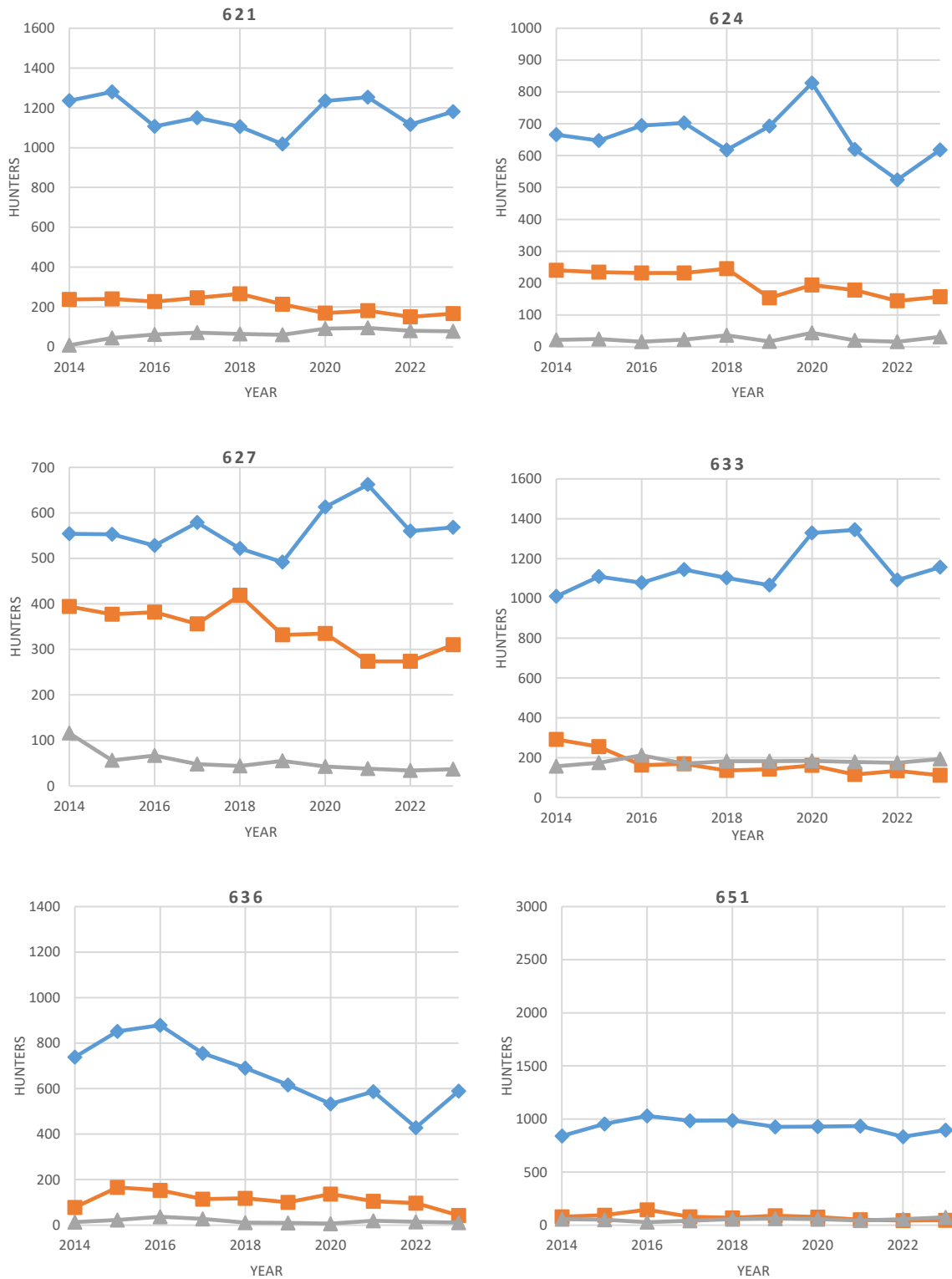
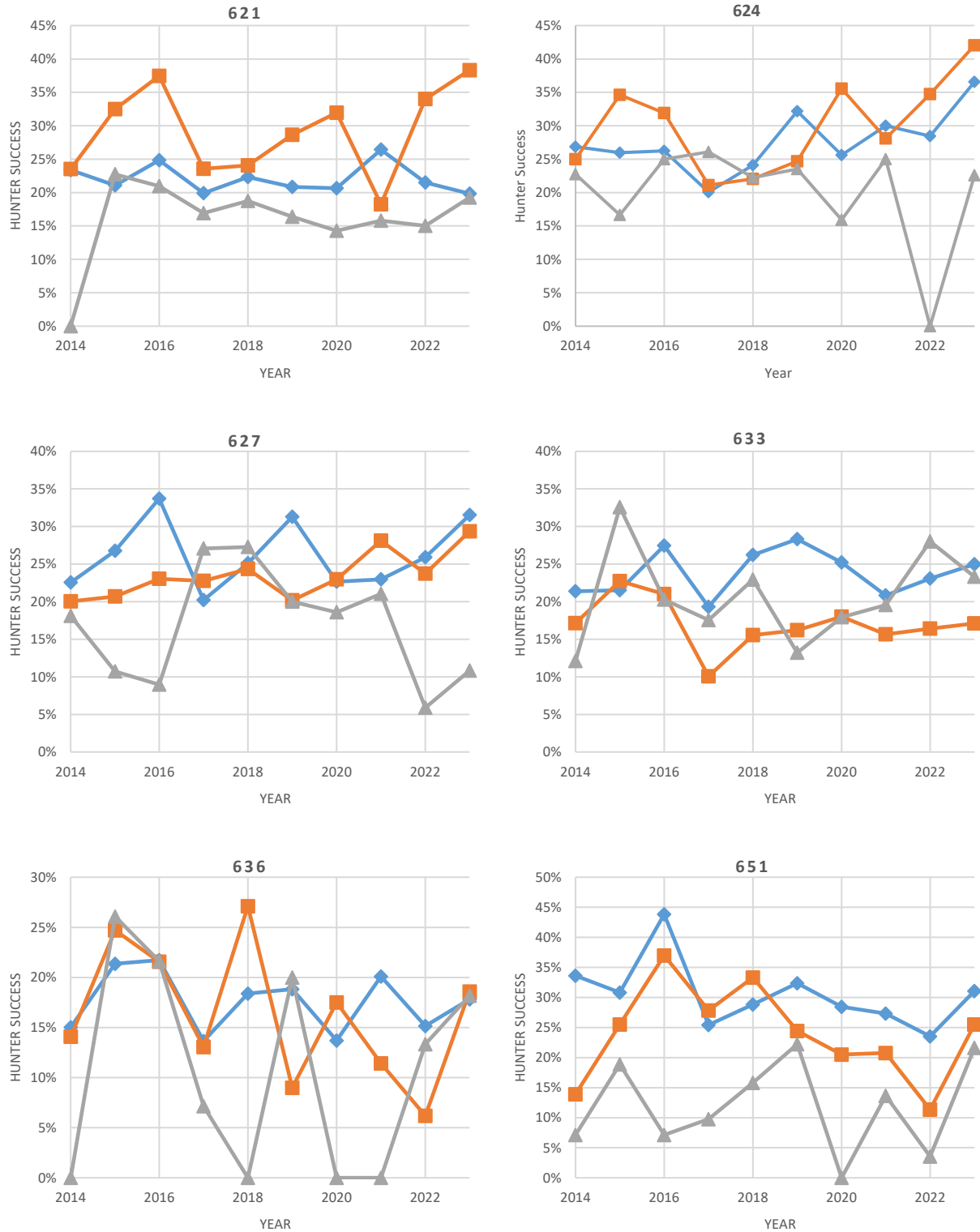


Figure 4. Trends in hunter success rates during general modern firearm (blue diamond), archery (orange square), and muzzleloader (gray triangle) deer seasons in District 15, 2014–2023.



Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

Black bears occur throughout District 15, but population densities likely vary among GMUs and change over time. In 2019, WDFW began measuring bear density across the state, sampling in a few areas each year. By 2023, survey efforts had been conducted in more than 22 GMUs and densities have ranged from seven to 35 bears per 100 square kilometers, or about 38 square miles (WDFW, 2023). In District 15, the portion of GMU 636 under USFS ownership along the foothills of the Olympic Mountains was sampled in 2023. The estimate derived for this area was 12 bears per 100 square kilometers. Other nearby locations that have been sampled include the Clearwater (615), which had an estimate of 31 bears per 100 square kilometers in 2022 (WDFW, 2023) and Capitol Forest (663), which had an estimate of 12-14 bears per 100 square kilometers (Beausoleil et al., 2012).

District 15 contains part of the Coastal Black Bear Management Unit (BBMU) (GMUs 621, 636, and 651) and part of the Puget Sound BBMU (GMUs 624, 627, and 633). The current black bear hunting season guidelines for these BBMUs are designed to maintain black bear populations at their current level. The fall black bear hunting season for all District 15 units is Aug. 1 to Nov. 15. Hunters can buy up to two bear tags during each license year. These rules have been consistent since 1997. Periodically, spring bear permit hunts have been available, but there have been no spring bear hunts since 2022.

What to expect during the 2024 season

Most bear harvest in District 15 comes from hunters harvesting a bear opportunistically while hunting other species like deer and elk, although many hunters do specifically hunt bears. Hunter success in District 15 has averaged 8% in the Coastal BBMU and Puget Sound BBMU over the last five years. Hunter success is likely higher for those who specifically hunt bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while they are deer or elk hunting.

Bear harvest in District 15 decreased in 2023 (Figure 5) but is usually highest in GMU 621 (Figure 6). GMUs 621 and 636 offer the most accessible public land in the district, and hunting the higher-elevation huckleberry patches could be a good strategy.

Notable hunting changes

None.

Figure 5. Trends in the number of male (blue bar) and female (orange bar) black bears and total number of bears harvested (gray line) during the general bear season in District 15, 2019–2023. Bears removed for other reasons are not included.

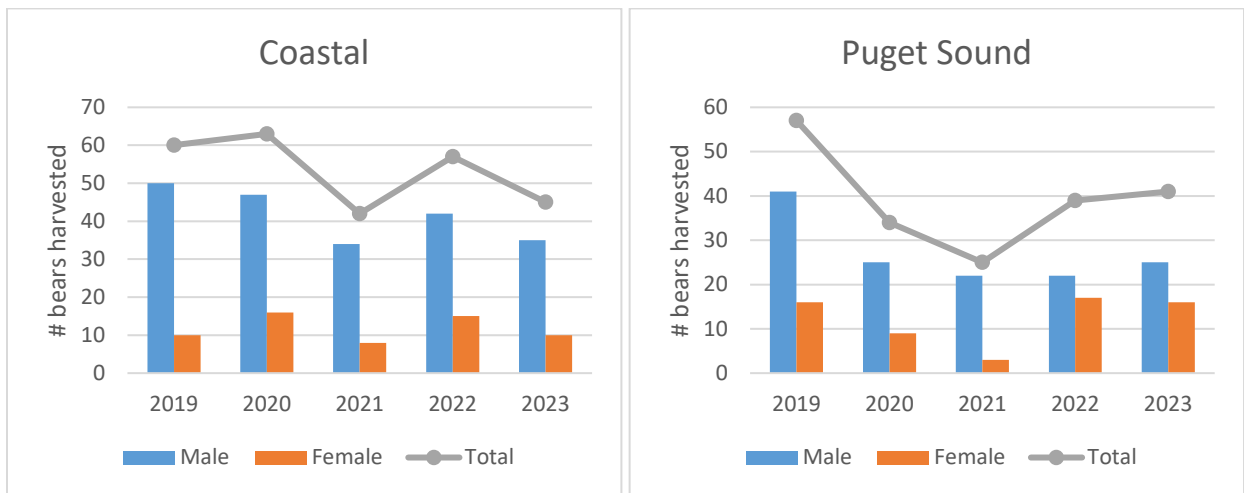
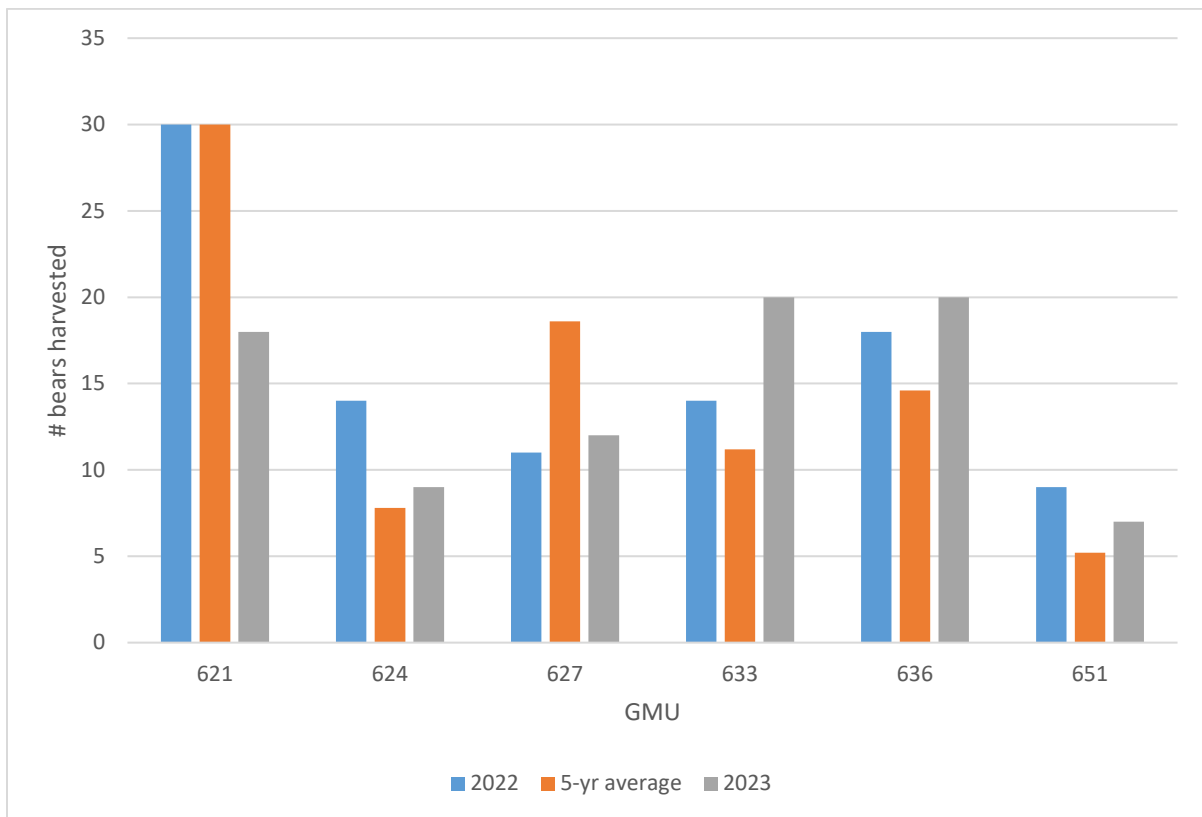


Figure 6. The number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2022 and 2023 seasons in District 15. The five-year average for total number of bears harvested in each GMU is also included.



Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status

Cougars occur throughout District 15. WDFW established harvest guidelines with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population (Table 2). Cougar season rules changed for the 2024 hunting season and are summarized in the Notable Hunting Changes section. Anyone planning to hunt cougar should confirm the season is open by calling 1-866-364-4868. Harvest guidelines, 2023 general season hunter harvest, five-year average hunter harvest, and five-year average total removals by population management unit (PMU) for 2023 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Harvest guidelines and the reported 2023 hunter harvest for the three cougar hunt areas located in District 15.

PMU/GMU	Harvest guideline	2023 hunter harvest	5-year average hunter harvest	5-year average total removals
PMU 44 - 618, 636, 638	3-5	1	1	1
PMU 45 - 621, 624, 627, 633	None	8	5	10
PMU 46 - 642, 648, 651	6-8	8	7	12

What to expect during the 2024 season

In 2024, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted several changes to cougar management guidelines that may affect hunting in several areas. These changes are described in the Notable Hunting Changes section below. It is most important for hunters to know that the cougar season may close at any time in any hunt area, depending on the amount of cougar removals that occur. So, hunters need to check the hotline regularly before and during the hunting season to make sure the season is still open.

Notable hunting changes

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted several rule changes for the 2024 cougar hunting season. This season setting structure or rule may change for future seasons as discussions about cougar hunting in Washington continue. To summarize the changes for the 2024 cougar season:

- Season dates: Sept. 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025
- All PMUs or hunt areas currently with a harvest guideline will now have a harvest cap.
- The cap is based on an estimated cougar density of 2.3 cougars per 100 square kilometers and a 13% intrinsic growth rate.

- All known human-caused mortalities of cougars 18 months and older will count toward a 13% or 20% cap.
 - PMU 44/GMUs 618, 636, 638 has a 13% cap at five and a 20% cap at seven.
 - PMU 45/GMUs 621, 624, 627, 633 does not have a cap.
 - PMU 46/GMUs 642, 648, 651 has a 13% cap at seven and a 20% cap at 11.
- The count of cougars removed starts April 1 and includes removals associated with depredation, conflict, public safety, hunter harvest, and the like.
- If total removals reach the 13% cap, the hunt area will close to hunting.
- If total removals reach the 13% cap before the hunting season, the cap increases to 20% and the hunting season will open, but could close at any time if removals reach the 20% cap.
- None of the rule changes prohibit the removal of cougars associated with depredation or public safety concerns.
- Finally, the Department may close hunting in any hunt area prior to the cap being reached, upon consideration of factors such as disease, suspected additional mortality, or any other issue affecting the cougar population.
- Call the cougar hunting season hotline, 1-866-364-4868, before you hunt.

Mountain goat

General information, management goals, and population status

Mountain goats were introduced into the Olympic Mountain range before the establishment of ONP in the 1920s. Mountain goats thrived in the Olympic range, rapidly expanding their distribution and abundance to over 1,000 goats by 1983. Concerns over the negative effect of an abundant introduced goat population on high-elevation endemic plants and soil erosion, prompted ONP to relocate 407 goats to other ranges outside the Olympics in the early 1980s. A mountain goat hunt outside ONP ran from 1983 until 1997, and 119 goats were harvested. WDFW closed the Olympic goat hunt in 1997. The population rebounded from these management actions and expanded its range and abundance to wilderness areas outside ONP by 2014. To again address concerns over the negative effect of an abundant introduced goat population on high-elevation endemic plants and soil erosion, ONP, USFS, and WDFW initiated efforts to remove mountain goats from the Olympics.

WDFW established a new permit hunt in 2014. This ran until 2018, and 15 goats were harvested. WDFW suspended the permit hunt during a joint management action with ONP and USFS to remove mountain goats from the Olympics beginning in 2018. This project included aerial captures and relocation, aerial lethal removals, and ground-based lethal removals, and concluded in 2022. A total of 548 goats were removed (Happe et al., 2023). WDFW held another permit hunt in 2021 with 25 permits available, but only one adult male goat was harvested. Tribal hunters harvested nine goats during this timeframe.

Removals were conducted across the Olympics, in and out of the park, with many coming out of the WDFW permit hunt area on USFS lands. It is currently thought that most remaining goats are in remote

areas of ONP and few, if any, are left outside the park accessible for hunting. Only three unconfirmed reports of mountain goats in the park, and none from outside the park, have been recorded since the removal effort concluded. WDFW will continue to assess where goats are outside the park to determine if a new permit hunt opportunity exists.

Notable hunting changes

No hunt in 2024. Future hunts may be recommended should mountain goats be found in huntable locations.

Ducks

Common species

Several duck species use District 15. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall, mallard, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, and common goldeneye, are also present on fresh and salt water. Nesting wood ducks can be located throughout the district early in the season and can provide a unique hunting opportunity. Sea ducks, including scoters, Barrow's goldeneye, long-tailed ducks, canvasbacks, and harlequin ducks inhabit Hood Canal and other saltwater areas.

Population status and 2024 prospects

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species. Wintering duck populations in Washington usually represent 10% or more of the total flyway population.

District 15 hunters can expect similar opportunities during the 2024 season. As in recent years, hunter success often depends on rainfall and storm events during the waterfowl season. A lack of flooded farm fields can sharply reduce hunting opportunities in District 15. Alternatively, the marine waters of Hood Canal can offer some good waterfowl hunting. Five-year average duck harvest is 5,451.

Public land opportunities

Public hunting access exists at the mouths of the Duckabush, Quilcene, and Union rivers. Many of the undeveloped lakes and marshes on the Tahuya Peninsula's DNR-managed land offer walk-in hunting opportunities for mallards, ringnecks, and scaup.

Notable hunting changes

What's NEW in 2024-2025? Harlequin duck permits! Thirty-eight permits were made available to eligible applicants through an August drawing; the application period was July 1 to Aug. 14. To apply for a Harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington small game hunting license,

migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. For more information, visit the WDFW [Harlequin duck hunting permit page](#).

Geese

Common species

The Canada geese subspecies most likely found in District 15 include western, lesser, Taverner's, and cackler. White-fronted and, occasionally, snow geese can also be encountered.

Population status and 2024 prospects

Like ducks, goose numbers in the district are largely driven by weather. The more severe the weather, the more likely the northern subspecies can be seen in the area. Anecdotal observations suggest that local westerns are stable or slightly increasing.

Goose hunting opportunities in District 15 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most geese are taken on private farm fields, and securing permission is essential. When funding exists, WDFW attempts to lease fields that regularly attract waterfowl. Five-year average Canada goose harvest is 428.

Public land opportunities

Same as those listed under ducks.

Forest grouse

General information and population status

Although grouse occur throughout the district, Mason County offers the most hunting opportunity. The Olympic National Forest and Skokomish GMU are two of the more popular grouse hunting areas. Blue (sooty) grouse tend to occur in the coniferous forests at higher elevations above 1,000 feet, although they may be found at lower elevations in District 15. Ruffed grouse can occur throughout the district in coniferous and mixed forests. In the fall, either species can be found feeding on berries like salal, Oregon grape, and huckleberry. More ruffed than sooty are harvested in District 15.

Grouse hunting season was Sept. 1 to Dec. 31 for decades until 2021. Dates shifted to Sept. 15 to Jan. 15 in 2021 to reduce harvest of adult females caring for young and ultimately increase grouse abundance. The daily bag limit for grouse increased from three to four in 2009 and changed to a mixed bag limit in 2015 (four birds, but not all of the same species). Most grouse are harvested by hunters driving roads looking for grouse. As such, grouse harvest is influenced by the amount or extent of roads open to motorized vehicles, which have declined in most District 15 GMUs. This decline is associated with more

regulated access to private industrial forestlands, reduced motorized access to some DNR lands, and the decommissioning of roads on USFS lands on the Olympic Peninsula.

WDFW initiated a formal survey effort to monitor blue (sooty) grouse populations statewide in 2023; results are pending analysis and future work. A similar effort for ruffed grouse has not been implemented. In the meantime, harvest trends like catch per unit effort, expressed as the number of grouse harvested per hunter day, can be an indicator of population trend. A caveat: We expect some decreases in harvest resulting from access changes and perhaps initially around the 2021 season dates shift.

Harvest trends

Grouse harvest statistics are compiled at the county level, rather than the GMUs used for big game species. Mason and Kitsap counties are wholly in District 15, while Jefferson County is split between Districts 15 and 16. In general, the trends we have seen over the last 10 years are somewhat expected given recent regulation and access changes. The number of hunters has been relatively stable (Figure 7), while the number of grouse harvested has increased (Figure 8), but hunters are taking a bit more time to get those grouse (Figure 9). The drop in hunters and harvest after the season date change in 2021 was followed by an increase in 2023.

Figure 7. The number of grouse hunters in Mason (blue line), Jefferson (orange line), and Kitsap (gray line) counties, 2014 – 2023.

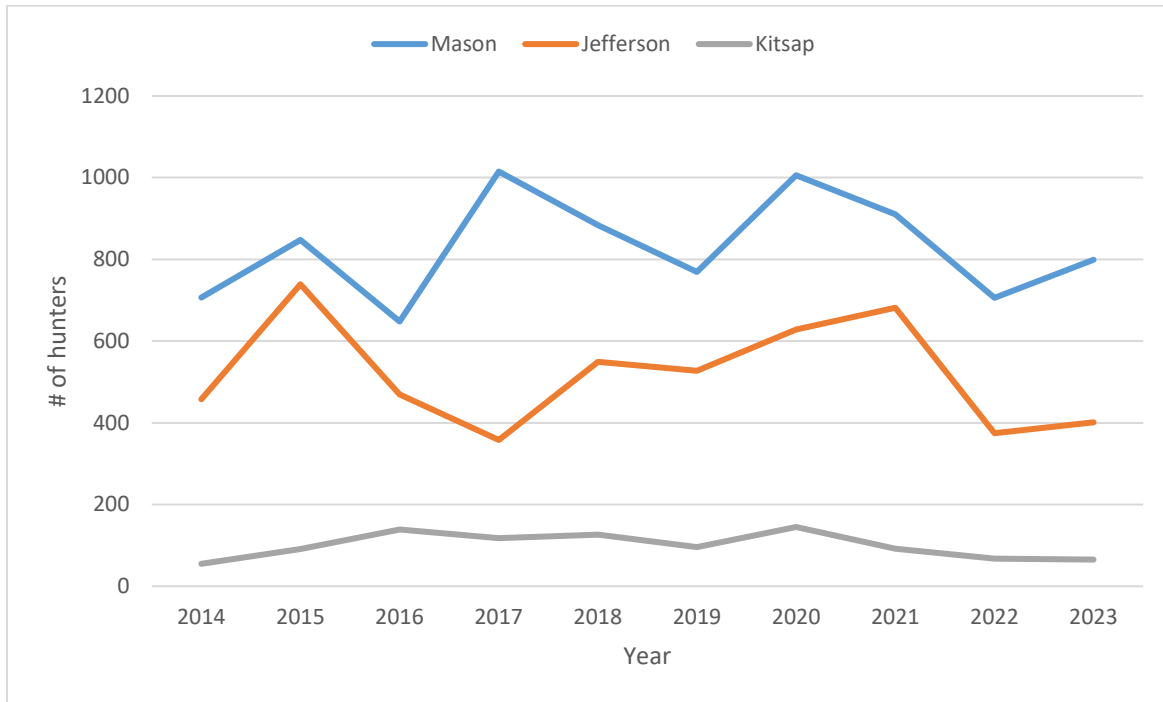


Figure 8. The number of grouse harvested in Mason (blue line), Jefferson (orange line), and Kitsap (gray line) counties, 2014 – 2023.

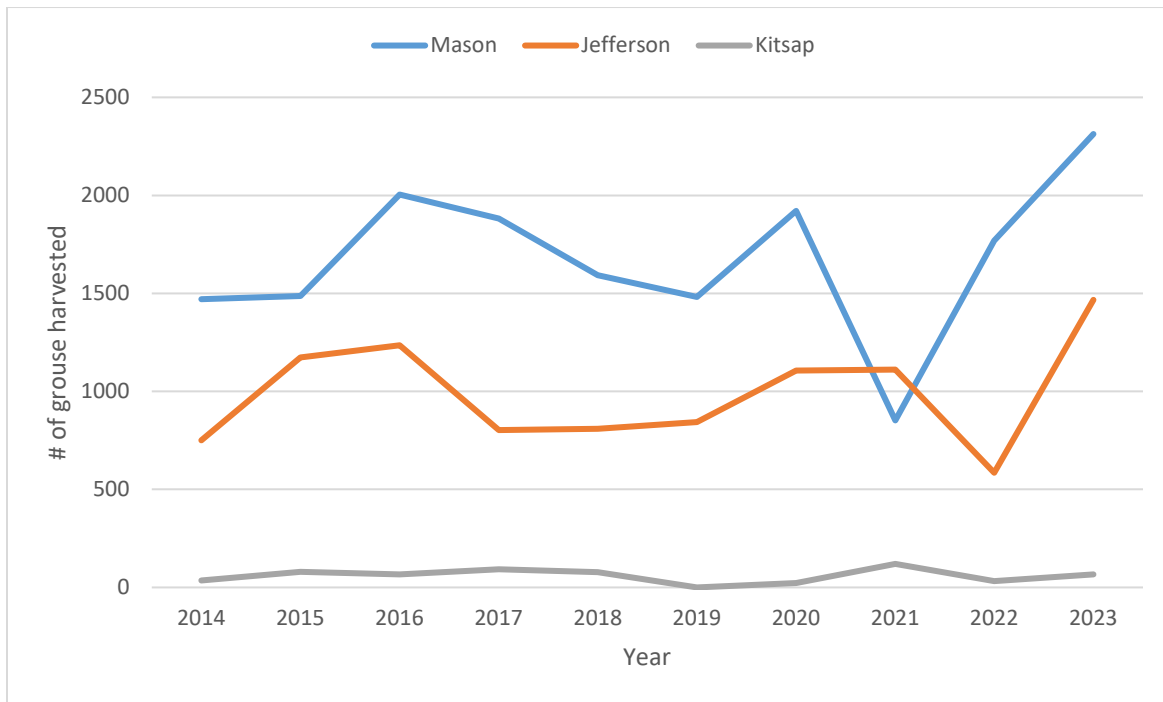
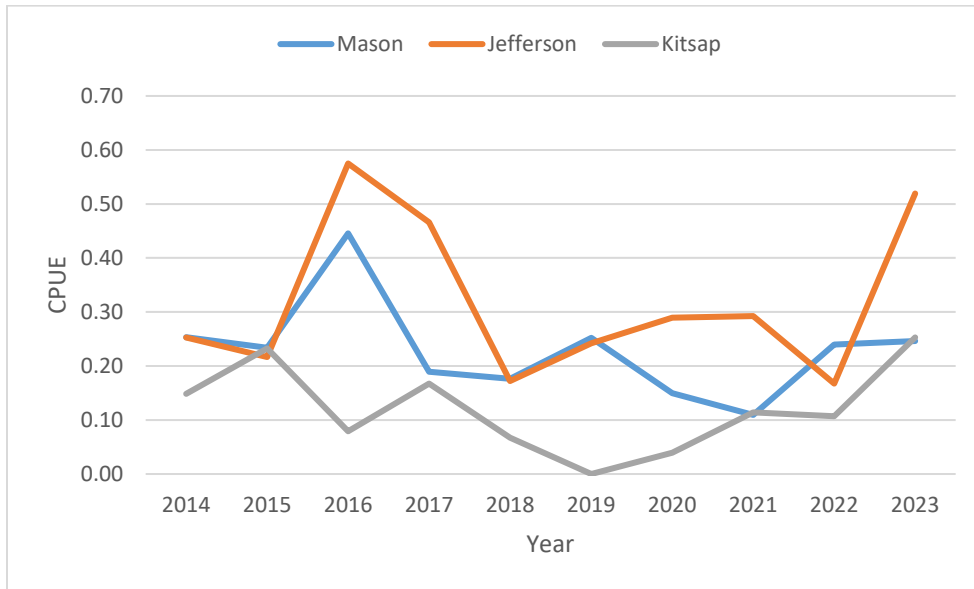


Figure 9. The number of grouse harvested per hunter day in Mason (blue line), Jefferson (orange line), and Kitsap (gray line) counties, 2014 – 2023.



Notable hunting changes

None.

Band-tailed pigeons

General description

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest pigeon species in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are found below 1,000 feet in elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

Population status and harvest

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey, as part of a Pacific Flyway-wide survey effort coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These surveys occur at mineral sites where band-tailed pigeons congregate. Since initiating a standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tailed pigeon populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.

Although band-tailed pigeon harvest statewide is down from 2009 harvest levels, the trend has increased since 2015. The average annual harvest of band-tailed pigeon is highest in Mason County at around 30 birds, followed by Jefferson County (includes east and west Jefferson County) at fewer than 10 birds per year, and Kitsap County where little to no harvest is reported.

Where and how to hunt band-tailed pigeons

Often, band-tailed pigeons congregate in areas where cascara and elderberry are fruiting, which are typically most abundant in 5- to 10-year-old timber harvests. Hunting can be exceptionally good in these areas. Band-tailed pigeons often congregate at seeps and mineral sites, which they show strong site fidelity to and often return year after year. However, many of these sites are difficult to find because they are not abundant and occur in obscure areas. The key to harvesting band-tailed pigeons is scouting. Hunters must locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites, sneak in, or sit patiently and wait for shooting opportunities. If hunters are lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tailed pigeons are congregating, they will likely have success in these locations for years to come.

Notable hunting changes

None.

Pheasants

There are no viable populations of wild pheasants in District 15. All pheasant hunting opportunities in District 15 are associated with the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program, which provides an upland bird hunting opportunity and encourages participation from youth and senior hunters. Each year, the program releases 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants at 25 sites, including Hunter Farms, Belfair, Trask Lake, and Mason Lake (Sgt. Mak) in District 15. Release site locations and other details can be found on the WDFW [website](#). In 2023, hunters harvested 2,022 pheasants in District 15, a few more than 2022.

Quail

Although frustratingly unpredictable, hunters are mostly likely to find quail in District 15 in 2- to 6-year-old timber harvests, under power lines, and in tall scotch broom stands throughout Mason and Kitsap counties. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird. Some locations include the DNR parcels on the Tahuya Peninsula northwest of Belfair and the industrial timberlands between Shelton, Matlock, and McCleary. Walk-in opportunities are also numerous on timber harvests around Mason Lake. The time to scout is in the spring and early summer when the males are quite vocal. In 2023, hunters harvested 47 quail in District 15.

Turkey

Although turkeys are occasionally seen, District 15 has no established turkey populations. Introduction programs were discontinued because populations did not appear to expand, and habitat suitability

models indicated District 15 was unlikely to support viable turkey populations. Occasionally, single birds are spotted, but WDFW doesn't recommend this district for turkey hunting.

Other small game species

Other small game species and furbearers that inhabit District 15 but were not covered in detail include Eastern cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, bobcat, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot. Crows are also abundant in District 15. Harvest information for these species is available in the WDFW game harvest reports on the Department website.

General overview of hunter access in each GMU

Although District 15 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities, they do exist on lands administered by DNR and USFS in all District 15 GMUs. Most hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, occur on private industrial forestlands owned by timber companies, which allow hunting under a range of restrictions. All hunters are encouraged to check ahead of time to determine if any landowner restrictions apply to the area they plan to hunt.

The information provided below is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Hunters are encouraged to contact the specific landowner if they have questions related to recreational access. Although other companies own land in District 15, the two primary private timber companies with land are Green Diamond Resource and Rayonier. Both require access permits to recreate on some of their lands in Kitsap, Mason, and Jefferson counties. Hunters should visit the appropriate landowner website for more information.

GMU 621 (Olympic)

Access in GMU 621 is good for deer hunters and challenging for elk hunters, as most elk are found on lower-elevation private lands along the major river valleys. This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, DNR, and USFS. Access to USFS land is generally allowed year-round. DNR land is accessible to motorized vehicles or walk-in only in some areas. Most private timberlands are non-motorized access. All private agricultural lands require owner permission to hunt.

GMU 624 (Coyle)

Other than the resident elk herd in the Sequim area, the Coyle Unit is usually considered a deer area. Although there are scattered timberlands publicly owned by DNR, most are privately owned. The largest property manager is Rayonier. Although some DNR and private mainlines may be open to motor

vehicles, most hunting access is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicle. Rayonier requires an access permit to hunt on most of their land in this GMU.

GMU 627 (Kitsap)

The Kitsap Unit is a highly developed area, with private property throughout. However, there is still hunting opportunity on forestlands owned by DNR and Rayonier. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized means, except that DNR allows all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use on designated trails on some of its land. Rayonier requires an access permit to hunt their land in most locations.

GMU 633 (Mason)

The Mason Unit is best known as a deer area. DNR has land throughout, with extensive holdings on the Tahuya Peninsula. In the Mason Unit, most deer hunting occurs on private property controlled by Green Diamond Resource Co. and Manke Lumber Co. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles, except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of its land.

GMU 636 (Skokomish)

This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, and USFS. Green Diamond Resource Co. is the largest private timberland owner in this unit, and they do open some areas to motorized use from September through December. Some areas are non-motorized access only and some require an access permit, particularly for their land near Matlock. Fire danger risk and active logging operations may delay gate openings.

Upper elevations and portions of this GMU in the upper Wynoochee River and Skokomish River valleys are primarily USFS, with most areas open year-round for vehicle access. USFS prohibits motorized access during the winter in some areas to minimize disturbance to wildlife.

GMU 651 (Satsop)

Green Diamond Resource Co. is the largest private timberland owner in this unit, and they require hunters to purchase an access permit for a large section of this GMU. Some of their land may be open to motorized access without a permit from September through December, while other portions may allow walk-in hunting without an access permit.

Private Lands Access Program

WDFW also negotiates hunting access opportunities with smaller private landowners, usually on farmland for waterfowl or pheasant hunting. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 6 office

in Montesano (360-249-4628) or periodically check for updated information on company websites for the most current information about private lands access in District 15.

Public land resources

Washington Department of Natural Resources – Olympic Region

olympic.region@dnr.wa.gov

360-374-2800

411 Tillicum Lane, Forks, WA 98331-9271

[Website](#)

Washington Department of Natural Resources – South Puget Sound Region

southpuget.region@dnr.wa.gov

360-825-1631

950 Farman Ave. N., Enumclaw, WA 98022-9282

[Website](#)

U.S. Forest Service – Hood Canal Ranger District – Quilcene

360-765-2200

295142 Highway 101 S., P.O. Box 280, Quilcene, WA 98376

Online tools and maps

Most District 15 GMUs are a checkerboard of ownerships, and sometimes it can be challenging to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. Some online tools and resources can provide valuable information to help solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list of a few resources available to the public. Parcel ownership can also be accessed from each county assessor's webpage by using their online mapping tools. Alternatively, private companies found online offer other map products.

WDFW's hunting regulations web map

WDFW's hunting regulations [web map](#) provides hunters with a great interactive tool for identifying hunting seasons and locating tracts of public land within each GMU.

DNR public lands quadrangle (PLQ) maps

The best sources for identifying the specific location of public lands are DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than \$10 on [DNR's website](#).

2024 District 16 Hunting Prospects

Clallam and west Jefferson counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

September 2024

2024 District 16 Hunting Prospects

Chelan and Douglas counties

Author

Shelly Ament, District Wildlife Biologist



Biologist Shelly Ament with a deer fawn collared for research within District 16. Photo by Tim Cullinan.

Cover photo by Shelly Ament.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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District 16 general overview

District 16 includes Clallam and western Jefferson counties on the Olympic Peninsula (Figure 1). The district has eight game management units (GMUs). Two eastern GMUs, Coyle GMU 624 and Olympic GMU 621, extend into eastern Jefferson County, which is within District 15. Reference the District 17 Hunting Prospects for information on Matheny GMU 618.

Each District 16 GMU had a unique mix of land ownerships: private residential, private agricultural, private forest industrial, state and federal forest, and park lands. Higher-elevation forestlands are primarily in public ownership: U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Olympic National Park (ONP). Lower-elevation foothills are generally private industrial forestlands and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) managed lands.

Figure 1. District 16 GMUs. GMUs 624 Coyle and 621 Olympic extend into District 15.

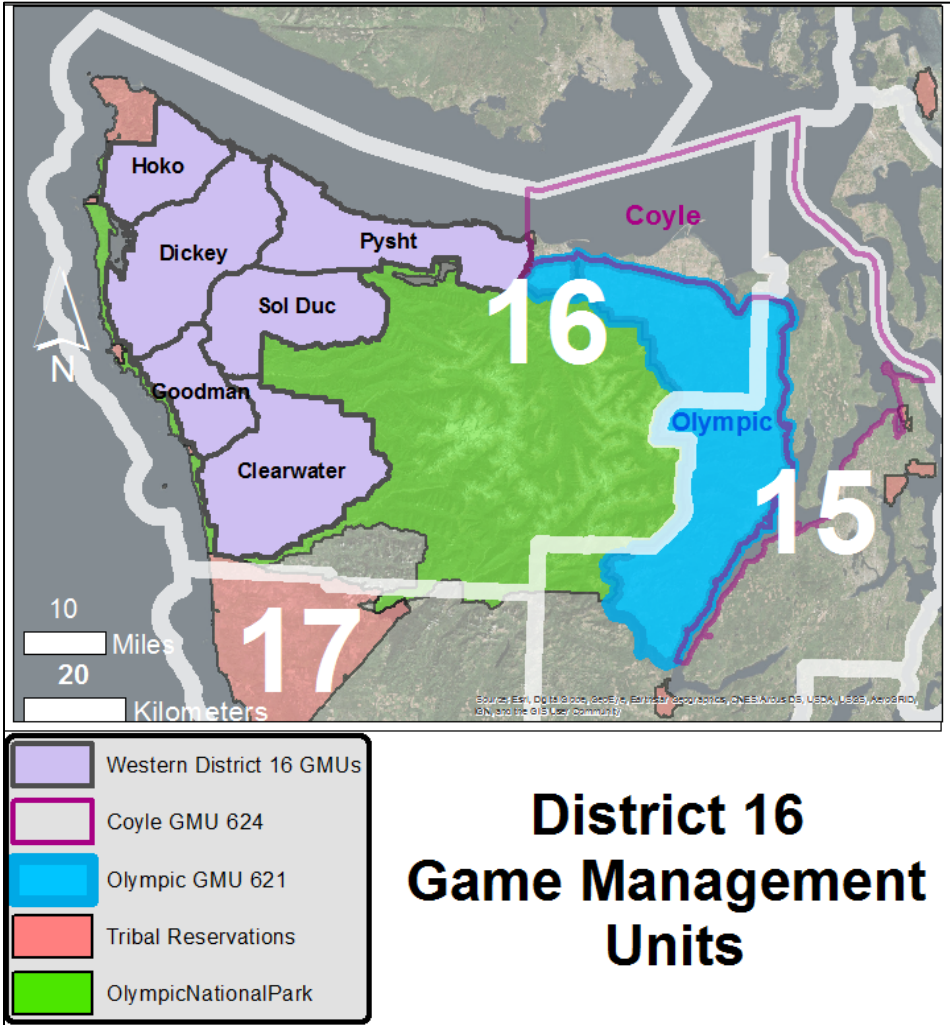


Table 1. District 16 game species annual harvest, 2015 - 2023. (Tribal harvest not included.)

Species	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Elk	97	173	139	211	249	246	132	138	179
Deer	285	268	344	400	468	347	329	418	339
Black bear	107	118	90	119	152	94	101	87	66
Cougar	11	2	9	8	5	12	2	8	5
Ducks	4893	5744	10365	7208	8682	6999	6057	11540	8093
Geese (Sept.)	55	88	84	388	96	154	149	272	97
Geese	172	223	432	353	364	318	183	713	355
Brant	43	90	180	156	46	89	90	Closed	Closed
Forest grouse	3739	1761	3814	3153	6868	2958	2590	4374	4794
Mourning dove	0	8	0	30	51	36	0	54	67
Quail	109	17	22	101	43	31	150	236	164
Snipe	0	0	77	213	0	0	0	45	4
Hare/rabbit	43	15	20	185	32	71	54	60	45

East District 16

The eastern portion of the district is the Dungeness Basin (western Coyle GMU 624 and northern Olympic GMU 621). The Dungeness watershed offers a rich habitat diversity in high elevation, rain-shadow mountains to lower watershed. The prairie is now a rural mix of small and large farms with scattered developments. The lower basin has some private duck hunting club ownerships and a few public waterfowl hunting areas. Waterfowl hunting opportunities have expanded in the eastern portion of the district in recent years. In the Dungeness Basin and the smaller watersheds east of the Elwha, deer abundance results in frequent complaints. Highly visible deer occur in the Coyle GMU 624 and Olympic GMU 621 as well as lower- elevation forestlands with an ideal ratio of forest openings. Olympic GMU 621 habitat includes large areas of USFS mature forest that offers less forage for ungulates. Deer Area 6020, where there are “any deer” regular seasons, typically features more deer for harvest. Private land access poses a challenge for District 16 hunters, who must obtain permission to access target properties.

West District 16

The west end (Hoko GMU 601), Dickey GMU 602, Sol Duc GMU 607, Goodman GMU 612, and Clearwater GMU 615) has the bulk of elk in the district, while deer are sparse in these same GMUs. Various sub herds of elk are located within District 16. Many elk herds are year-round residents that remain in lower-elevation habitats. Some herds regularly migrate into higher elevations, most always in ONP. Hunters will likely find harvest opportunities as elk move out of ONP during the hunting season.

ONP areas vary from the Outer Coast Park strip to the eastern portion of the Clearwater GMU 615, which includes a large block of DNR-managed land that borders ONP.

Varied hunting opportunities exist within District 16, from waterfowl on designated shoreline and wetland areas along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, to forest grouse, deer, elk, bear, and cougar on private commercial and public forestland. Both state (DNR) and federal (USFS) lands provide hunting opportunities.

Elk

General information, management goals, and population status

The elk within District 16 are Roosevelt elk. District 16 encompasses various sub herds of the Olympic elk herd, one of 10 herds identified in the state. Elk numbers peaked in the late 1970s, with a conservative estimate of about 12,000 elk outside of ONP based on historical harvest information. Past elk population estimates were based on a combination of harvest data, telemetry studies, and mark-resight surveys. These techniques yielded a fall 2000 population estimate of about 8,600 in the GMUs surrounding ONP. The Olympic elk herd's current population is likely lower.

Overall, the elk harvest opportunity is for three-point minimum bull elk. Much of the elk hunting within the eastern portion of the district is restricted to a limited entry (state hunters – permit only, three--point minimum, bull-only harvest) with antlerless harvest used as a damage management tool when necessary. Elk hunting opportunities are generally good west of the Elwha River, with possibilities on DNR-managed lands, USFS lands, and private timberlands. However, several areas limit vehicular access or require access permits. Hunters should obtain permission to hunt on private lands and must obey all posted signs and regulations. Some elk herds migrate down from high alpine meadows in ONP to lowland winter range. Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. Hunters often scout for elk that leave ONP and travel along major river drainages. Keep in mind that it is unlawful to hunt in ONP.

Along with elk come some challenges with elk damage, some of which WDFW manages using harvest and hunting pressure. WDFW's wildlife conflict specialists manage elk damage areas and frequently use Master Hunter permittees to put pressure on the herds and encourage habitat use patterns that limit damage and support public safety. If interested, review the information to sign up for the [Master Hunter Permit Program](#).

Radio-collars and markers: Local elk studies and ongoing monitoring require transmitting markers or other tags. Radio-collars and ear tags should have contact information identifying them as property of WDFW, university, or other researchers. Recovering radio-collars from marked animals can provide biologists with valuable information. Please return any radio-collars from animals you harvest. When drugs are used to capture an animal, it is marked with an ear tag printed with directions to call the Department before consuming the meat. If you harvest an animal that you can't consume due to

potential drug residues in the meat, the Department will re-issue your original transport tag, special permit, or special permit points as appropriate. For more information, reference page 46 of the 2024 [Washington Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#).

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

Hunters can harvest elk from any District 16 GMUs. Past harvest records can help to inform which areas hunters should consider for future harvests. Harvest has been a reliable measurement the Department uses to monitor elk on the Olympic Peninsula. WDFW generates game harvest report data using mandatory hunting reports, follow-up phone surveys, and permit reports. For other species, the small game hunter questionnaire, trapper report of catch, and cougar pelt sealing also inform data. The [2023 Game Status and Trend Report](#) and [game harvest reports](#) are available on the WDFW website.

West District 16

The Clearwater GMU 615, Dickey GMU 602, Goodman GMU 612, and Sol Duc GMU 607 have the highest elk harvests in District 16. These units contain large areas of public land, much of it without restricted access. All these GMUs include gated roads, some of which allow hunter access and others that are closed to public access.

The Hoko GMU 601, Pysht GMU 603, and Coyle GMU 624 have very limited opportunities for general season hunters. Most of these units contain private land, and many of the roads on timberlands are gated. Elk groups in the Pysht GMU 603 have increased slightly in recent years. A thesis developed from research conducted in the Hoko GMU 601 and Dickey GMU 602 on movements and habitat use of elk in relation to human disturbance is available [online](#).



Group of elk in the Hoh River observed during an aerial composition survey. Photo by Kristin Phillips.

East District 16

The Olympic GMU 621 is limited to state permit elk and tribal elk harvest. WDFW doesn't recommend the Coyle GMU as an elk hunting destination because of limited opportunities. The season remains open for three -point minimum. Elk population and associated hunting opportunities may increase in the Coyle GMU 624 but are most likely outside of District 16.

WDFW establishes hunting seasons not only to allow recreational use, but also to manage elk habitat use patterns within the district. The Department designed Elk Area 6071 within Olympic GMU 621 and Coyle GMU 624, to specifically address challenges with the Dungeness/Sequim herd. Harvest within Elk Area 6071 is limited to damage control, occasionally involving Master Hunter elk hunts from the Region 6 permit list. Reference District 15 [Hunting Prospects](#) for more information on elk harvest within GMU 621 and GMU 624.

District 16 elk hunting and harvest records

Hunters can reference [annual harvest reports](#) on the WDFW website. Reports represent harvest, hunting effort, and success, which mandatory hunter reports and follow-up surveys help to inform for a correction factor of non-response bias.

Bull elk harvest

Olympic Peninsula elk harvest distribution reflects the general elk abundance, with most harvest occurring in the western GMUs. The west end elk are well distributed, with herds scattered throughout the GMUs. The east Olympic Peninsula elk herds are not as well distributed, with herds having distinct use patterns within watersheds. Hunting the east Olympic Peninsula elk takes more deliberate planning to find the herds and make the most of elk harvest opportunities. The entire Olympic GMU 621 is permit only for state hunter elk harvest.

Bull elk harvest within the western GMUs (GMUs 602, 607, 612 and 615) consistently contributes the highest bull harvest levels, while the northwestern to eastern GMUs (GMUs 601, 603, 621, and 624) consistently have low bull harvest levels, rarely reaching a GMU harvest of 20 bull elk annually.

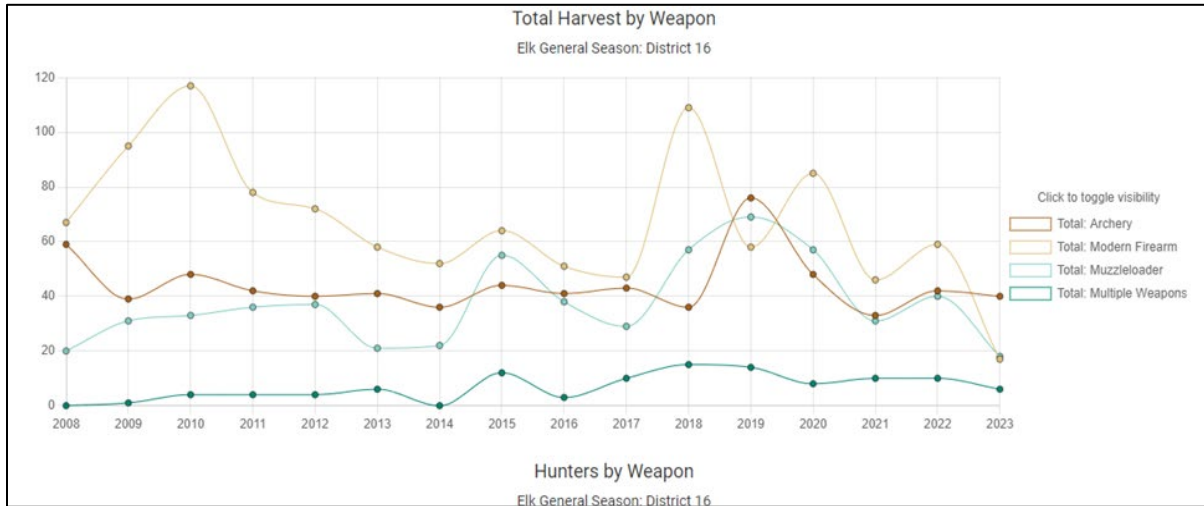
Hunting methods

Archery elk hunting in District 16 predominately occurs in Clearwater GMU 615. Dickey GMU 602, Pysht GMU 603, and Goodman GMU 612 have much fewer archery hunter days, ranging between 200 and 400 days annually. Hoko GMU 601, Olympic GMU 621, and Coyle GMU 624 had the lowest level of archery hunter days at fewer than 200.

Muzzleloader elk hunting was concentrated in Dickey GMU 602 and Sol Duc GMU 607 for many years. This changed in 2015 when muzzleloader elk hunting opened in Clearwater GMU 615 and Goodman GMU 612. As the total days spent in these GMU's increased, so did the overall trend in muzzleloader elk hunter days. Clearwater GMU 615 has more hunter days than Goodman GMU 612.

Total modern firearm elk hunting in District 16 peaked in 2010 and again in 2018 but has since decreased (Figure 2). Clearwater GMU 615 modern firearm hunting pressure dropped in half from a 2014 high to a 2017 low. Simultaneously, there was a 600-day increase in muzzleloader hunting and a 200-day increase in archery hunting during that period. The number of elk harvested by modern firearm and muzzleloader decreased during the 2023 season, but archery hunting success was similar to the previous season (Figure 2).

Figure 2. General season total elk harvest by weapon type in District 16, 2008-2023.



Hoko GMU 601 elk hunting

Since 2014, the Hoko GMU 601 bull elk harvest has generally remained between 25-30 elk but increased in 2021 and last season (Figure 3). Overall state hunter participation in Hoko GMU 601 is primarily modern firearm and muzzleloader (Figure 4). Muzzleloader harvest increased for 2023.

Figure 3. Hoko GMU 601 state elk harvest. Bar is general season bull harvest, all weapon types. Line is total harvest including general season, permit, and tribal harvest. Tribal harvest from 2023 not available. No general season cow harvest.

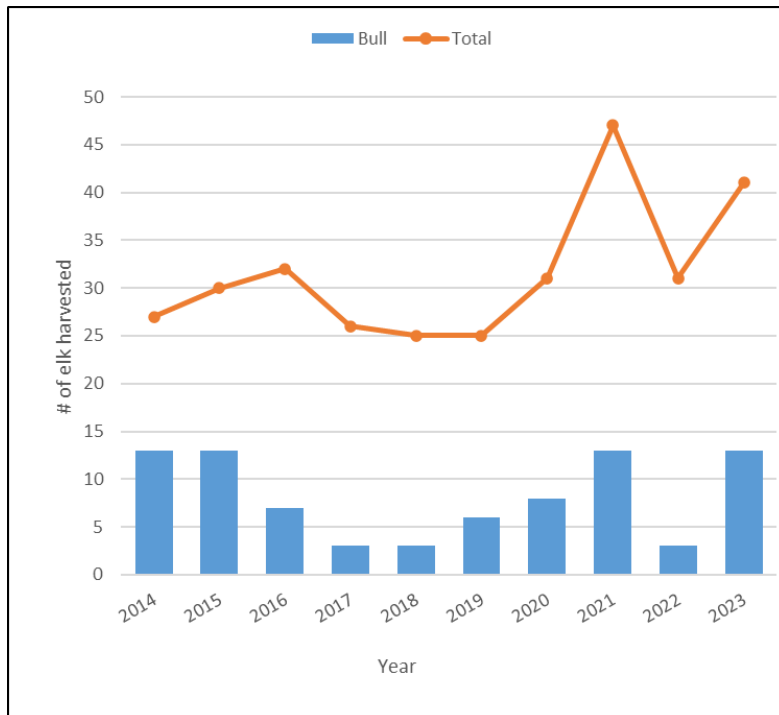
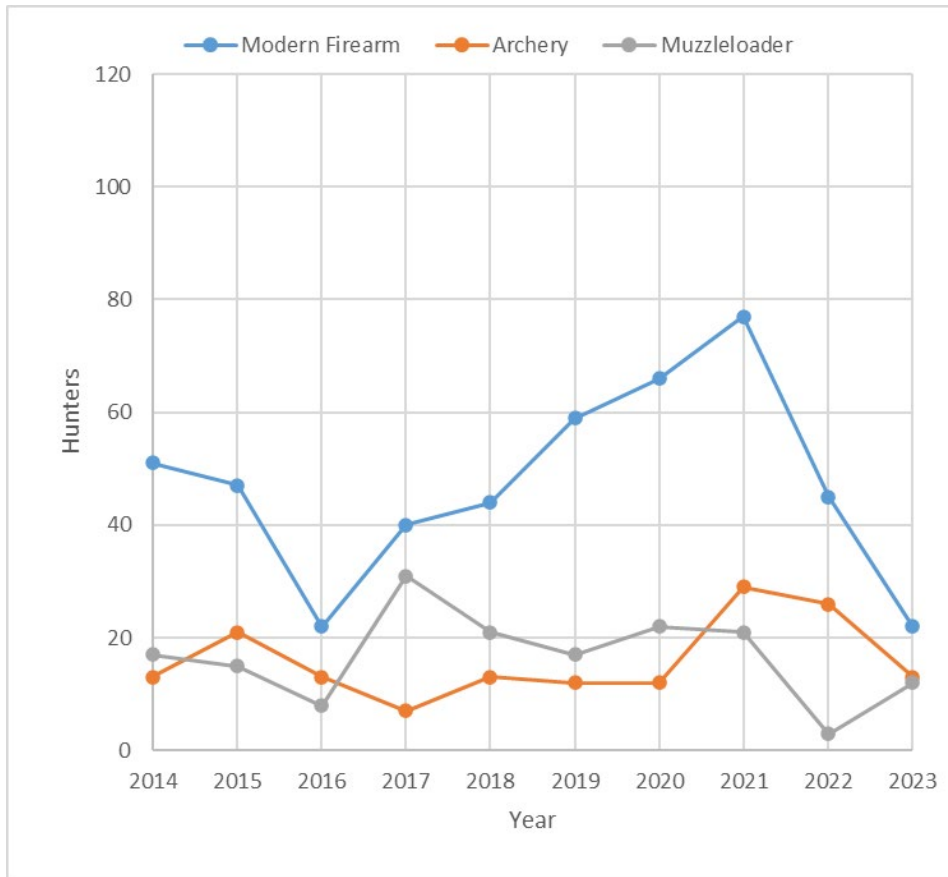


Figure 4. Hoko GMU 601 elk hunters by weapon type, 2014-2023.



Dickey GMU 602 elk hunting

The Dickey GMU 602 total bull harvest peaked in 2019 but has decreased significantly the past four hunting seasons (Figure 5). From 2022 to 2023, the number of modern firearms hunters increased while the number of archery and muzzleloader hunters increased within the unit (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Dickey GMU 602 state elk harvest. Bar is general season bull harvest, all weapon types. Line is total harvest including general season, permit, and tribal harvest. Tribal harvest from 2023 not available. No general season cow harvest.

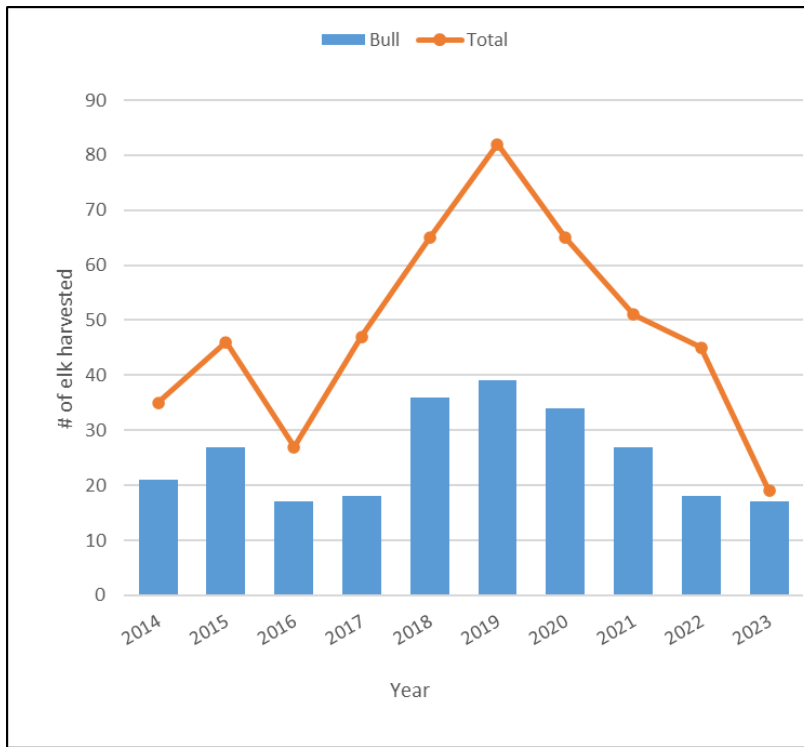
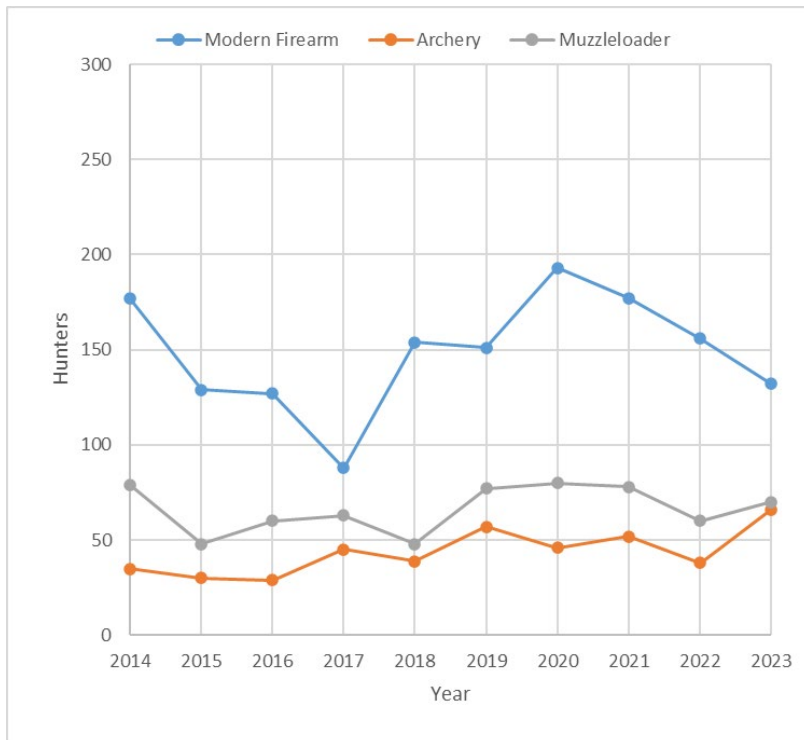


Figure 6. Dickey GMU 602 elk hunters by weapon type, 2014-2023.

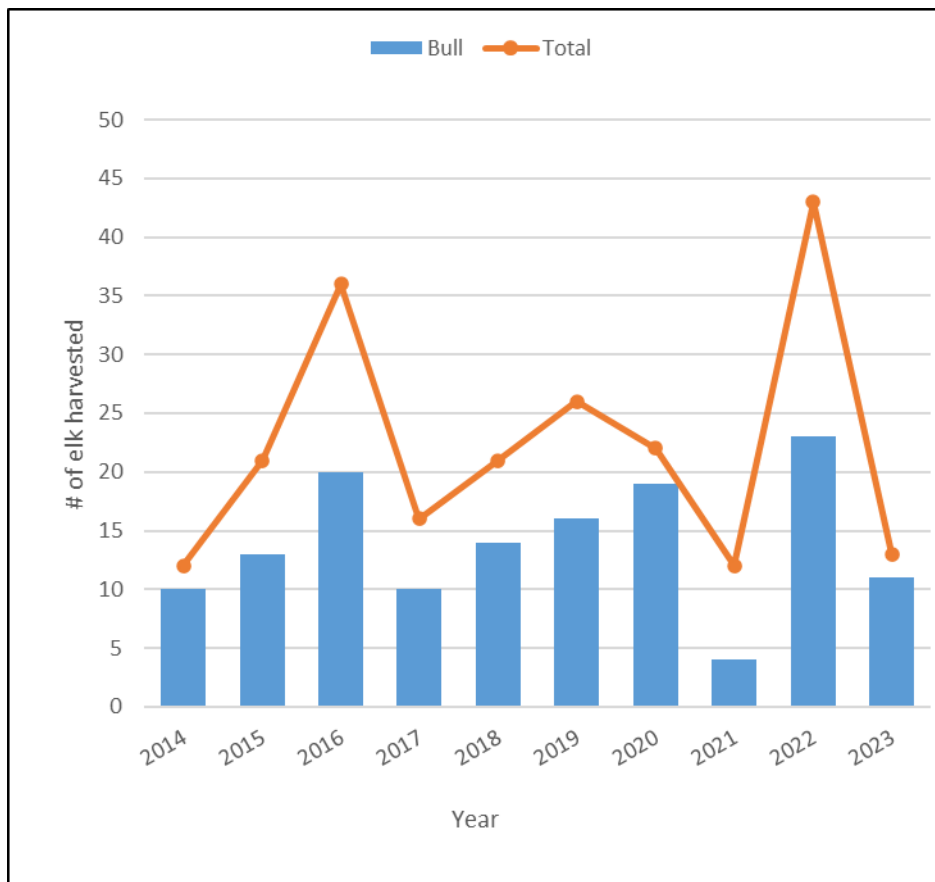


Pysht GMU 603 elk hunting

Elk abundance in GMU 603 has increased for the last three decades. During the 1990s, it was uncommon to observe elk in GMU 603. As the elk population continues to increase, hunting opportunities are expanding, with the harvest trend increasing since 2001. Most of the elk population increase occurs within the western portion, on Merrill and Ring Pysht Tree Farm and other private forestlands. There are also some herds within the Elwha Watershed, with occasional observations of elk use within the newly formed Elwha floodplains. The Joyce vicinity elk herds have increasing conflict situations, and WDFW's wildlife conflict staff have started issuing special damage hunt permits for this GMU.

Modern firearm hunters maintain a success rate of around 5 - 10%. Hunter pressure has remained relatively constant since 2001, with bull harvest peaking in 2022 but decreasing significantly last season (Figure 7). This GMU consistently has a higher number of archery hunters than muzzleloader hunters (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Pysht GMU 603 state elk harvest. Bar is general season bull harvest, all weapon types. Line is total harvest including general season, permit, and tribal harvest.

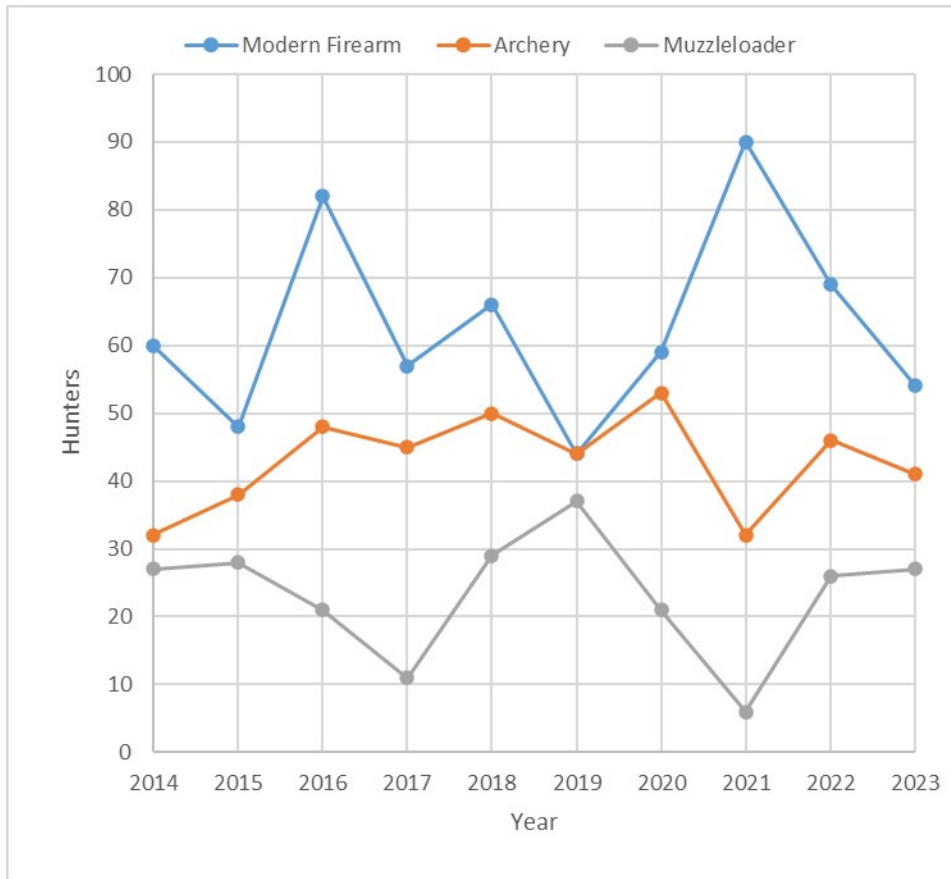


Tribal harvest from 2023 not available. No general season cow harvest.



Two bull elk spar in a field in the Dungeness Valley. Photo by Anita McMillan.

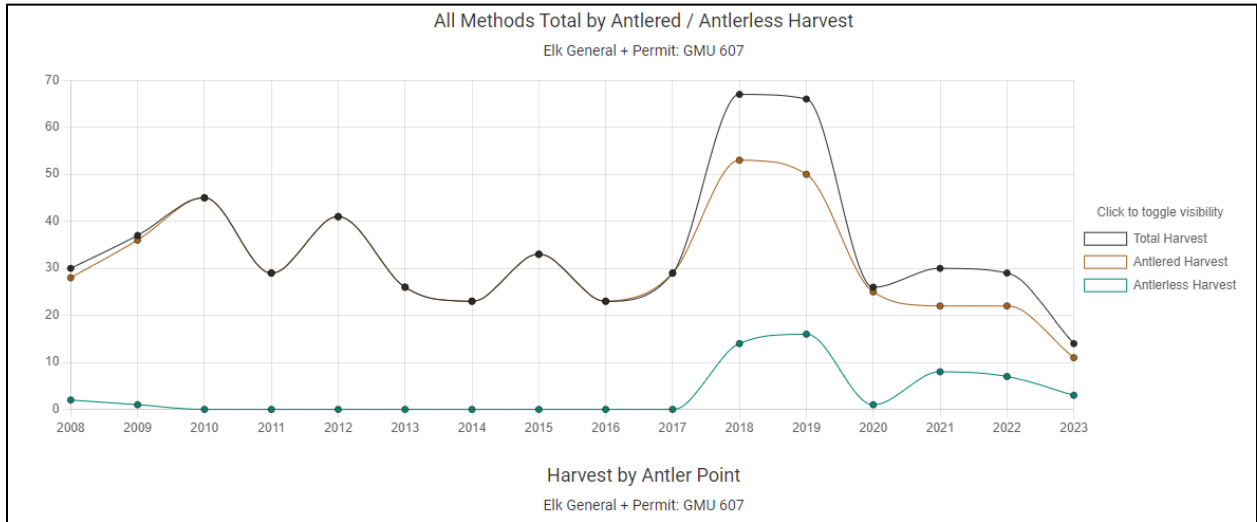
Figure 8. Pysht GMU 603 elk hunters by weapon type, 2014-2023.



Sol Duc GMU 607 elk hunting

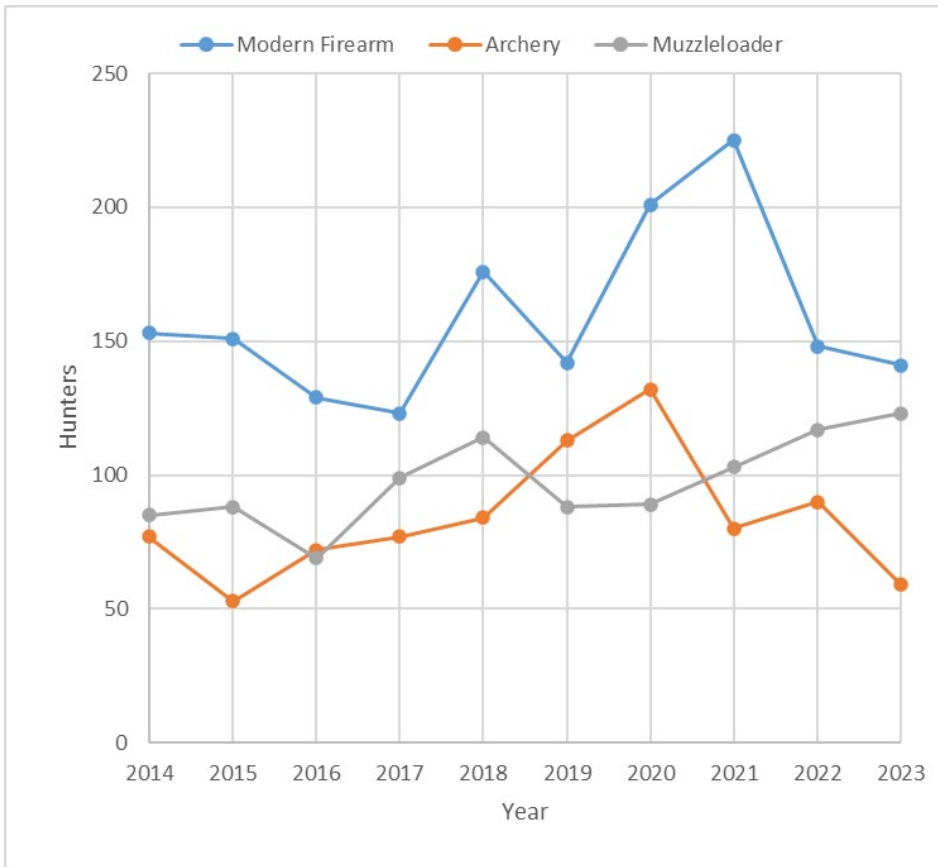
State hunters account for most Sol Duc GMU 607 bull elk harvest, with tribal hunters accounting for a portion. State hunters harvest about 30 bulls annually, and tribal hunters take fewer than 10 bulls annually. State bull harvest topped at 53 in 2018 and 48 in 2019, but the number of bulls harvested in 2023 was significantly lower at fewer than 10 (Figure 9). In 2018, a new antlerless elk permit opportunity was provided within this GMU to help manage damage complaints in the Forks area. Modern firearm is the method used by most hunters in the Sol Duc GMU 607, but the concentration of archery and muzzleloader hunters has fluctuated consistently. Since 2020, the number of muzzleloader hunters has increased while the number of archery hunters has decreased (Figure 10).

Figure 9. Sol Duc GMU 607 state elk harvest. Total elk harvest, general season bull harvest, and permit antlerless harvest for all weapon types.



Tribal harvest from 2023 not available.

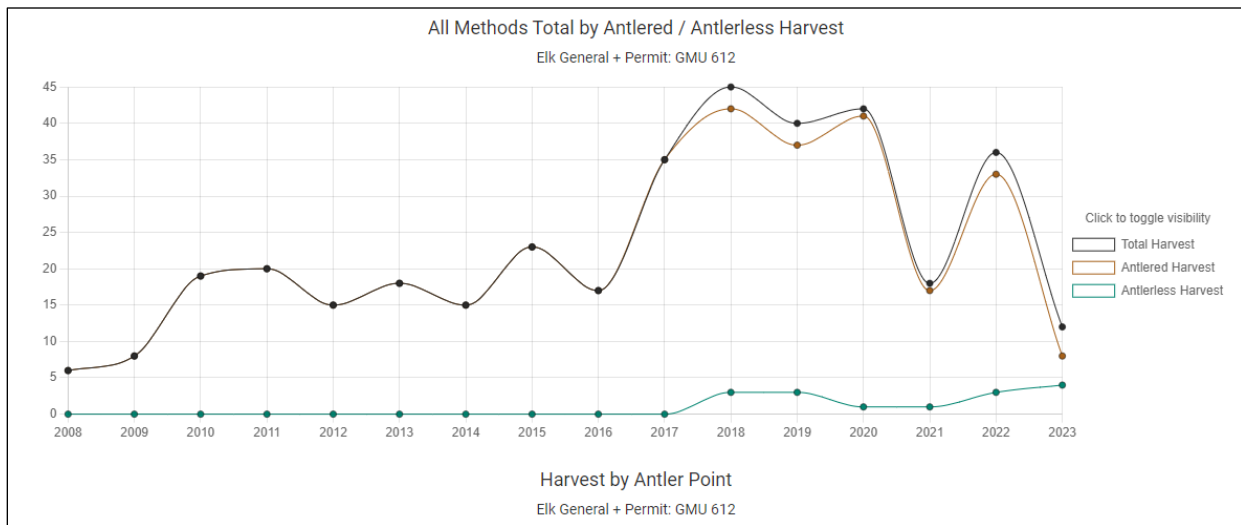
Figure 10. Sol Duc GMU 607 elk hunters by weapon type, 2014-2023.



Goodman GMU 612 elk hunting

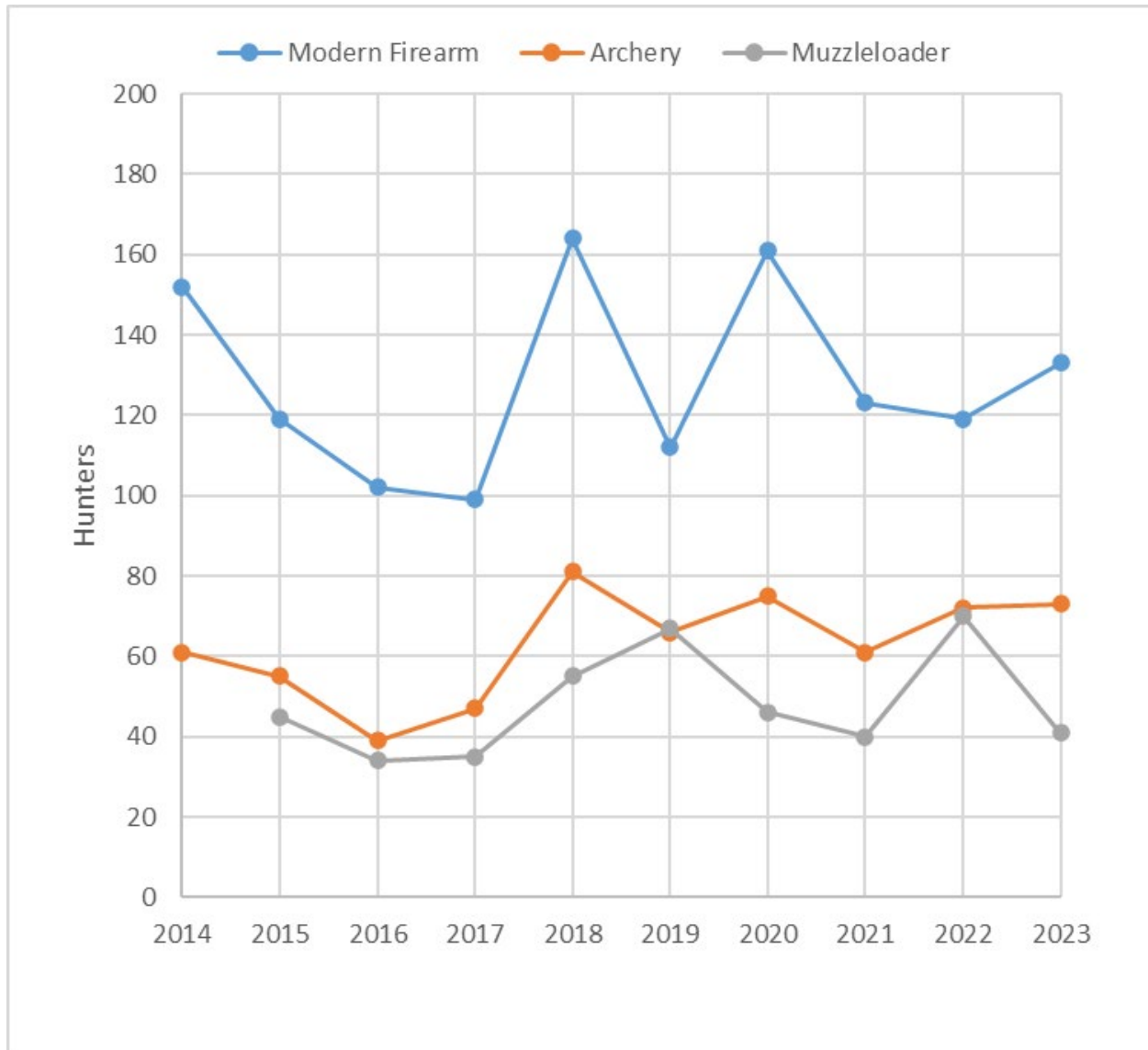
State bull harvest in Goodman GMU 612 has maintained harvest numbers between 15-25 elk from 2010 to 2016, but harvest increased between 2017 and 2020. Bull harvest in this GMU dropped significantly from 2022 to 2023 (Figure 11). Muzzleloader season was initiated with the Goodman GMU 612 in 2015. In 2018, a new antlerless elk permit opportunity was provided within this GMU to help manage for damage complaints in the Forks area. Modern firearm is the method used by most hunters in Goodman GMU 612, with the number of archery and muzzleloader hunters remaining constant (Figure 12).

Figure 11. Goodman GMU 612 state elk harvest. Total elk harvest, general season bull harvest, and permit antlerless harvest for all weapon types.



Tribal harvest from 2023 not available.

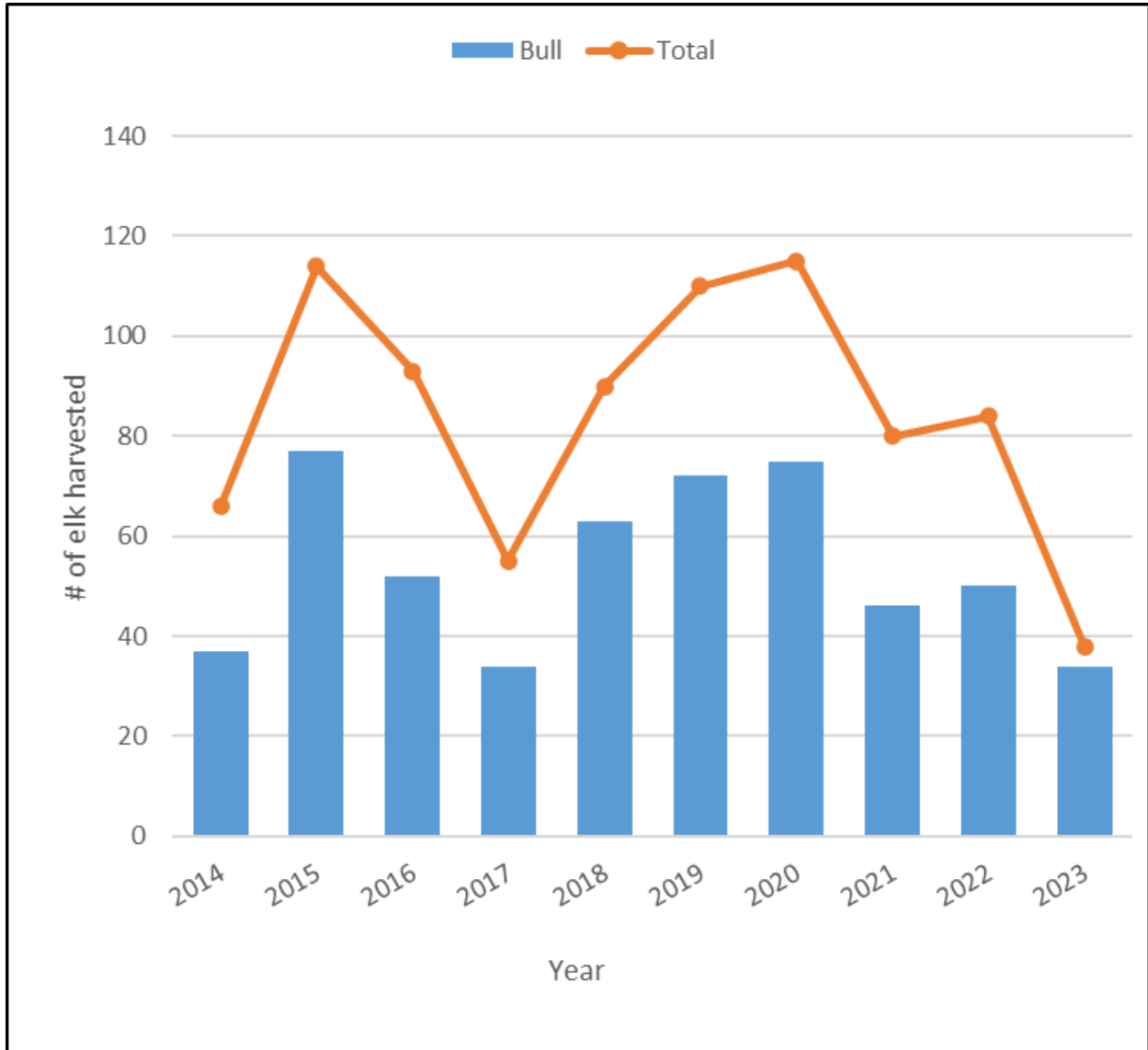
Figure 12. Goodman GMU 612 elk hunters by weapon type, 2014-2023.



Clearwater GMU 615 elk hunting

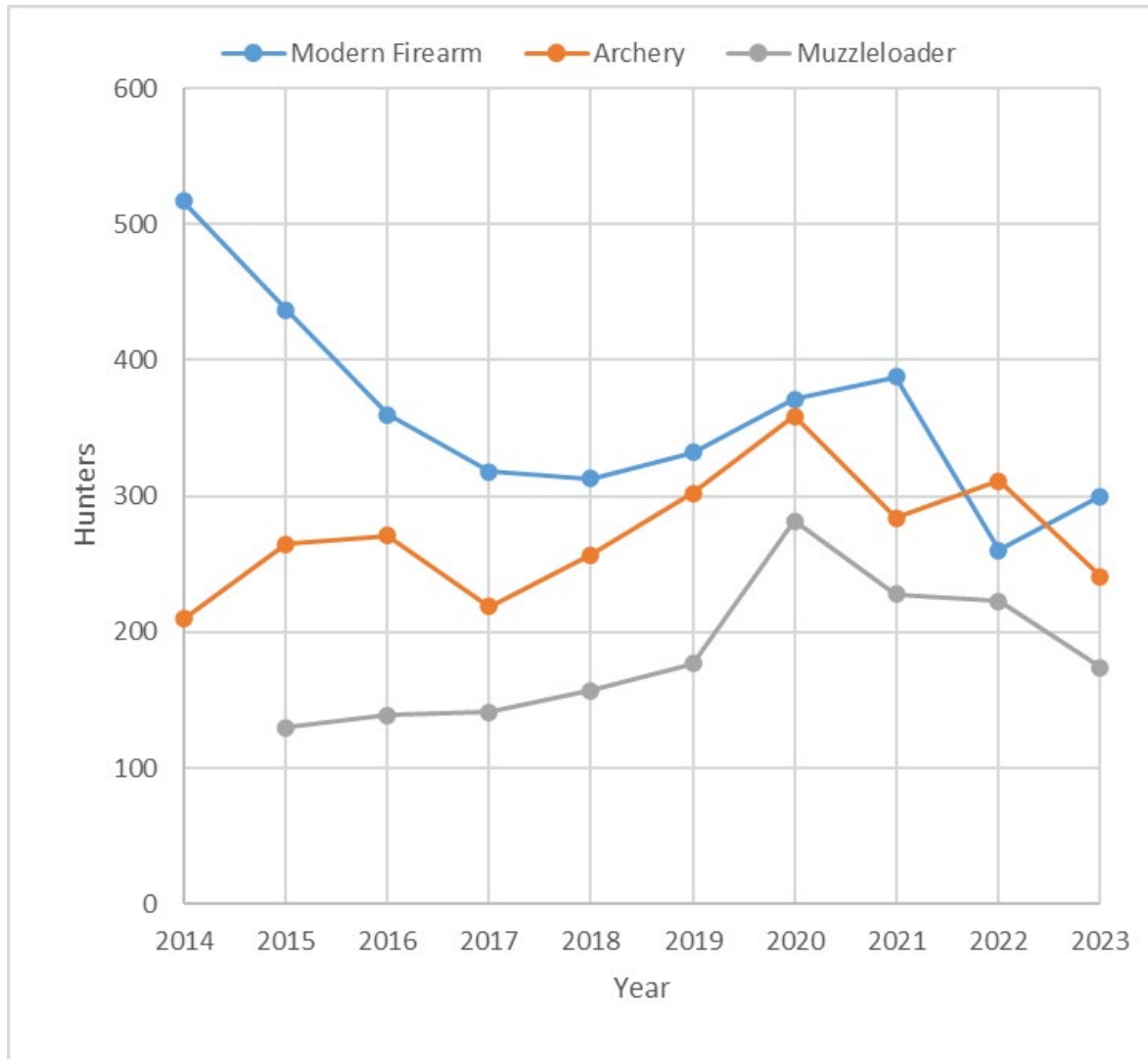
Clearwater GMU 615 has had the most elk harvest of all District 16 GMUs since 2003. Bull harvest has fluctuated considerably in recent years, with a low of 46 in 2017 and a high of 102 in 2020. It dropped significantly from 2022 to 2023 (Figure 13). The number of muzzleloader and archery hunters within this unit has decreased since 2020. The number of modern firearm hunters dropped significantly from 2021 to 2022 but increased during the 2023 season (Figure 14).

Figure 13. Clearwater GMU 615 state elk harvest. Bar is general season bull harvest, all weapon types. Line is total harvest including general season, permit, and tribal harvest.



Tribal harvest from 2023 not available. No general season cow harvest.

Figure 14. Clearwater GMU 615 elk hunters by weapon type, 2014-2023.



Olympic GMU 621 and Coyle GMU 624 elk hunting

Olympic GMU 621 elk opportunity is limited to permit hunts and an occasional damage harvest. Permit hunts can be a great opportunity, if the weather and elk use patterns are favorable. Most hunting opportunity in Olympic GMU 621 is within District 15. GMU 624 is not a prime elk hunting unit, with extremely low harvest. Small groups that may have split off from the Dungeness herd or other east Olympic Peninsula herds offer the main source of Coyle GMU 624 elk. Over the years, WDFW has received reports of small groups of elk in various locations within Coyle GMU 624, mostly within District 15. Please review the [Hunting Prospects for District 15](#) for more information on these units.

Notable hunting changes and regulations

Several private timber companies in District 16 are shifting to fee-access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Typically, these companies post signs at primary roadways, but hunters should be aware of changes. WDFW advises hunters to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the individual company's current land access policy. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

WDFW has adopted night hunting and hound hunting regulations during deer and elk seasons in recent years. Reference Page 21 of the 2024 Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Unmanned Aircraft: (WAC 220-413-070) "Using Aircraft" to include unstaffed aircraft. Page 87 of the 2024 Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

"It is illegal to:

- Use an aircraft, including unmanned aircraft, to spot, locate, or report the location of wildlife for the purpose of hunting.
- Hunt game animals, game birds, or migratory birds on the day one has operated an unmanned aircraft."

Using Dogs: (WAC 220-413-060) Hunting wild animals (except rabbits and hares) with dogs (hounds) in October or November during dates established for modern firearm deer or elk general seasons is prohibited. Page 87 of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Prohibited Hunting Methods: Page 87 of Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations:

- Hunting game birds or game animals with anything other than a firearm, a bow and arrow, a crossbow, or by falconry.

People with disabilities: Note new regulations referenced on Page 92 of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Since 2008, WDFW has received dramatically increasing reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascades, including within the Olympic elk herd area. While elk are susceptible to many conditions that result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington, where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis

counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area, including elk from the Olympic herd.

All of District 16 falls within the Olympic elk herd range. TAHD is most prevalent among elk on the southern end of the Olympic Peninsula; however, recent detections on the northern end confirm the disease is spreading to other portions of the Olympic elk herd range. WDFW has confirmed the presence of TAHD from elk sampled in GMUs 603, 607, 621, 624, 636, 638, 648, and 651.

While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but no evidence shows that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help

- Harvest a limping elk from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.
- Turn in your elk hooves along with complete registration forms at one of several collection sites in Western Washington.
- Report elk: Help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the Department's [online reporting form](#).
- Clean shoes and tires: Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage westside (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. This program aims to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can participate by submitting elk hooves at one of many collection sites in Western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for the following license year. Multiple bull permits in Western Washington with season dates of Sept. 1 through Dec. 31 will be awarded. Additionally, participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, reference WDFW's [elk hoof disease](#) in Washington webpage. Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on Page 65 of the Washington's Big Game Hunting Regulations.

Deer

General information, management goals, and population status

The only deer species found in District 16 is black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*). The Department's objective for deer in District 16 is to maintain productive populations while providing for multiple uses, including recreational, educational, and aesthetic (WDFW Game Management Plan, 2008). Buck harvest is any antlered buck, while antlerless harvest is limited to certain weapon types and/or by permit.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 16. Instead, harvest trends (harvest, hunters, success, and harvest per unit effort) are used as an index to trends. WDFW recognizes the limitations of this approach and is currently evaluating new techniques for monitoring black-tailed deer populations independent of harvest data. WDFW monitors black-tailed deer populations by tracking the harvest and hunting effort and gathering data on survivability, recruitment, and mortality rates using collared deer studies and aerial census methods.

According to Dr. Cliff Rice, a retired WDFW researcher for past black-tailed deer studies, some of the largest does captured in Western Washington were captured west of the Dungeness River on the lower foothills in a mix of DNR and private land.



Black-tailed buck along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Photo by Anita McMillan.

Which GMU should deer hunters hunt?

Western District 16

Western District 16 is generally sparse of deer. This area includes Hoko GMU 601, Dickey GMU 602, Pysht GMU 603, Sol Duc GMU 607, Goodman GMU 612, and Clearwater GMU 615. Observations and published reports indicate deer population numbers and density are generally low throughout the

district west of the Elwha River. West Olympic Peninsula tribes dropped antlerless harvest in the western GMUs in 2010. Deer research in the Hoko GMU 601 includes:

- [Factors affecting the survival of black-tailed deer fawns.](#)
- [Abstract of a study on the influence of hair loss syndrome \(HLS\) on black-tailed deer fawn survival.](#)

Eastern District 16

Eastern District 16 includes the northwestern portions of Olympic GMU 621 and the northern portion of Coyle GMU 624, which extend east and south into District 15 (eastern Jefferson County). Because WDFW records harvest data by GMU, harvest figures presented here include all Olympic GMU 621 and Coyle 624, extending into District 15. The portion of District 16 east of the Elwha River has black-tailed deer populations that are readily observed (presumably due to higher densities) and in many areas can often be observed in groups, especially near farmland. In these areas, deer are often considered a nuisance by property owners and agricultural operations, especially in Coyle GMU 624. Reference the Special Deer Permits section of the 2024 Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations for more information about Deer Area 6020.

Coyle GMU 624 has firearm restrictions, with no centerfire or rimfire rifles allowed. Read more about that on Page 90 of the 2024 Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations.

The mid and lower elevations of Olympic GMU 621 have high densities of deer, with some scattered blocks of DNR ownership that offer hunting on public land. Private industrial timberlands and DNR-managed lands are largely gated due to timber theft, dumping, vandalism, and other problems. However, hunters can access many roads on foot or mountain bike. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations.

The key to a successful harvest is securing the appropriate permission to hunt on private land and scouting the area before the hunting season. Hunters who intend to target deer in developed areas should check with local jurisdictions regarding firearm restrictions.

District 16 black-tailed deer hunting and harvest records

[Annual harvest reports](#) and harvest statistics for deer based on hunter reporting can be found on the WDFW website. Reference the [District 15 Hunting Prospects](#) for more information on deer harvest in Olympic GMU 621 and Coyle GMU 624.

Buck harvest is highest on the eastern half of the district and decreases farther west. The five GMUs with low buck harvest in the district are Hoko, Dickey, Sol Duc, Goodman, and Clearwater. Buck harvest in the Pysht GMU 603 has increased in recent years. The GMU's with consistently higher buck harvest in the district are Coyle 624 and Olympic 621. The 2023 buck harvest is presented in Table 2. Tribal deer harvest ranges within 5% to 20% of the total deer harvest in District 16 GMUs.

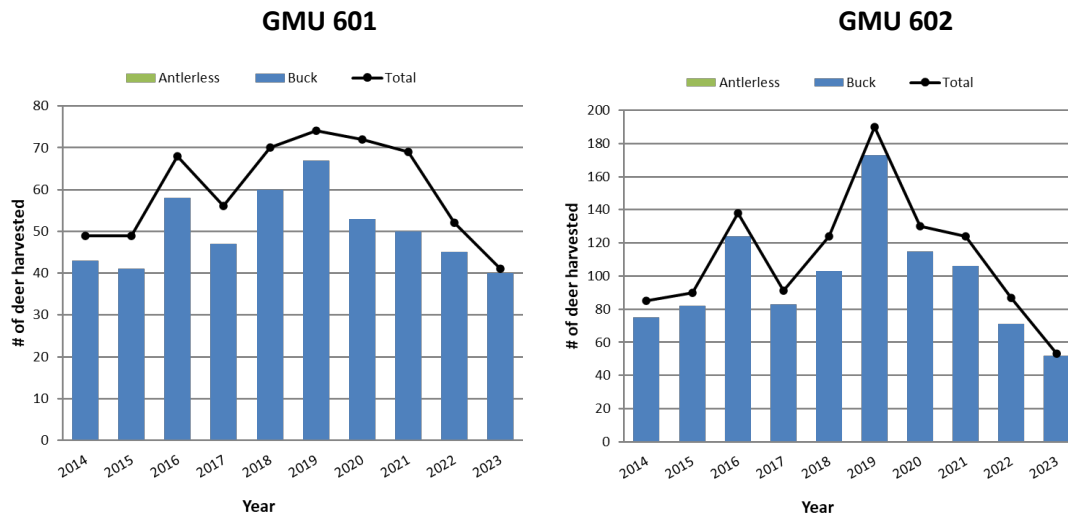
Table 2. Total state buck harvest in 2023 for District 16 GMU's.

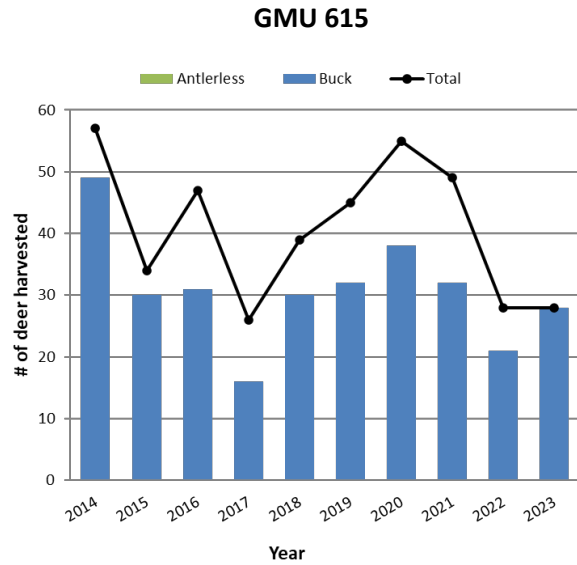
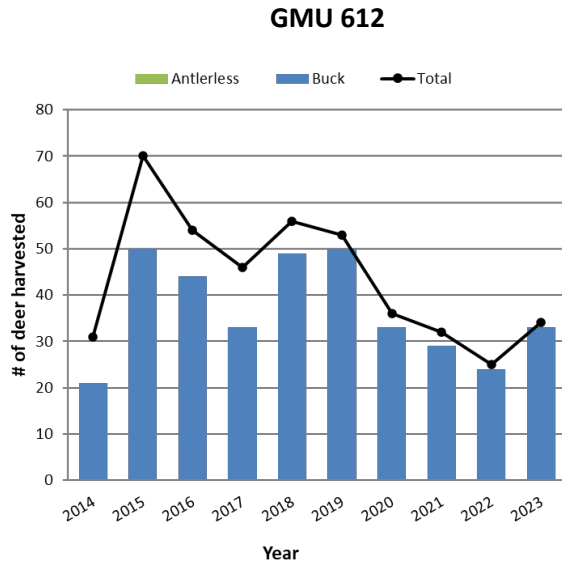
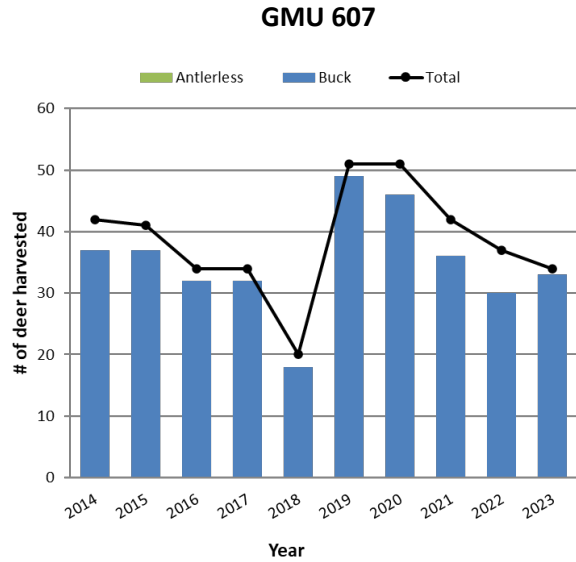
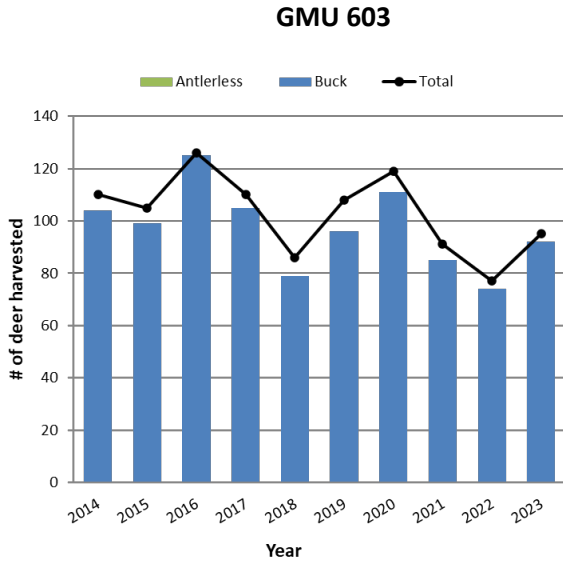
Number of bucks harvested	Game Management Unit (GMU)
41	601
53	602
95	603
34	607
34	612
28	615
305	621
285	624

Permit and tribal harvest numbers not included.

Deer populations rarely fluctuate dramatically from year to year in District 16, since severe weather does not normally occur that might lead to large die-offs. Hunter numbers have not typically changed dramatically from one year to the next within the district. Consequently, the best predictors of future harvest during general seasons are recent harvest trends, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Figures 15 and 16 (below) provide trend data for deer harvest and hunter numbers for weapon type by GMU. This information is intended to provide hunters with the best information to make an informed decision on where to hunt in District 16, as well as what they can expect to encounter regarding hunter numbers.

Figure 15. Trends in the total number of buck (blue) and antlerless (green) deer harvested in District 16 GMU's during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons combined, 2014–2023. Total deer harvest (black line) includes harvest from state general and permit seasons plus tribal harvest. (Tribal harvest from 2023 not included).

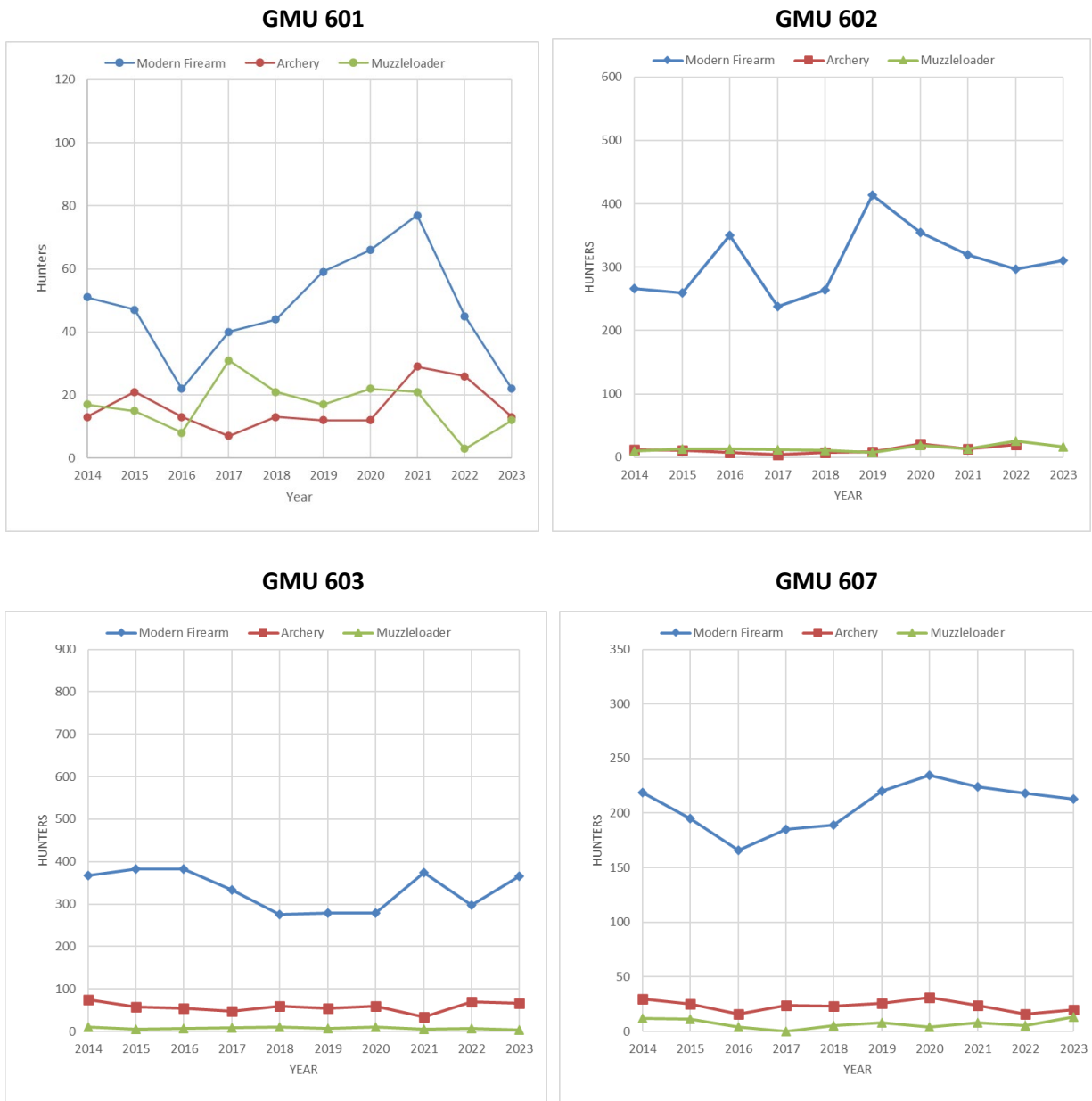




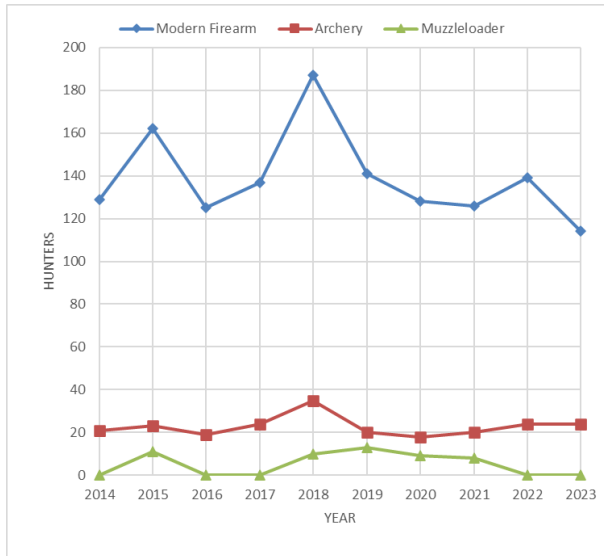
Hunting methods

Archery deer hunting in District 16 is concentrated in Olympic GMU 621 and Coyle GMU 624 (these are in both Districts 15 and 16). Modern firearm hunters have maintained a steady participation level in the District 16 GMUs. Muzzleloader deer hunting has recently increased in Olympic GMU 621, while all other District 16 GMUs reportedly receive fewer than 200 hunter days annually. Other GMUs remain consistent with the amount of muzzleloader hunter days.

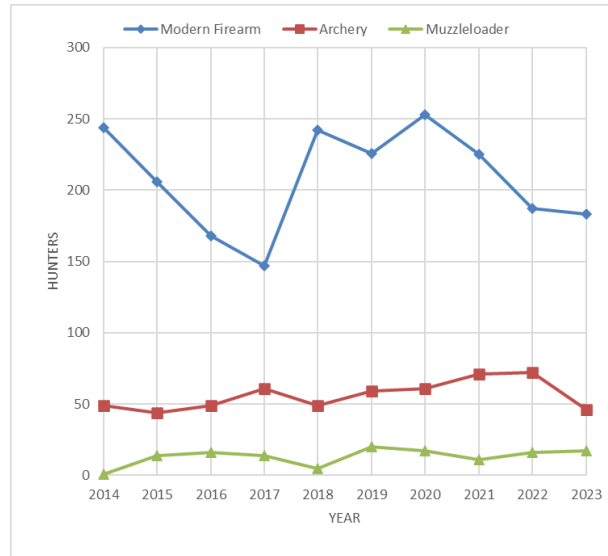
Figure 16. Trends in hunter numbers for District 16 GMU's during general modern firearm (blue diamond), archery (orange square), and muzzleloader (gray triangle) deer seasons, 2014–2023.



GMU 612



GMU 615



Deer areas

WDFW established Deer Area 6020 over 20 years ago to allow for doe harvest to help reduce deer conflicts north of Highway 101 between Port Angeles and eastern Miller Peninsula. The Department allows doe harvest within Deer Area 6020 during general seasons. This area is primarily private land, but it is worth inquiring with landowners about hunting access. Much of the state-managed land on Miller Peninsula is state park land where hunting is not allowed. Refer to the firearm restrictions section of the Washington’s Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet if you are considering this area. The entire Coyle GMU 624 within District 16 (Clallam County) has firearm restrictions. Refer to [Clallam County Code](#) [Clallam County Firearms Discharge Restrictions](#). No hunting is allowed with centerfire or rimfire rifles.

Notable hunting changes

Several private timber companies in District 16 are shifting to fee-access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Typically, these companies post signs at primary roadways, but hunters should be aware of changes. WDFW advises hunters to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the individual company’s current land access policy. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

WDFW adopted night hunting and hound hunting restrictions as well as permits during deer and elk seasons in recent years. Reference Page 87 of the Washington’s Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Unstaffed aircraft: Wording has been added to WAC 220-413-070 “Using Aircraft” to include unstaffed aircraft. Reference Page 87 of the Washington’s Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

People with disabilities: Note regulations referenced on Page 92 of the Washington’s Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Black bear



Black bear that was immobilized and relocated by WDFW staff in the Dungeness River drainage. Photo by Dale Metzger.

General information, management goals, and population status

WDFW’s black bear management goals are to:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage black bear and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize threats to public safety from black bears, while maintaining a sustainable and viable bear population.

3. Manage black bear for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes, including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography.
4. Manage populations statewide for a sustained yield. The state is divided into nine Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs). Harvest levels vary between BBMU depending on local population dynamics and environmental conditions.

District 16 is located nearly entirely within the designated Coastal BBMU, except for GMU 624, which is in the Puget Sound BBMU. This area is mostly private land with firearm restrictions. Fall black bear hunting is allowed in all District 16 GMUs. Current black bear hunting season guidelines for both the Coastal BBMU and Puget Sound BBMU are designed to maintain black bear populations at their current level. The fall black bear hunting season for all District 16 units is Aug. 1 to Nov. 15, 2024. Hunters can buy up to two bear tags each license year. A spring bear hunt season is currently not provided in Washington.

Wildlife managers use three statistics to assess black bear harvest:

- Proportion of females harvested (no more than 35-39% of harvest)
- Median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years)
- Median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years)

WDFW doesn't conduct annual surveys to monitor black bear population size trends and instead uses harvest data trends for population estimates or indices. Wildlife managers believe black bear populations are stable in District 16. Black bears occur throughout the district, but population densities vary among GMUs.

In 2013, the Department began work to estimate black bear density statewide. This research originated in the North Cascade Mountains using two detection methods: non-invasive DNA collection using barbed-wire hair collection and physical capture and deployment of global positioning system (GPS) collars. Results showed that while density varied by human development and habitat productivity, it averaged 20 bears per 100 square kilometers in the western Cascades and 19 bears per 100 square kilometers in the eastern Cascades (Welfelt et al., 2019). In the Western Washington study area, average total density estimates (including cubs) were nearly 50% lower than expected prior to this research (20 vs 39 per 100 square kilometers). Because these results showed density could vary widely by habitat types within limited areas, WDFW determined density should not be extrapolated statewide or even region wide. Thus, the Department needs more data to evaluate which habitat and management factors are associated with variations in bear density at a broad scale.

A non-invasive DNA collection project has been conducted in various GMUs. Biologists conducted this hair collection effort within the Clearwater GMU in June and July 2022. Over 1,000 hair samples were collected from bear and other wildlife species. A total of 92 bears (38 female and 54 male) were assigned individual identity from the hair samples collected. The agency was able to determine the density of bears was 25 per 100 square kilometers for this managed forestland. This was determined to be one of the highest bear densities for the state. Black bear research will continue on the Olympic

Peninsula. Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe biologists collected bear hair samples within the Pysht GMU 603 during this past spring/summer. With multiple density estimates in a variety of habitats, WDFW can examine what habitat and human factors are associated with black bear density across Washington and estimate statewide population abundance more accurately. Continued sampling will also allow for appropriate inferences to be made regarding harvest levels and the effects of management actions.

What to expect during the 2024 season

District 16 black bear harvesting prospects remain good to excellent. Although some hunters specifically target black bears, most harvest bears opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest and hunter success can vary quite a bit from one year to the next. The variability in the district is likely higher for hunters who specifically hunt black bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while deer or elk hunting.

During the 2023 season, hunters harvested 60 bears within District 16 GMUs. Hunters harvested an additional 18 bears in Olympic GMU 621 and 9 in Coyle GMU 624, both of which include a portion of District 15. Hunter success during the 2023 season ranged from 6% in Goodman GMU 612 to 15% in Clearwater GMU 615. Many GMUs saw a decrease in the number of bears harvested last season. The district's highest black bear harvest occurred in Sol Duc GMU 607 and Clearwater GMU 615. During the 2023 fall hunt, 13 bears were harvested in Sol Duc GMU 607 and 37 bears were harvested in Clearwater GMU 615. Hunters can reference summaries of BBMU and GMU harvest reports in two tables (Table 3 and Table 4). The harvested report table also represents the percentage of male and female black bear harvest.



Successful hunter with harvested black bear. Photo by WDFW.

Table 3. Black bear 2023 harvest and hunter effort for District 16 GMUs.

BBMU	Black Bear Management Unit	Total harvest	Number of hunters	Hunter success rate	Hunter days	Days per kill
1	Coastal	357	3899	9%	37252	104
2	Puget Sound	137	1817	8%	16861	123

Table 4. Black bear 2023 harvest reports for District 16 GMUs.

BBMU	GMU	Fall male harvest	Fall female harvest	Total harvest	Number of hunters	Hunter success (%)	Hunter days	Days per kill
1	601	3	2	5	62	8	315	63
1	602	6	3	9	139	6	1066	118
1	603	6	5	11	79	14	543	49
1	607	8	5	13	114	11	715	55
1	612	3	2	5	80	6	890	178
1	615	17	20	37	255	15	2065	56
1	618	2	0	2	36	6	213	107
1	621	15	3	18	300	6	2302	128
2	624	7	2	9	132	7	988	110

How to locate and harvest a black bear

DNR and USFS lands continue to provide the best opportunities for bear hunting within the district. WDFW encourages hunters to scout for signs of bears (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Access behind gated roads is largely available to those willing to walk or mountain bike, and there are ample numbers of timber harvests/younger age class regeneration units that attract bears. At higher elevations, those willing to hike in and pack out can pursue bears in classic environments where spot-and-stalk opportunities await. The USFS website has forest health maps that identify areas where bear damage has been detected from aerial surveys. Hunters can find the [aerial forest health detection maps](#) on the USFS website.

Scouting is an extremely important factor that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 16. Although black bears are common and occur in some areas at high densities, they are seen infrequently because of the thick vegetation that dominates the Olympic Peninsula landscape. Black bears can occur in a variety of habitats, so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. In the early fall, hunters should focus their efforts at higher elevations and in open terrain (hillsides, etc.) and timber harvest areas. Huckleberries ripen throughout the summer, but in the early fall the most remaining berries are typically at higher elevations. A good berry patch yielding much

fruit would be a good place to hunt. Bears can also look in recent timber harvests that contain many berry-producing shrubs, including huckleberries, serviceberries, snowberries, blackberries, salmonberries, thimbleberries, and salal berries. During the fall, hunters need to find openings with these characteristics and hike through them to see if there is any bear sign. If they do find fresh sign, odds are a bear is frequenting the area. If hunters are patient and sit for extended periods of time watching these areas, they stand a reasonable chance of harvesting a bear. Since the Olympic Peninsula experienced a very cool spring and late summer, bears may move into berry foraging areas later than usual this season.

Important considerations

WDFW strongly urges bear hunters not to shoot sows with cubs. Some cubs may lag behind their mothers and may not be obvious to hunters. Bear cubs (weighing 30-50 pounds) may also be present in trees or well-hidden in dense vegetation nearby. Please observe and be patient before shooting. In past hunting seasons, WDFW received several reports of orphaned cubs in Region 6. Some of these cubs were captured and taken to rehabilitation facilities. The use of hounds and/or bait to hunt black bear is prohibited statewide ([RCW 77.15.245](#)).

Mandatory submission of teeth

All successful bear hunters must submit a premolar tooth with a tooth envelope, available at WDFW offices ([WAC 220-415-090](#)). The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth (toward the throat) of the upper jaw. The tooth should be submitted within five days of harvest, or by Dec. 1, 2024.

Cougar



Cougar that was treed as part of a WDFW research project. Photo by Rich Beausoleil.

General information, management goals, and population status

Cougars occur throughout District 16, but densities can vary among GMUs. WDFW manages cougars in District 16 to maintain a stable population. The statewide goals for cougar are:

1. Preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage cougar and their habitats to ensure healthy, productive populations.
2. Minimize human/cougar conflict.
3. Manage cougar for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by tribal members, wildlife viewing, and photography.
4. Manage statewide cougar populations for a sustained yield.
5. Improve WDFW's understanding of predator-prey relationships.

Since the 2012-2013 hunting season, WDFW changed cougar harvest management throughout Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intent was to have a longer season, without any hunting implement restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a guideline. WDFW administers this hunt structure within 50 population management units (PMUs). District 16 includes PMUs 42, 43, and 45.

To accomplish harvest goals, WDFW established an early and a late general season for defined hunt areas. The early season is Sept. 1 through Dec. 31, and no harvest limits apply even if harvest exceeds the guideline. Beginning in the 2015 season and continuing until last season, WDFW extended cougar season dates through April 30. In this late season, (Jan. 1 through April 30), harvest guidelines applied for hunter-harvested cougars only. However, to hunt cougars after March 31 in a unit open for cougar harvest, hunters needed to buy a new license and cougar tag. WDFW examined harvest numbers starting Jan. 1. If the guideline was met or exceeded, the PMU would not open for the late season. Cougar harvest was monitored during the late season, and managers closed any hunt areas that met or exceeded the harvest guideline. Over the past six years, an average of 74% of PMUs remained open to hunters through April 30. Closures occurred on the PMU level, resulting in less impact to hunter opportunity.

New for the 2024-2025 season

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently approved changes to cougar hunting for the 2024-2025 season. The new [rule](#) establishes the Washington cougar hunting season from Sept. 1 to March 31, sets a cap of 13% of each PMU using a specific statewide density, and includes all known human-caused cougar mortalities of cougars (18 months old and older) to determine when to close a PMU during the season.

The Commission incorporated an amendment in the cougar hunting rule to clarify that all known human-caused cougar mortalities of cougars (18 months old and older) will contribute to the 13% cap. Mortalities will be counted between April 1 of the current year through March 31 of the subsequent year. Additionally, the Commission decided that, in PMUs that reach the 13% cap before the cougar hunting season starting on Sept. 1, the cap would increase to 20% of the population to provide hunting opportunity. The rule proposal also eliminates the allowance for harvesting a second cougar within the same license year statewide. The Commission also directed staff to initiate rule making for the 2025-26 cougar season.

Hunters should call 1-866-364-4868 to determine if a specific hunt area is open. For more information related to the harvest guidelines management approach, please visit WDFW's [cougar hunting areas openings and closures](#) page. The agency recently formed an internal group to assess the results of implementing the cougar harvest hunting structure. Table 5 provides the harvest guidelines for each District 16 hunt area for 2024 - 2025. No harvest guideline was established for PMU 45 due to the higher potential for human-cougar conflicts in these more urban GMU's.

Table 5. Cougar harvest guidelines for 2024-2025 for District 16 GMUs.

Hunt area	13% harvest cap	20% harvest cap
PMU 42 - 601, 602, 603, 612	6	9
PMU 43 - 607, 615	4	6
PMU 45 - 621, 624, 627, 633	None	None

What to expect during the 2024-2025 season

Most cougar harvest within the district comes from opportunistic encounters while hunters are pursuing deer, elk, or other activities. Total cougar harvest can vary from year to year. Tables 6-8 presents total cougar hunting and other mortality for all PMUs in the district. Table 9 presents status and trend report information as well as harvest totals and mean averages for the past three hunting seasons. Hunters harvested 11 cougars within the district during the 2023-2024 general cougar season. During the general season, hunters harvested two male cougars in PMU 42, one female cougar in PMU 43, and eight cougars in PMU 45, which includes a portion of District 15. Totals don't include tribal harvest and other mortality. Nine cougars were removed within the district due to public safety concerns. Reference the 2024-2025 [Washington Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#) for more information regarding cougar hunting in specific GMUs.

Cougars are widespread in the forestlands of District 16. Areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk provide great opportunity for hunting cougar. GMU 621 consistently has the highest cougar harvest in the district. The other GMUs' cougar harvest numbers fluctuate each year. With the yearly variation, it is hard to predict future harvest, but cougar sightings in the district continue to be somewhat common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the harvest. Under past harvest management guidelines, the two district hunt areas, PMU 42 and PMU 43, did not meet their harvest guideline in the past 10 seasons. However, during the 2020-2021 late season in PMU 43, the harvest guideline of four cougars was met and the unit was closed to further cougar hunting on Feb. 26, 2021. This highlights that hunters should monitor closures and plan accordingly.

Table 6. Total cougar harvest 2023 – 2024 for PMU 42 within District 16 by state hunters and other mortality.

Mortality cause	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
General hunting	2	0	0	2
Other	2	1	0	3
Total	4	1	0	5

The harvest of male and female cougars is represented. Tribal hunting not included.

Table 7. Total cougar harvest 2023 – 2024 for PMU 43 within District 16 by state hunters and other mortality.

Mortality cause	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
General hunting	0	1	0	1
Other	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	0	1

The harvest of male and female cougars is represented. Tribal hunting not included.

Table 8. Total cougar harvest 2023 – 2024 for PMU 45 within District 16 by state hunters and other mortality.

Mortality cause	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
General hunting	5	3	0	8
Other	6	3	0	9
Total	11	6	0	17

The harvest of male and female cougars is represented. Tribal hunting not included.

Table 9. Cougar harvest in District 16 (and portion of District 15) for 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24.

GMUs	Harvest 2021 - 2022	Harvest 2022 - 2023	Harvest 2023 - 2024	Three-year mean harvest
601, 602, 603, 612	3	2	2	2.33
607, 615	2	0	1	1
621, 624, 627, 633	4	0	8	4
Total	9	2	11	n/a

Tribal harvest or other sources of mortality not included.

Hunters harvest most cougars while deer or elk hunting. However, during the 2019-2020 season, several hunters were successful when specifically targeting cougars after snow events. One hunting team was fortunate to harvest adult male cougars a few weeks apart in two locations within Clearwater GMU 615. Enforcement officers in the district report low cougar hunting pressure in most GMUs in previous years. WDFW removed several cougars in District 16 last season due to depredation concerns with livestock and domestic animals. Two cougars were removed in Coyle GMU 624, two in Olympic GMU 621, and three in Pysht GMU 603. Conflict has consistently been higher in Coyle GMU 624 and Pysht GMU 603 than other management areas within the district.

Important considerations

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually less than 80 pounds) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. WDFW strongly encourages cougar hunters to check for multiple sets of tracks when pursuing an animal. Female cougars may have kittens in trees or in dense vegetation nearby. Please be very observant and patient before shooting. During the 2015-2016 season, WDFW enforcement officers and biologists captured two orphaned cougar kittens near Joyce. One later died, and the other will remain in captivity at a zoo. Cougar hunters must follow mandatory reporting and sealing requirements. Voter Initiative 655 banned the use of hounds to hunt cougars in the state. Hunting with dogs is prohibited statewide except during cougar management removals authorized by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and for research purposes.



Two cougar kittens rescued near Joyce after mother was killed. Photo by WDFW.



Cougar kitten from research project on the Olympic Peninsula. Photo by Shannon Murphie.

Notable changes

New rule changes in effect for cougar harvest in the 2024-2025 season were previously described. See a more complete description of these rule changes on the WDFW [website](#). This rule is responding to and supporting a [rule petition \(PDF\)](#) that the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission accepted Dec. 15, 2023. The petition requests that the Department revisit the topic of cougar hunting seasons and a previous rule that was adopted in 2020. The rule amends WAC 220-415-100 based on the petition.

Mandatory reporting/sealing

Successful cougar hunters must report their harvest to the cougar hotline at 1-866-364-4868 within 72 hours of harvest and have the cougar pelt sealed within five days of notification. This is the same hotline hunters can use to check if cougar hunt areas are open. A premolar tooth and tissue sample will be taken. Reference page 69 of the 2024-2025 [Washington Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations](#) for details about cougar sealing requirements.



Biologist Shelly Ament removes the canine tooth of a harvested cougar. Photo by Gail Weger.



Close up of removed canine tooth of a harvested cougar. Photo by Gail Weger.

Cougar outreach and education

WDFW is committed to minimizing human-wildlife conflict. With the increase of the human population in Washington, there are more recreationists in cougar habitat and small livestock farms near residences, along with intentional and unintentional feeding of wildlife around homes. It is essential to raise public awareness and keep both people and cougars safe. A young male cougar killed a mountain biker near North Bend in the spring of 2018. This type of incident is extremely rare and was only the second known human fatality from a cougar in Washington. In late July 2023, an 8-year-old boy was attacked by a cougar while camping at Lake Angeles in Olympic National Park. The boy was only slightly hurt, and the cougar was never found. Please reference WDFW's [cougar web page](#) to learn more about cougar-human interactions, or contact a WDFW regional office for a copy of the 2018 "Discover Washington's Cougars" brochure.

Small game

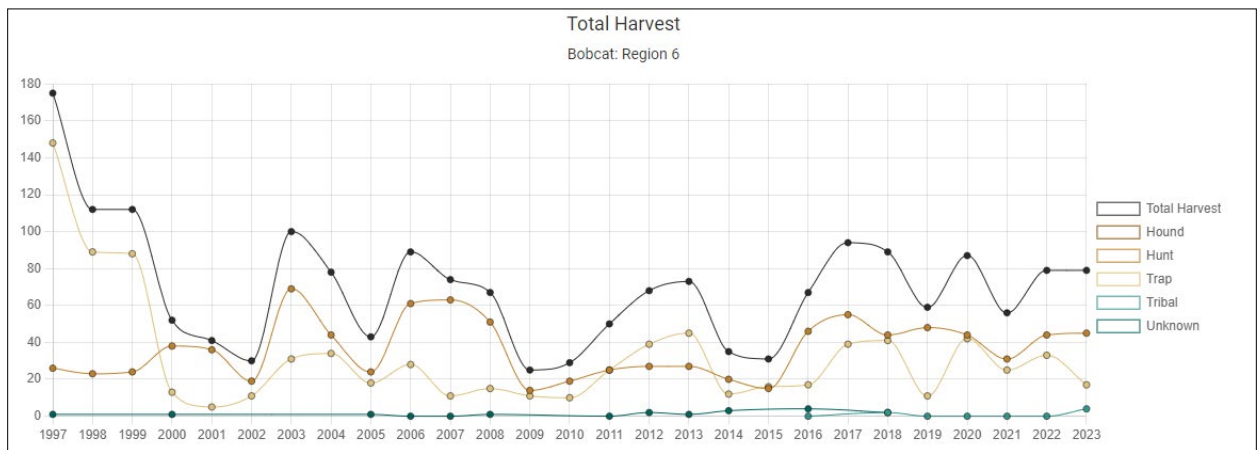
Bobcats

Bobcats are plentiful in the wooded lands across District 16, and many hunters successfully harvest bobcat each season. Bobcat may be hunted statewide with a small game license and no bag limit from Sept. 1 through March 15. Bobcats are exempt from hunting hour restrictions, except it is unlawful to hunt bobcat at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons in October and November. Hunting or pursuing bobcat with dogs is prohibited in Washington. **Successful bobcat hunters or trappers must contact a WDFW office to have the bobcat pelt sealed and submit the associated harvest report to WDFW by April 20 of each year.** The bobcat hide must not be frozen so a seal may be

attached. No one may possess an open WDFW bobcat seal unless it has been cut by a licensed taxidermist or fur dealer who has received and invoiced the pelt for processing.

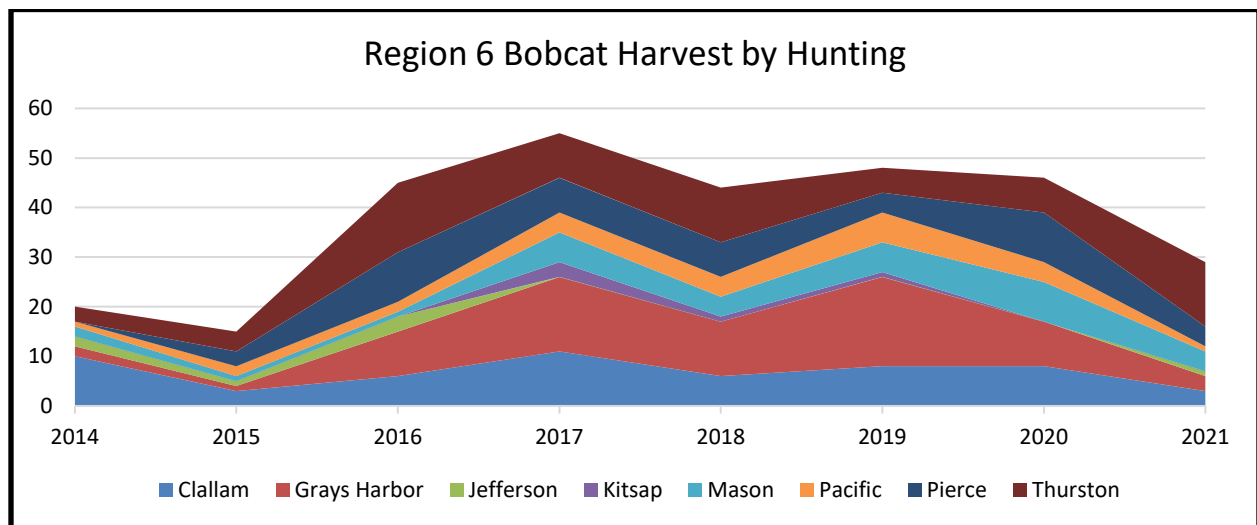
Bobcat harvest through trapping in Region 6, which includes District 16, had trended upward since 2014 until the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in trappers either not trapping or not having access to public and private properties. Harvest then peaked in 2020, possibly since Covid provided the public more recreation time, but declined significantly in 2021. Generally, more bobcats are harvested through hunting in Region 6 than through trapping (Figure 17). Clallam and Jefferson counties provide great opportunity for harvesting bobcat. However, bobcat harvest in Clallam County has consistently been lower than other counties (Figure 18). Prospects for hunting or trapping bobcat in 2024 and 2025 remain steady. Public and private forest remain the best locations for locating and harvesting bobcat.

Figure 17. Region 6 bobcat harvest by all methods, 1997 – 2023.



Tribal harvest included.

Figure 18. Region 6 bobcat harvest by hunting for all counties, 2014 – 2021.



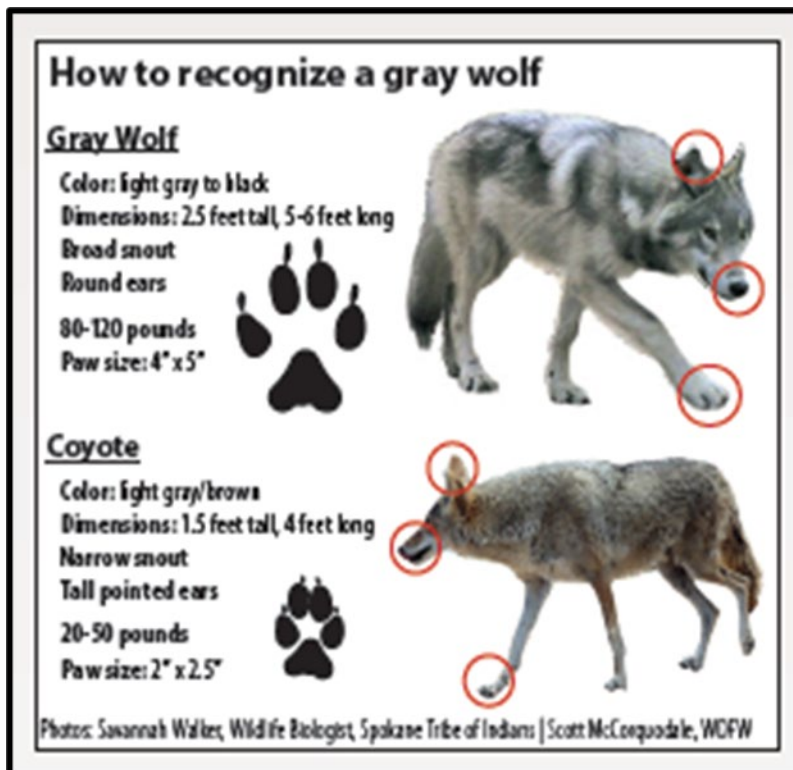
Raccoons

Raccoons are also very plentiful across District 16, particularly around suburban neighborhoods where they eat garbage, fallen fruit, pet food, pond fish, and various other things. A lack of natural predators within these areas helps to perpetuate this species. Raccoons are also found in the less-developed forests of the district's western portions. Raccoons can be hunted across District 16 with a small game license and no bag limit from Sept. 1 through March 15. Hunters may use dogs to hunt raccoon and may hunt them at night. It is unlawful to hunt with dogs or at night in October or November during dates established for modern firearm deer and elk general seasons.

Coyotes

Coyotes are another small game animal abundant across District 16, both in urban and non-urban areas. They have also benefitted from a lack of large predators in urban and suburban areas. Hunters may harvest coyotes without a bag limit year-round under a small game or big game license. They can also hunt coyotes at night with lights year-round. It is unlawful to hunt coyote at night during modern firearm deer or elk general seasons in October and November. The use of dogs to hunt coyote is prohibited. Wolves are protected under federal and state law and MAY NOT be shot or killed. WDFW hasn't confirmed any wolf sightings in District 16. However, be sure of identification if you are hunting coyote (Figure 19). Report all wolf observations.

Figure 19. Identifying wolves and coyotes in the field.



Snowshoe hare and cottontail rabbits

Most rabbits encountered on the Olympic Peninsula are snowshoe hare (reference range maps below). Snowshoe hare are readily observed along forested roads in the western half of District 16, and are found throughout the district, usually along forested edges. Annual district harvest of hares and rabbits is erratic, ranging from zero to over 300. Opportunity is always there, with a harvest per unit effort expected to range between .25 and .70 per day.

Estimates of hunters and harvest for 2023 are as follows:

- Snowshoe hare harvest
 - Clallam County – two harvested with 10 hunters that hunted for 12 days.
 - Jefferson County – two harvested with 10 hunters that hunted for 9 days.
- Cottontail rabbit harvest
 - Clallam County – thirty-six harvested with 31 hunters that hunted for 257 days.
 - Jefferson County – seven harvested with 13 hunters that hunted for 52 days.

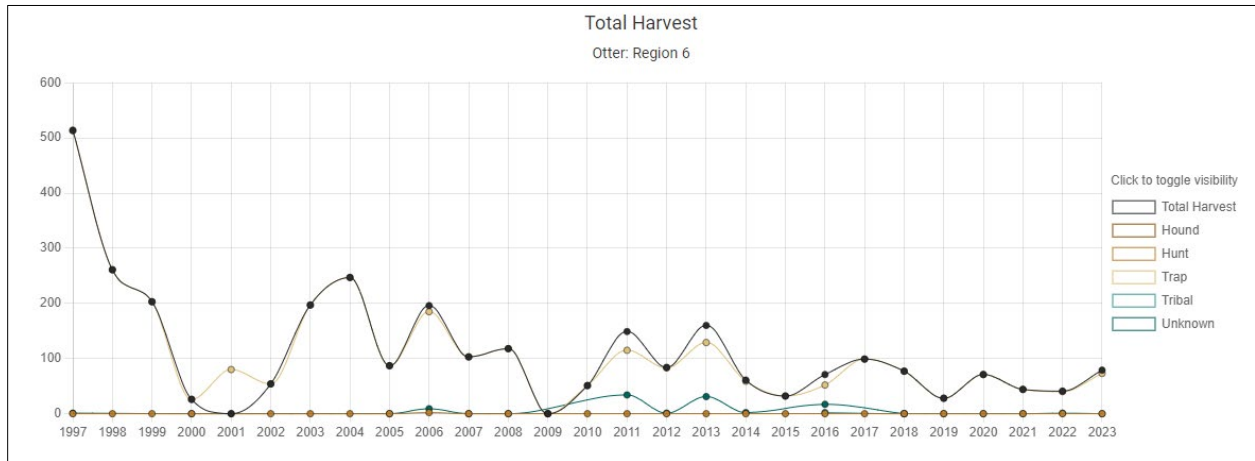
More information on the snowshoe hare and other rabbits can be found at the following links:

- [Snowshoe hare](#)
- [Eastern cottontail](#)
- [European rabbit](#)
- [Nuttall's cottontail](#)

Beaver, weasel, mink, muskrat, and river otter

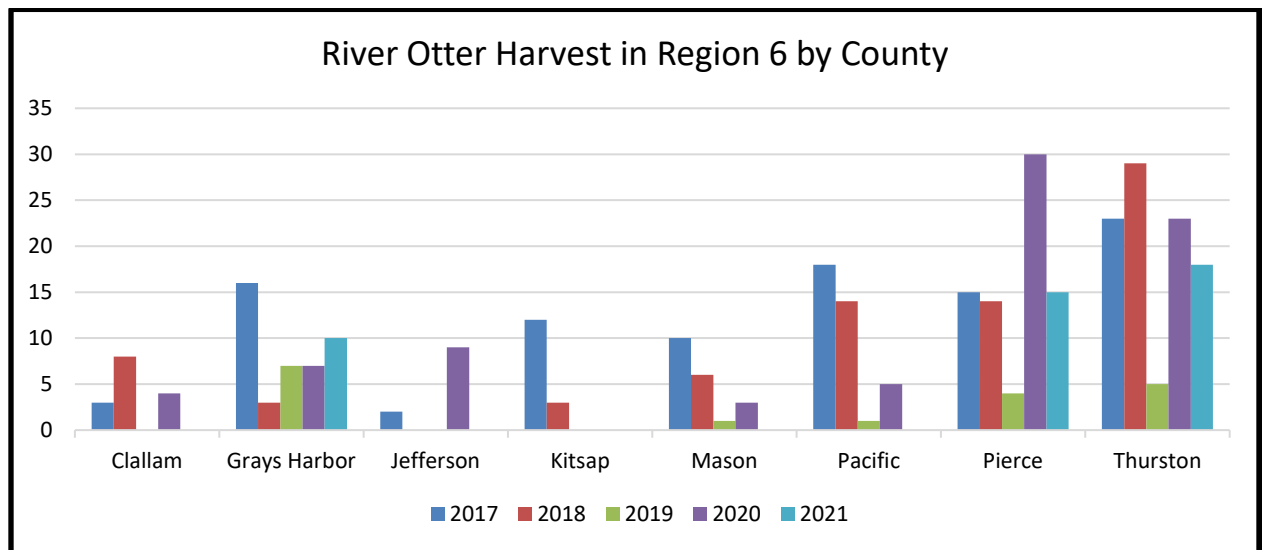
These species are all plentiful across Region 6, including District 16. Martens are less common. Long-tailed weasels occur primarily on pasture, cropland, fields, and grasslands. River otter (*Lutra canadensis*) are plentiful in freshwater lakes, streams, and wetlands across District 16 and are frequently observed along saltwater shorelines of the coast and Strait of Juan de Fuca. Sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*) are found along the outer coast and occasionally along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. This species is protected and cannot be trapped or hunted. Hunters may only harvest beaver, weasel, marten, muskrat, and river otter with a trapping license during the trapping season (Nov. 1 through March 31). **Successful river otter trappers must contact a WDFW office to have their otter pelt(s) sealed and submit the associated harvest report to WDFW by April 20 of each year.** Pelts must be presented in a way that the hide can be sealed. No frozen hides or carcasses will be accepted (reference [trapping regulations](#)). River otter harvest in Region 6 dropped significantly from over 500 otters harvested in 1997 to fewer than 100 since 2018 (Figure 20). Clallam and Jefferson counties within District 16 generally have some of the lower trap rates for river otter compared to other Region 6 counties (Figure 21).

Figure 20. Region 6 river otter harvest by all methods, 1997 – 2023.



Tribal harvest included.

Figure 21. Region 6 river otter harvest by county, 2017 – 2021.



Marten

American marten sightings are quite rare in District 16. Marten trapping is closed on the Olympic Peninsula in Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, and Grays Harbor counties to protect low-density coastal Pacific martens (*Martes caurina*). Efforts are underway by USFS and others to document and monitor fisher and marten on the Olympic Peninsula. They are both difficult species to find. Fishers may be misidentified as martens (Figure 22). Fishers are protected under federal and state law and MAY NOT be trapped or killed. Be sure of identification if you are trapping. Report all fisher observations [online](#) or by emailing wildlife.data@dfw.wa.gov.

Figure 22. Identification of fisher and marten.

Identification of Fisher and Marten in Washington

Fishers are protected under both federal and state law and may not be trapped or killed.
Be sure of identification if you are trapping marten or mink.

Pelage Colors
 Fisher — dark brown with lighter shading on head, back of the neck and back.
 Marten — light brown to brown (cinnamon, russet), with creamy brown/ beige face and occasionally chest with darker brown legs, feet and end of tail.

Size
 Fishers are bigger, darker and have noticeably longer and fuller tails than marten. Fishers tails average 14-15 inches in length and Martens tails average 6.5-7.5 inches in length.

Ear Shape
 Fishers — rounded “teddy-bear” shaped ears
 Martens — more pointed ears

Elevation
 Fishers and martens overlap in elevation. Therefore, elevation should not be used as an indicator of species presence.

Trapping Information
 Use cubby boxes, with a closed front and 2.5 inch entrance hole, to avoid catching fishers.

FISHER





Photo by Paul Bannick

MARTEN

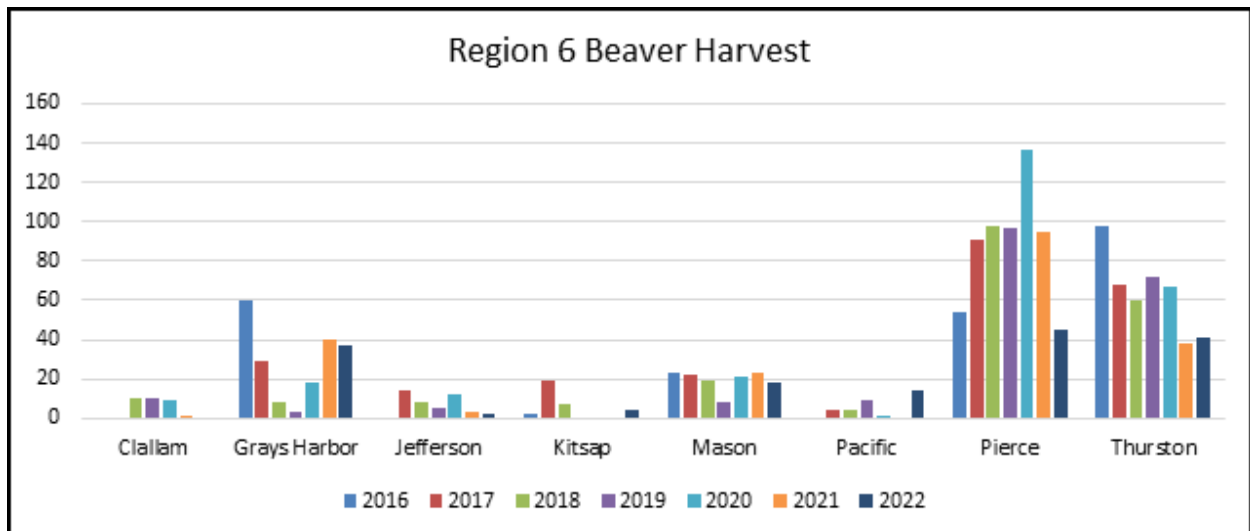


WDFW Staff

Beaver

Beaver harvest by trapping in Clallam and Jefferson counties has usually been lower in Region 6 compared to more highly urbanized counties such as Pierce and Thurston (Figure 23). Considering lakes, wetlands, and waterways exist across the region, the difference is likely due to less hunter participation and less removal of nuisance beaver. Totals for beaver trapped within the region for the 2023-2024 season are not available at this time.

Figure 23. WDFW Region 6 beaver harvest from trapping by county, 2016 - 2022.



Ducks

Common species

Many duck species are found in District 16. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall, mallard, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Divers, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, and common goldeneye, are also present on fresh and saltwater. Nesting wood ducks can be located throughout the district early in the season and can provide a unique hunting opportunity. Sea ducks, including scoters, Barrow's goldeneye, long-tailed ducks, canvasbacks, and harlequin ducks inhabit the Strait of Juan de Fuca, protected bays, and other saltwater areas.

Trumpeter swan numbers have increased in the Dungeness Valley in the past 10 years, and they have been documented near the Dungeness River mouth. Each season, swans usually return to the Dungeness Valley in late October and leave in early March. The highest count from surveyors last season was 89 swans, including nine juveniles. The previous winter season, numbers were higher with a count of 200 trumpeter swans, including eight juveniles. The number of swans counted during weekly, daytime surveys has been stable, suggesting a strong location fidelity for the population in the Dungeness Valley. The percentage of juveniles observed, around 15% average in recent years, was low the last two winters, ranging from 5% to 10%. We understand the late wet springs in trumpeter swan breeding grounds delayed nesting in recent years. Freezing temperatures and harsh Arctic conditions may have increased the mortality of juvenile swans before they had fledged or during migration.

WDFW encourages waterfowl hunters to know all identification features for trumpeter swans and snow geese. It is illegal to shoot trumpeter swans. Please reference the [Northwest Swan Conservation website](#) to help with swan identification.

Concentration areas

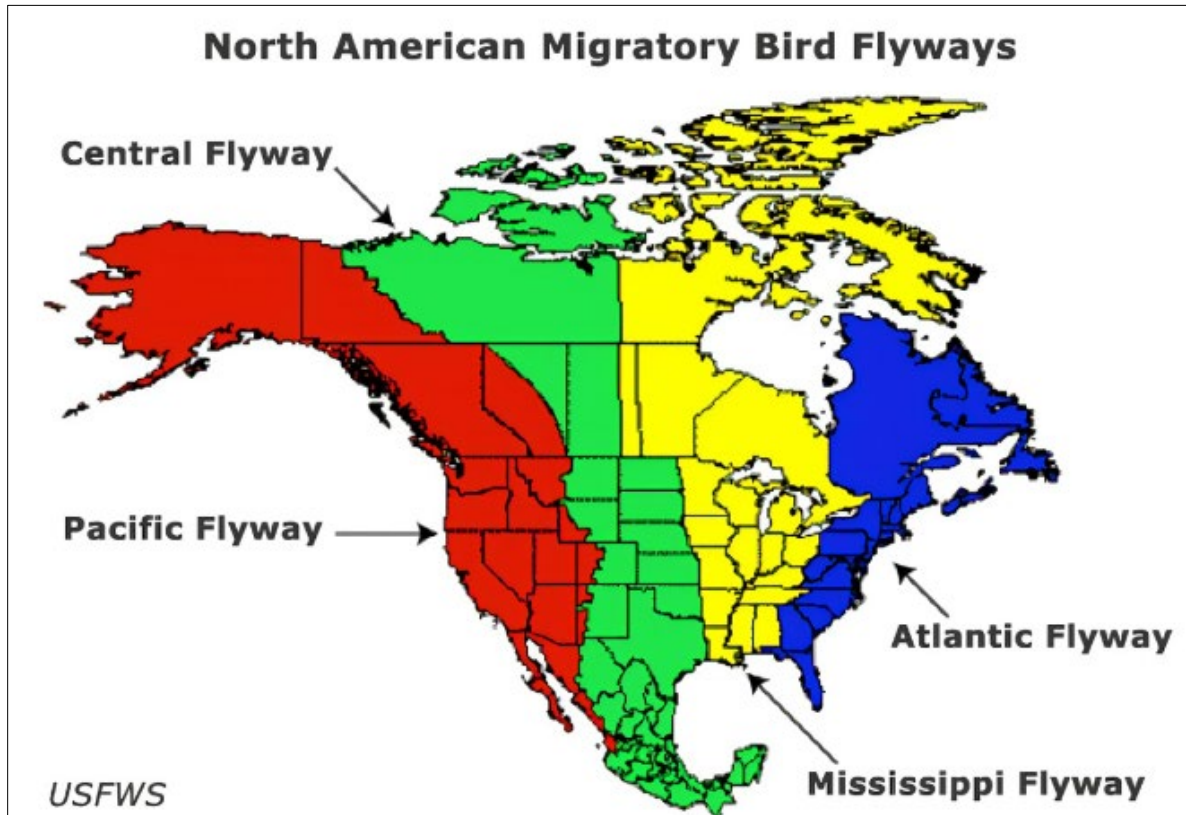
Much of the waterfowl hunting opportunity in District 16 is east of Port Angeles, centered in the Lower Dungeness Basin. The basin has a high density of wintering waterfowl and holds about 7% of the Western Washington breeding waterfowl population, even amid ongoing development of open space habitats. Fortunately, a rich mix of farmland, wetlands, coastal habitats, and conserved open space retain the necessary food and cover for many wintering waterfowl. Concentrations of waterfowl in freshwater habitats diminish drastically west of the Elwha and Lyre rivers.

Population status

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species (Figure 24). Wintering duck populations in Washington usually represent 10% or more of the total flyway population. Midwinter waterfowl survey counts in District 16 represent about 2% of all waterfowl counted in the state. Midwinter populations include resident and migratory populations. The following link provides a 2023 report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) detailing

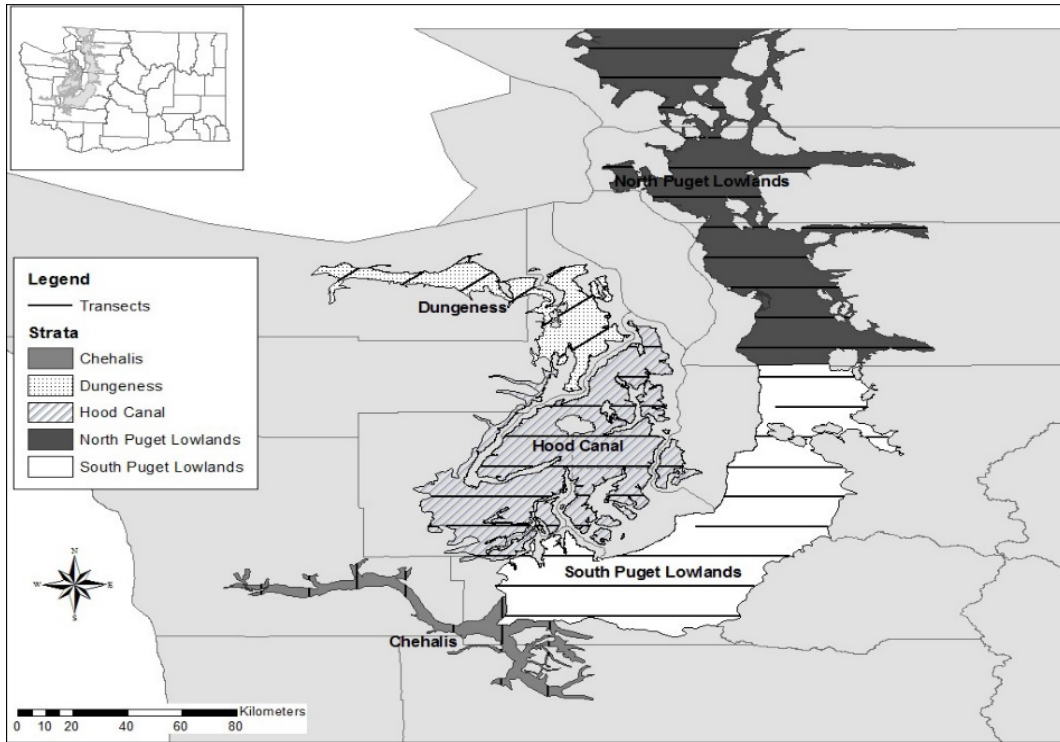
population status for the Pacific Flyway: [fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/waterfowl-population-status-report-2023.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/waterfowl-population-status-report-2023.pdf). This report summarizes the most recent information about the status of North American waterfowl populations and their habitats to facilitate the development of harvest regulations. The annual status of these populations is monitored and assessed through abundance and harvest surveys.

Figure 24. North American migratory bird flyways.



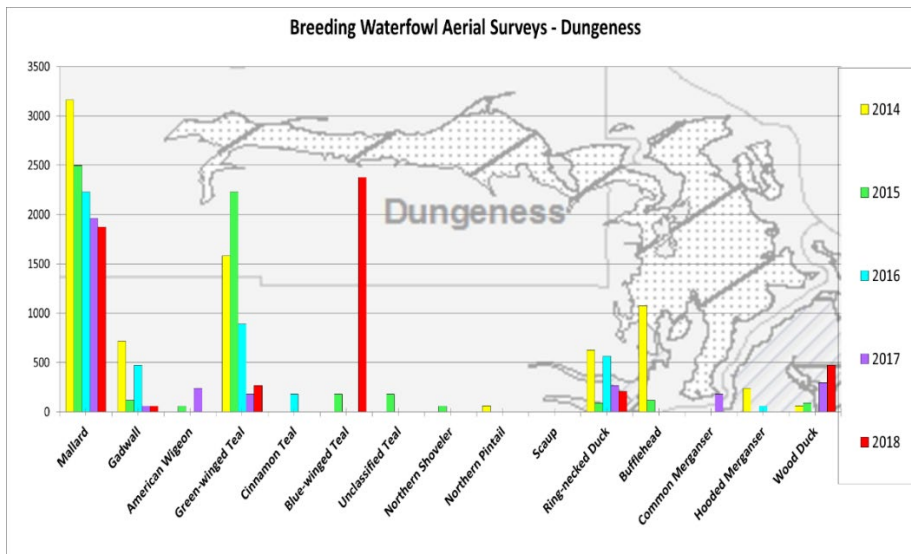
In the past, district biologists focused on conducting mid-winter ground count surveys to document high waterfowl concentration areas in Clallam County. Breeding duck populations in Western Washington were not monitored until 2010, when WDFW developed and began flying established transects in five areas. The Department conducts these surveys during April and early May. The survey includes the east and west areas of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The Dungeness area, including the Dungeness National Wildlife Area, is surveyed as part of the East Strait of Juan de Fuca transect route (Figure 25). Surveys did not occur in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 impacts. In April 2023, WDFW estimated the duck breeding population in the Dungeness area was 7,843, significantly higher (83%) than the 2022 estimate of 4,278. The four species with the highest numbers observed during the surveys were mallard (4,100), wood ducks (891), green-winged teal (713), and bufflehead (594). The number of mallard ducks estimated in 2023 was a 92% increase than what WDFW estimated in 2022. One factor contributing to the high mallard estimate for the Dungeness and all Western Washington was the high number of grouped mallards observed.

Figure 25. Aerial breeding waterfowl survey transects flown in Western Washington.



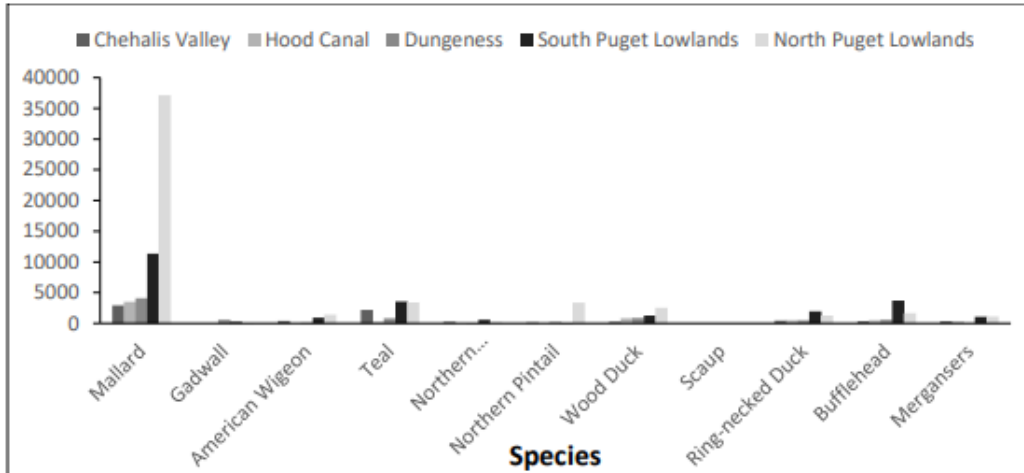
The Dungeness count has been 4% to 15% of the total breeding ducks in Western Washington from 2010 to 2016. The counts (by species) of the Dungeness area from 2014 to 2018 are provided in Figure 26.

Figure 26. Breeding waterfowl survey counts - with background map showing Dungeness aerial transects, including nearby Elwha, Chimacum, and Quilcene habitats.



The most recently revised survey design for Western Washington in 2023 estimated the total breeding duck population at 97,823. This was the highest since the survey began in 2010. Mallards numbered 59,012, followed by green-winged teal 9,383, bufflehead 6,826, wood duck 5,752, and ring-necked duck 4,666. The North Puget Lowlands stratum held the majority of breeding ducks in 2023 (53.2%), followed by the South Puget Lowlands (25.3%), Dungeness (8.0%), Chehalis River Valley (7.5%), and Hood Canal (5.9%) (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Western Washington duck breeding population survey results by species and strata, 2023.



More recent data for Washington breeding waterfowl population monitoring can be found in the Waterfowl Section of the [2023 Status and Trends Report](#). The greatest factor influencing brood production in the district continues to be loss of habitat to development and increasing human disturbance. Waterfowl numbers are expected to remain moderate in District 16. For more information, reference [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#).

Sea ducks have had restrictive bag limits due to concerns about low recruitment rates, increasing interest in hunting, and the unknown impact of reduced sea duck bag limits on compensatory species, particularly Barrow's goldeneyes.

Harlequin duck: Harlequin duck harvest had significantly increased for the few seasons before 2022 in Clallam and Jefferson counties. Due to management concerns over population health, harlequin duck hunting was not allowed the past two hunting seasons. A limited permit hunt will occur this season for harlequin ducks. Thirty-eight permits were made available to eligible applicants through an August drawing; the application period was July 1 to Aug. 14. To apply for a Harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington small game hunting license, migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. For more information, visit the WDFW Harlequin duck hunting permit page: wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/hunting/small-game/harlequin-duck-permit.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Washington duck harvest declined steadily from over 1 million in the late 1960s, to a low of 242,516 in 1993-1994. However, it has stabilized over the past 10 years, averaging about 438,170 ducks annually. The 2020-2021 Washington duck harvest of 426,092 was a 20.9% increase from the 2019-2020 harvest of 352,347, which was the lowest since the 2004-2005 season. The 2022-2023 Washington duck harvest of 431,574 increased by 7.3% compared to the 2021-2022 harvest of 402,158.

During the 2023-2024 season, 230 hunters, who spent 1,589 days afield in Clallam County, harvested 2,491 ducks. For Jefferson County, 224 hunters spent 1,009 days afield and harvested 2,402 ducks. **Estimates are not comparable to all past years due to the new voluntary online reporting WDFW piloted in 2022-2023.** District 16 hunters can expect similar hunting opportunities during the 2024-2025 season.

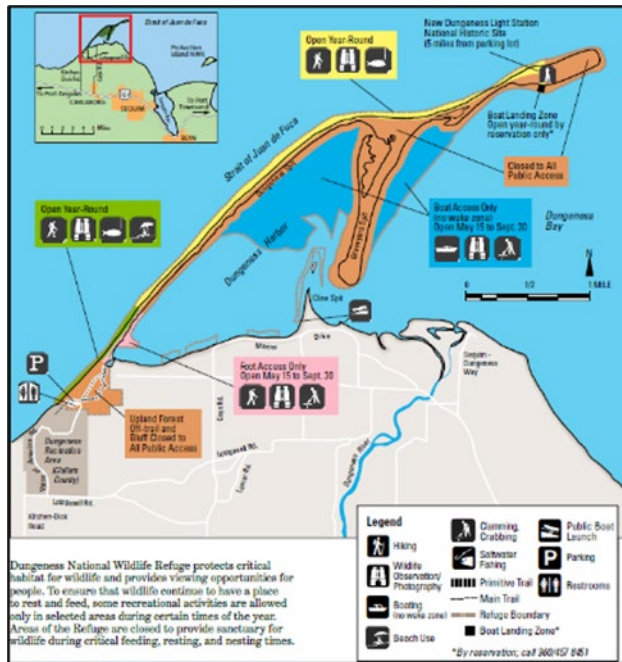
Restrictive bag limits for most sea ducks were maintained for Western Washington in 2023-2024. The 2023-2024 harvest survey indicated 1,062 sea ducks were harvested, compared to 1,729 from last season. Number of hunter days was estimated at 1,304 days afield, which was lower than the 2,153 days afield last season. For the 2023-2024 season, species composition, based on compliant and noncompliant harvest report components, was estimated as: 622 scoters (surf 450, white-winged 106, and black 66), 62 long-tailed ducks, and 370 goldeneyes (Barrow's 202 and common 168). Primary harvest areas included Island, Mason, and Whatcom counties. Last season, 82 sea ducks were harvested in Clallam County and 79 sea ducks were harvested in Jefferson County. These numbers were both slightly lower than the 2022-2023 season. Be sure to check the [Game bird and small game regulations](#) in the 2024 season pamphlet for additional requirements before hunting sea ducks (long-tailed ducks, scoter, harlequin, and goldeneye) in western Washington.

District 16 has limited access for waterfowl hunting. Some locals in the western portion of the district jump shoot in pools and side channels of rivers, along with other small ponds and flooded gravel pits. As in recent years, hunter success often depends on rainfall and storm events during the waterfowl season. A lack of flooded farm fields can sharply reduce hunting opportunities within the district.

Hunting techniques

Public saltwater hunting opportunities are more numerous than freshwater options in District 16, albeit more difficult in many ways. Regulations and landownerships, including tideland ownerships, make it necessary to plan ahead. Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge has areas that are closed (Figure 28). Hunting is not allowed on the refuge, and some of the refuge boundaries can be difficult to determine in the field.

Figure 28. Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge map showing closed areas.



Important information for hunting from a boat

When hunting from a boat, ensure the boat anchor is not down on private tidelands without permission. Boat hunters shouldn't go onto private land without permission to retrieve waterfowl. However, hunters could risk violating the wastage law if they do not retrieve waterfowl. Therefore, it is essential hunters be aware of property ownership, especially when hunting from a boat.

Shoreline and tidelines

Some private landowners allow limited hunting access along the saltwater shoreline. Typically, local signs refer to a phone number or other contact information, and in some cases signs detail conditions of access. Because these vary from year to year, hunters must tour the area and find out current arrangements. Hunters should make sure they will have the ability to retrieve ducks, keeping in mind the ownerships where they have permission to hunt and the adjacent ownership where they do not have that permission.

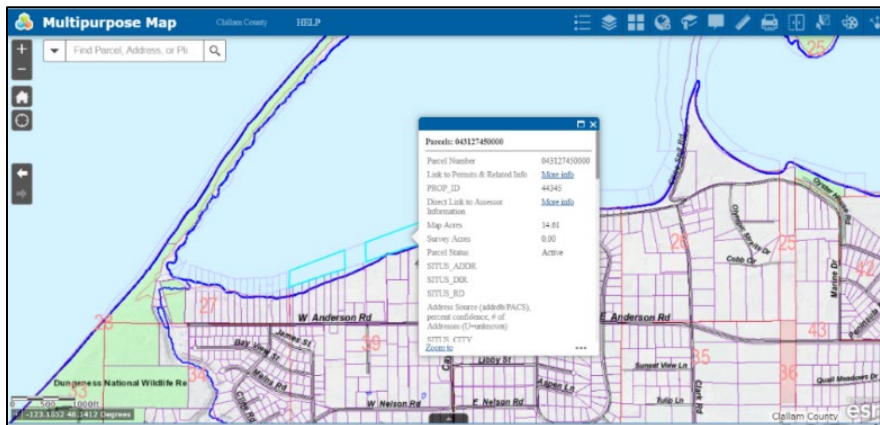
DNR quadrangle maps display the category of tidelands, with different shades of blue for different public tideland ownerships (Figure 29).

Figure 29. Portion of DNR quadrangle map displaying public tidelands in blue.



For Clallam County, hunters can use the county assessor maps to determine tideland ownership (Figure 30).

Figure 30. Clallam County website with parcel information on tidelands.



Public land opportunities

Most freshwater waterfowl hunting areas in the Dungeness Basin are on private lands. Public land hunting opportunities have changed at the Lower Dungeness Unit at the mouth of the Dungeness River. Some hunters find opportunities in the near-shore areas of bays and along the shoreline of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, both on foot and by boat. Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies and along saltwater shorelines. WDFW urges hunters to obey all state and county regulations at sites near residential areas to avoid potential future closures.

North Olympic Wildlife Area

The North Olympic Wildlife Area includes the [Dungeness Unit](#). This unit contains multiple disjointed parcels about 5 miles north of Sequim (Figure 31). Hunting opportunities are offered ONLY at the River's End property. Access to private lands is no longer available. WDFW is still evaluating the hunting activity the reduced area can accommodate. Consult the [wildlife area](#) webpage for information updates. The River's End property is located north of East Anderson Road, and west of the Dungeness River. Public access is supported by a small parking area, an information kiosk containing site rules, and a restroom.

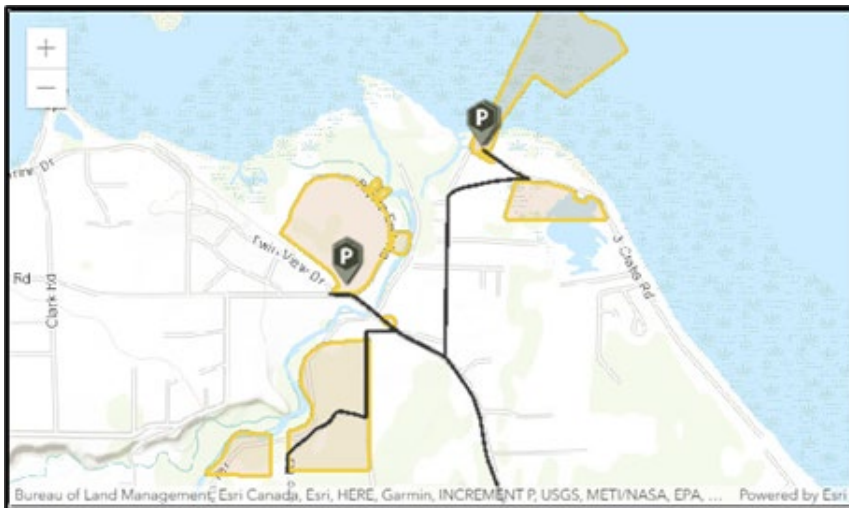
Be advised:

- Due to popularity, waterfowl hunting at this site is subject to several rules. Hunting is restricted to Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and state and federal holidays. Hunting is restricted to one designated point on WDFW-managed land that is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Occupancy of a hunt point is limited to four people.
- River's End: It is unlawful to have in possession more than 15 shotgun shells or to fire (shoot) more than 15 shells in one day on this unit (WAC 220-414-050).
- Firearms Restriction Area: Per Clallam County Regulations Chapter 15.16 FIREARMS DISCHARGE RESTRICTIONS - RESTRICTED SHOOTING AREA 1 (North of 101). The area north of Highway 101, and bounded on the west by the Elwha River, on the south by Highway 101, on the east by the county line, and on the north by the Strait of Juan de Fuca.
- Towne Road and Three Crabs properties: Hunting management decisions are on hold until further review and planning.

Useful Links:

- [Dungeness Wildlife Area Unit](#)
- [The Dungeness Recreation Area County Park](#) no longer allows hunting.

Figure 31. WDFW parcels located in the Dungeness Wildlife Area Unit.



Notable hunting changes

The limited permit hunt for harlequin ducks was described above.

Geese and brant

Common species

Canada goose

Most goose hunting opportunity in District 16 is for Canada geese. Resident geese are increasing in distribution, especially within urban and rural areas. Habitats like the Port Angeles Coast Guard base, Civic Field, and nearby estuaries have had increased usage by Canada geese. In the last 10 years, the Department has noticed a Canada goose expansion into wetlands that geese previously didn't use to WDFW knowledge.

Population status

Canada geese populations continue to increase on the east side of the district.

Harvest trends and 2024-2025 prospects

During the 2023-2024 season, 137 Canada geese were harvested in Clallam County (42 during September hunt and 95 during late hunt). In Jefferson County, 90 geese were harvested (13 during September hunt and 77 during the late hunt). Goose numbers are increasing year-round, providing more hunter opportunity by the local production. District 16 is in Goose Management Area 3. The 2024-2025 early season for Canada geese will be Sept. 7-12 with a daily bag limit of five geese and possession limit of fifteen. The late season will be Oct. 12-24 and Nov. 2 to Jan. 26 with a daily bag limit of four geese and possession limit of twelve.

Hunting techniques

Within small acreages and patchy ownership, WDFW doesn't advise pass shooting geese. Local hunters were quite successful in previous seasons using a decoy spread and blinds. Hunters must obtain permission to hunt on private lands and follow all firearm restrictions for Clallam and Jefferson counties. Many agricultural fields have residential properties nearby, so hunters must be aware of all safety concerns.

Please be respectful of private landowners and avoid conflicts with other recreational users in the area. Hunters are likely to find brant along the Dungeness shorelines that hold eelgrass. Brant also occur in other locations from Port Angeles to Sequim Bay. It will be worthwhile to become familiar with the other regular uses in potential brant hunting areas to avoid a location that will have conflicting uses on the few days the hunt is open.

Public land opportunities

Most goose hunting opportunities are on private agricultural lands in GMU 624.

Brant



Brant geese forage on eel grass at the Three Crabs property within WDFW's Dungeness Wildlife Area Unit. Photo by Shelly Ament.

Brant hunting was closed in Clallam and Jefferson counties for many years. Brant management was complicated by the difference in productivity of subpopulations, some enduring high nesting failures that led to restrictions on the hunting grounds. The 2014 report on management of brant in Washington is available online [here](#). January 2018 was the first season brant hunting was open in Clallam County for decades. WDFW estimated the harvest within Clallam County to be 90 brant in 2018 and 89 brant in 2019. To compare, the 2019 harvest in Skagit County was estimated to be 241 brant, Whatcom County was 48 brant, and Pacific County was 72 brant. The brant season has continued the past few years, after winter counts consistently placed the three-year average above the 1,000 brant winter population threshold required to consider opening a county to potential harvest, per WDFW Game Management Plan objectives. Hunters harvested 43 brant during the January 2024 season. This was considerably lower than the previous season when 90 brant were harvested. WDFW biologists checked and measured many harvested brant from Clallam County during the 2018-2020 seasons to further assess populations. WDFW also collected feathers for DNA analysis during the 2018-2020 seasons. District biologists assisted researchers last season by collecting tongue tissue samples from harvested brant. These samples will determine genetic diversity and assist with identifying the nesting locations of sampled brant.

If brant numbers are sufficient, brant hunting this upcoming season will be open Jan. 18, 22, and 25 with a daily bag limit of two brant and possession limit of six. The date for youth, veterans, and active military brant hunters in Clallam County will be Feb. 1 with a daily bag limit of two brant and possession limit of two.



Successful Clallam County brant hunters. Photos by Shelly Ament.

Forest grouse

Species and general habitat characteristics

Any forestland throughout District 16 should offer good opportunities for harvesting grouse. Hunters may find prime forest grouse hunting on DNR and USFS lands. Clallam County usually has one of the highest totals for grouse harvested within Region 6.

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout public and private forestlands in District 16. The chances for harvesting sooty grouse increase at higher elevations. Hunters can expect the greatest success along trails and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet, within timber stands with huckleberry and other forage plants. Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (5 to 25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forests.

The effect of spring weather on chick production and survival is a well-known factor influencing variation in populations across regions and years. During the peak of hatching (late May to early June), wet and windy weather reduces chick survival due to exposure as well as reducing insect populations at the time when young grouse need a high-protein diet. Conversely, drought conditions can also reduce forage opportunities. Loss or changes in forest habitat may also affect populations and harvest opportunities.

Harvest trends and 2024-2025 prospects

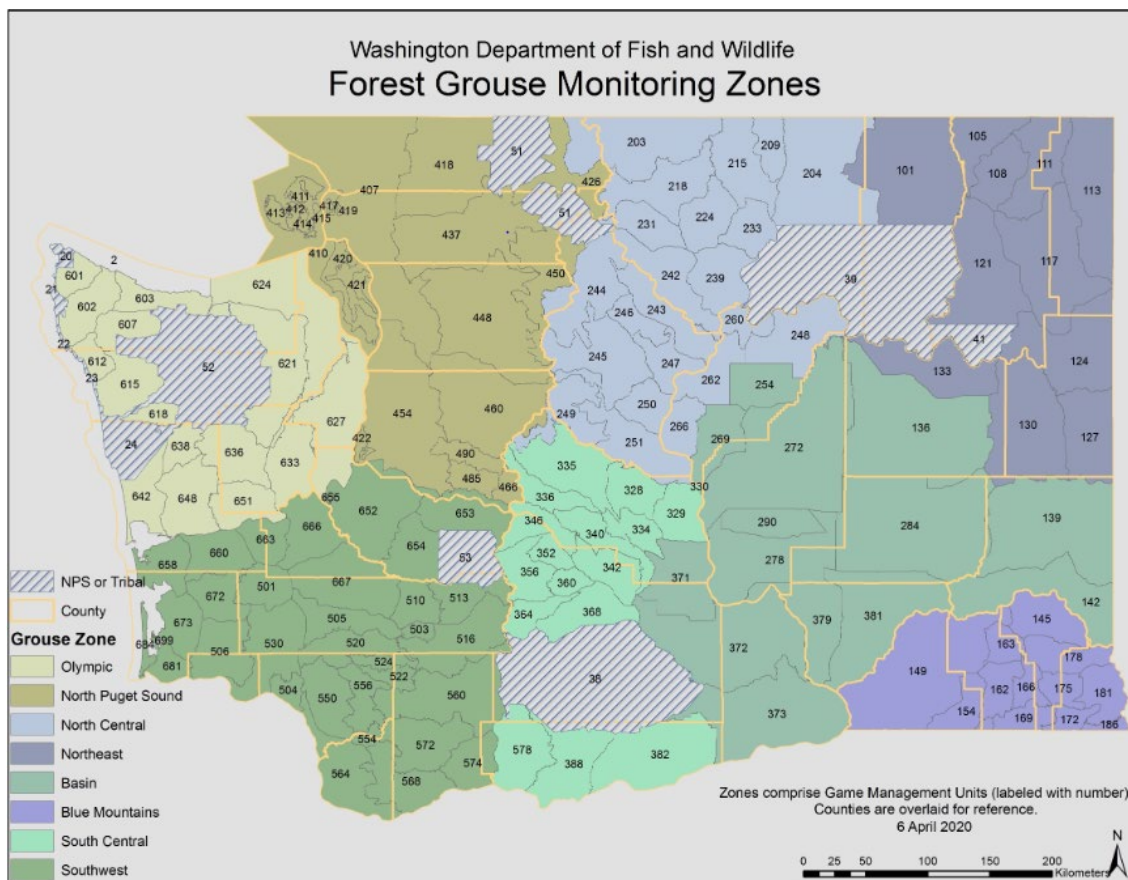
Grouse hunting in District 16 continues to decline, a trend WDFW has documented since 2009. Clallam County grouse harvest peaked in 2009 at 6,350 by 1,202 hunters, with Jefferson County 2009 harvest at 3,839 grouse by 1,502 hunters. The 2023-2024 harvest total for Clallam County was 2,272 grouse. A total

of 860 hunters spent 5,574 days hunting. A total of 1,467 grouse were harvested in Jefferson County during the 2023-2024 hunting season. A total of 401 hunters spent 2,825 days hunting.

In 2020, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved changing the grouse season to Sep. 15 through Jan. 15, beginning with the 2021 season. Delaying the season start by two weeks (without reducing the total season length) is intended to increase grouse abundance and availability to hunters by protecting breeding-aged females (hens) while they are still caring for their broods. Forest grouse broods typically become independent of the hen in mid-September. In the early season before broods break up, hens appear to be at higher risk of harvest than breeding-aged males based on hunter-submitted wing and tail samples. Increasing hen survival should lead to increased population abundance and hunter opportunity.

Samples collected from hunters provide an additional metric for monitoring forest grouse population trends. A wing and tail from a harvested grouse can provide the information necessary to identify species, sex, and age. District 16 is within the Olympic Forest Grouse Monitoring Zone (Figure 32). During the 2021-2022 season, within the Olympic Monitoring Zone, 56% of the harvest were ruffed grouse and 44% of the harvest were sooty grouse. A higher number of sooty grouse were also harvested the past two seasons within the district.

Figure 32. Forest grouse monitoring zones.



District 16 biologists will collect grouse wings and tails again during the 2024-2025 season to help evaluate harvested populations. Hunters will need to include date and location (GMU) of harvest on provided envelopes. Hunters can contribute their harvested grouse wing and tail in various ways. One option is to bring the wing and tail of harvested grouse to the nearest WDFW district or regional office. Another option is to drop them off (with completed envelopes), at wing/tail barrels in the field. Four grouse wing/tail collection barrels will be set up within District 16 during the grouse hunting season. Site locations can be found on WDFW's page. Thanks in advance for helping WDFW with grouse monitoring.



Grouse wing/tail collection barrel in Clallam County. Photo by Shelly Ament.

There have been concerns about the declining population of sooty grouse in Western Washington. WDFW initiated a pilot project in 2022 to monitor the abundance of hooting male sooty grouse and fully implemented the project during the spring of 2023. Listening stops were conducted on established transects within suitable sooty grouse habitat. Five survey routes were established and surveyed in District 16 in May. Three acoustic recorder units (ARU) were also deployed on hooting males in the district to improve our understanding of sooty grouse daily and seasonal activity patterns (Figure 15). Data from the 2023 survey transects and ARU's have not yet been analyzed. Survey results will help with future management of this species. This project will continue for several more years.



An acoustic recording unit deployed to record hooting male sooty grouse. Photo by Shelly Ament.

Pheasant

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining pheasant populations, primarily due to the wet climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting in Western Washington depends on fall pheasant releases. District 16 does not have viable populations of wild pheasant, and there are no longer any pheasant release sites in the district. Information on current pheasant release sites is available at: wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations/pheasant-release.

Quail

There is a fair abundance of California (valley) quail in eastern District 16. They are quite common in the Dungeness Valley, but hunting can be challenging due to predominately private ownership. Quail, like deer, thrive in the Dungeness habitats that include a mix of open grass, shrubs, and forest. Some quail hunting opportunities can be found on public lands located in the lower foothills in clear-cuts or early successional habitats. During 2023, hunters harvested 88 quail in Clallam County, and 21 in Jefferson County. The 2024 Western Washington California (valley) quail season runs from Sept. 21 through Nov. 30 with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. Reference the [Washington Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) for more information.

Turkeys

WDFW doesn't manage District 16 for wild turkeys, and the species remains relatively rare in the district. WDFW receives occasional reports of individuals or small groups of turkeys within GMU 603. These are likely domestic turkeys that escaped from a farm in the Joyce area. District 16 biologists received a report of a small flock of turkeys in the Dungeness area in the summer of 2022, but they were also determined to be domestic turkeys. Unfortunately, no prospects for hunting wild turkeys exist in District 16.

Mourning dove

District 16 has not been a major dove hunting area, although eastern Clallam County has a lot of doves. To complicate matters, the Eurasian collared dove, an introduced species, is becoming very prevalent in eastern Clallam County. There was no reported harvest of mourning doves in Clallam or Jefferson counties during the 2023 season. However, during the 2022 season, eight mourning doves were harvested in Clallam County. The 2023 [USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status report](#) contains more information.

Band-tailed pigeons

General description

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest pigeon species in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

Population status and trend

Band-tailed pigeons were quite abundant in District 16 historically. Local hunters reported seeing clouds of band-tailed pigeons in drainages, such as McDonald Creek, on the east side of District 16 in the 1950s. Hunters find them throughout the district using forest habitats. WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 16-plus mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Hunters report relatively low band-tailed pigeon harvest in this district (sometimes zero), but the resource is available throughout the district in good numbers. Bag limits were 10 birds per day until 1950, when statewide harvest was estimated at 90,000 birds. However, overharvest and habitat changes caused significant decline in overall numbers. Band-tailed pigeon harvest in Clallam County has averaged nine birds per year for 2004-2020. During the same period for Jefferson County, total average harvest per year is seven birds. There was no band-tailed pigeon harvest reported during the 2022 season. Total harvest for the 2023 season for Clallam and Jefferson counties was unavailable at the time of publication.

Where and how to hunt band-tailed pigeons

Band-tailed pigeons are most prevalent in District 16 along marine estuaries, shorelines, and forested areas where they forage on berries. They frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in 5 to 10-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests used by band-tails is difficult. Hunters must locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites. Upon finding a good site, hunters should sit patiently and wait for possible shooting opportunities.

Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season.

Only one historic mineral site was known to exist within District 16. However, at least three new suspect mineral sites were located during a special research project initiated in 2021. Please contact District 16 biologists if you know of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Clallam or Jefferson counties.

Special regulations

The 2024 hunting season for band-tailed pigeons will be Sept. 15-23. Since band-tailed pigeon seasons reopened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization, along with all required hunting licenses and the band-tailed pigeon harvest card. Hunters must report all band-tailed pigeon harvest to WDFW after the season has closed. Review the 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Regulations to confirm season dates and any regulation changes. More information about population monitoring and harvests is available in the 2023 [USFWS band-tailed pigeon population status](#) report.

Research

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of Districts 15, 16, and 17 (Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor, and Pacific counties). The Department has fitted 36 pigeons with transmitters that are programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network (Figure 16).



Band-tailed pigeon fitted with a satellite transmitter. Photo by Anthony Novack.

The goal is to conduct research on band-tailed pigeons in areas where mineral sites have not been identified, allowing WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

- More accurately index our statewide population via mineral site surveys.
- More expertly manage our band-tailed seasons to potentially allow expanded hunting opportunity.
- Provide details on resource selection to inform managing habitat to increase the statewide population.

This research project led to the discovery of new mineral sites in Grays Harbor County. Three locations in Clallam County have been identified as possible new mineral sites. A USFWS biologist joined WDFW biologists in July 2023 to further investigate these sites. Hunters and members of the public fund this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. WDFW expects this project to continue through 2025 across various districts within Region 6. WDFW biologists may be looking for new trapping locations. Please contact District 16 or 17 biologists if you know of concentrations of band-tailed pigeons.

Major public lands

Make sure you have acquired the necessary permits to drive on public and private land in the area you decide to explore.

Public access permits

Here are some public access permits to be aware of and that you may need depending on your destination.

- [Discover Pass](#) State parks, DNR, WDFW
- [Federal Agency – Interagency Annual Pass](#)
- [Federal Agency – Interagency Volunteer Pass](#)

Some landowners have enrolled in WDFW’s Private Lands Access Program. Those lands provide additional hunting opportunities for the public. Reference the private lands section for more details or visit the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#).

Interagency passes include access on National Park Service, USFS, USFWS, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation lands. Many public lands on the Olympic Peninsula are not open to hunting, including Olympic National Park, Washington state parks, and Clallam County parks.

Private industrial forestlands

General information

Private timberlands have various access and road closure procedures, so it is prudent to determine current ownership for a target location and the requirements to obtain permission to hunt. Merrill and Ring Pysht Tree Farm in GMU 603 made a drastic change several years ago and will not allow deer hunting. They issue a small number of access permits for elk season through a lottery system. Other forest industry ownerships have various access systems in place. Hunters are encouraged to scout the areas they are considering and pay close attention to signs on all roads. Signs are often the landowner’s primary method of informing the public of which areas are open to hunting.

Contact information for major timber companies

Rayonier, Inc.

Website: rayonier.com

IFP Office	360-452-1351
Forks Office	360-374-6565
Port Angeles	360-457-2329

For information on Rayonier access permits: rayonierhunting.com

Green Crow

- Website: greencrow.comhttps://opengovwa.com/corporation/601759478
- 360-452-3325
- 727 E. 8th St., Port Angeles, WA 98362

Merrill and Ring

Website: merrillring.com/contact-us

360-452-2367

Email: contact@merrillring.com

813 E. 8th St., Port Angeles, WA 98362

Other major landowners

Hoh River Trust

Facebook: facebook.com/The-Hoh-River-Trust-74841050447

Hunting organizations

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation – Olympic Peninsula Chapter

Website: rmef.org/where-we-conserve/?state=WA

5705 Grant Creek

Missoula, MT 59808

Phone: (406) 523-4500

Jefferson County Sportsmen’s Association

Website: jeffersoncountysportsmen.org/wp

Email: info@JeffersonCountySportsmen.org

P.O. Box 737, Port Townsend, WA 98368

Sportsmen for Wild Olympics

Website: SportsmenForWildOlympics.org

Email: info@sportsmenforwildolympics.org

Wapiti Bowmen Archery Club

Facebook: facebook.com/Wapiti-Bowmen-180948655312545

Email: wapitibowclub@gmail.com

374 E. Arnette Road, Port Angeles, WA 98362

Eyes in the Woods

Website: facebook.com/groups/eyesinthewoods/about

P.O. Box 2406, Olympia, WA 98507

West End Sportsmen's Club-Forks

Facebook: facebook.com/pg/West-End-Sportsmens-Club-354953248029561/posts

Phone: (360) 374-5420

Sportsman Club Road, Forks, WA 98331

Washington Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Website: backcountryhunters.org

Max Cole, West Side Co-Chair

Email: washington@backcountryhunters.org

Ducks Unlimited Olympic District

Website: ducks.org/washington <http://www.ducks.org/washington/wa-content/state-contacts/?poe=stateHomelcon>

Chairman Mike Luecht

Email: papaluke@wavecable.com

Izaak Walton League of America, Greater Seattle Chapter

Website: iwla.org/local-chapters

A. William Way

Phone: 425-868-4759

Email: bway@watershedco.com

3451 E. Lake Sammamish Lane N.E., Sammamish, WA 98074

Washington Brant Foundation

Website: wabrant.org

Maynard Axelson

Phone: 360-445-6681

Email: info@wabrant.org

15929 Fir Island Road, Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Washington Outdoor Women (WOW)

Website: washingtonoutdoorwomen.org

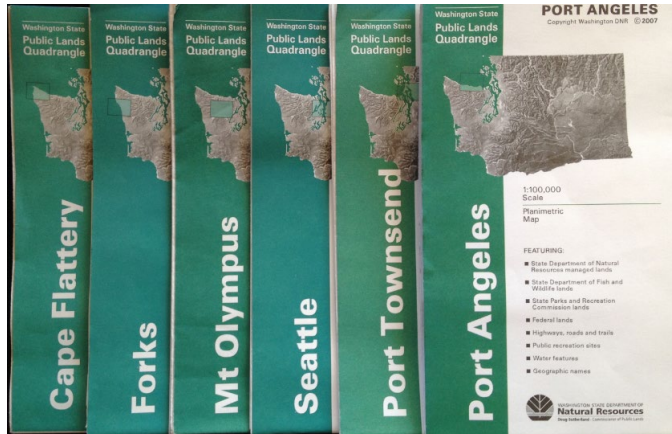
Workshops: washingtonoutdoorwomen.org/workshops

P.O. Box 1656, Bellevue, WA 98009-1656

If you know of an organization that should be included in this document, please let us know.

Online tools and maps

WDFW recommends a set of these DNR maps, which you can order [online](#).



These DNR maps are available to buy at Swains and Browns in Port Angeles and Thriftway in Forks but can also be ordered online or by phone. Photo by Anita McMillan.

These DNR maps have some of the best combination of land ownership and current roads. However, there have been several DNR and private forestland ownership exchanges in recent years that won't show up on these maps. [DNR's website](#) displays current DNR ownership.

Other maps that can be helpful for select areas include:

[Forest Service Free Online Maps](#)

Forest Service maps can be obtained free online at

[Forest Service Maps to purchase](#)

USFS sells forest district maps that are very useful, as are the custom correct maps shown on the same page.

East end of WDFW District 16 is the Hood Canal Ranger District/North End map.

West end of WDFW District 16 are the Pacific Ranger District/North End and South End maps.

OnX app: The OnX cellphone application has been the go-to tool for information on land ownership in recent years. One main issue is areas with no cell service could make the tool useless. If you preplan when you have service, you can save the aerial background for the areas you will encounter poor cell coverage and then still use the app without cell service.

2024 District 17 Hunting Prospects

Pacific and Grays Harbor counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

July 2024

2024 District 17 Hunting Prospects

Pacific and Grays Harbor counties

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Cover photo by C. Grist.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

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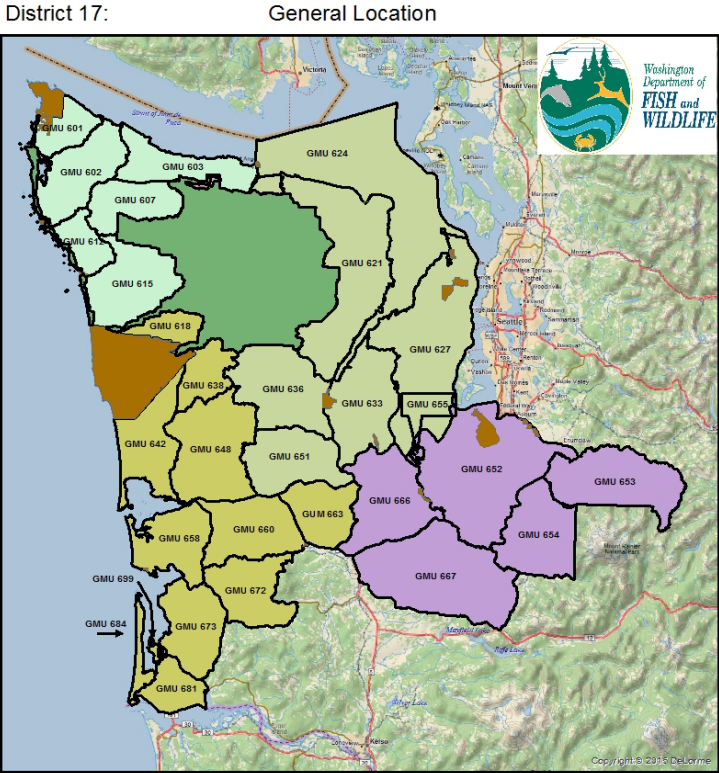
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District 17 general overview

District 17 includes all of Pacific and Grays Harbor counties and is one of four management districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that constitute the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) Coastal Region, or Region 6. The northern portion of District 17 (north of Highway 12) includes the southwestern portion of the Olympic Mountains, while the southern part of the district is situated in the Willapa Hills.

District 17 is in southwest Washington and consists of 12 game management units (GMUs): 638 (Quinault Ridge), 648 (Wynoochee), 660 (Minot Peak), 672 (Fall River), 681 (Bear River), 699 (Long Island), 618 (Matheny), 642 (Copalis), 658 (North River), 663 (Capital Peak), 673 (Williams Creek), 684 (Long Beach).

Figure 1. Four administrative districts and their associated GMUs within WDFW Region 6.



Disclaimer
 Due to the dynamic nature of data the need to rely on outside sources of information, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions in the data and information contained in and products produced from this application. There are no warranties which accompany the maps and information information contained in or produced by this application. For legal definitions of hunting regulations, seasons, and boundaries, the user should refer to Chapters 232-12, 232-16, and 232-26 of the Washington State Administrative Code (<http://www.leg.wa.gov/wac/>).

The District 17 landscape is dominated by intensively managed industrial forest land characterized by second- and third-growth forests. These lands are primarily dedicated to producing conifers such as Douglas fir, western hemlock, and occasionally cedar. Some tree stands focus production on red alder.

Other habitats in the district range from sub-alpine in areas adjacent to Olympic National Park to coastal wetlands along the outer coast.

District 17 is best known for elk hunting in the Willapa Hills and waterfowl hunting around Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and in the Chehalis and Willapa river valleys. High-quality hunting exists for other game species, including black-tailed deer, black bears, and forest grouse. The following table shows the estimated harvest for the three most popular big game species in District 17 during the 2018-2023 seasons. For more information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Table 1. Hunter harvest for selected game species during 2023 and previous five years in District 17.

Species	Harvest (2023)	Harvest (2022)	Harvest (2021)	Harvest (2020)	Harvest (2019)	Harvest (2018)
Elk	565 Total 416 Bull 149 Cow	636 total	768	766	748	856
Deer	1,499 Total 1,308 Buck 191 Doe	1310 total	1562	1476	1674	1542
Black bear	159	190	142	139	202	123

Elk

Summary

Success rates: Range widely depending on weapon type, GMU, and land access.

Recent trends: Decrease in harvest and hunter effort. Slight decline in archery elk hunters.

GMUs with highest elk harvest in rank order: 673, 658, 660, 681.

General information, management goals, and population status

The subspecies of elk in District 17 are Roosevelt elk. Unlike other areas in Western Washington, Rocky Mountain elk were never introduced into the district, and Roosevelt-Rocky Mountain elk hybrids do not occur. Washington has 10 distinct elk herds. A portion of two elk herds occur in District 17:

- Olympic elk herd (GMUs 618, 638, 642, and 648)
- Willapa Hills elk herd (GMUs 658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, and 699)

District 17 elk hunting varies from marginal to excellent depending on the GMU. GMUs associated with the Willapa Hills elk herd, specifically 658, 672, 673, and 681, offer the greatest harvest opportunities.

WDFW manages elk at the herd level and sets regulations at the GMU level. In general, each herd occupies several GMUs that collectively define the range of a population that minimizes interchange with adjacent elk populations.

WDFW manages District 17 with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing elk herds. To meet that goal, WDFW's objective is to maintain herds at a minimum ratio of 15 bulls to 100 cows in the pre-hunting season population and a minimum of 12 bulls to 100 cows in the post-season population. Portions of the district (such as GMU 684) must balance overall herd objectives with the equally important mission to minimize human-wildlife conflicts. Elk can cause severe impacts to commercial crops such as hay or cranberries.

WDFW doesn't use formal population size estimates to monitor elk populations across the entire district. Instead, the Department uses harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort to supplement formal indices or estimates. This approach has limitations for monitoring trends in population size. Therefore, WDFW has a more detailed monitoring strategy specifically for the Willapa Hills elk herd to:

- Determine elk population trends
- Quantify cow to calf ratios
- Quantify bull to cow ratios

No surveys were conducted in spring 2024. In 2023, WDFW conducted surveys across the northern and southern portions of the Willapa Hills, including portions of Region 5, District 10, to estimate overall abundance and ratios of calves and bulls to cows at the GMU, sub-herd (i.e., north vs south), and herd scales. Typically, limited funding and the large herd area requires surveying the north and south sub-herds in alternating years (reference map). This year, the Department had sufficient funding to survey the entire herd area. Results from the 2023 Willapa Hills elk surveys are in the table below.

Figure 2. Willapa Hills elk herd area map.



Table 2. South sub-herd GMU ratios.

GMU	Calf/cow ratio	Bull/cow ratio
506 Willapa Hills	32:100 = (32 calves per 100 cows)	11:100 = (11 bulls per 100 cows)
530 Ryderwood	41:100	18:100
681 Bear River	36:100	18:100
673 Williams Creek	26:100	15:100
Willapa South Total	34:100	15:100

Table 3. North sub-herd GMU ratios.

GMU	Calf/cow ratio	Bull/cow ratio
658 North River	29:100	18:100
660 Minot Peak	31:100	15:100
672 Fall River	30:100	16:100
Willapa North Total	29:100	17:100

Survey results from 2023 showed a healthy and stable elk population throughout the Willapa Hills. Both calf to cow and bull to cow ratios are robust, indicating a productive herd with decent harvest opportunities. WDFW will conduct annual or semi-annual surveys of the Willapa Hills elk herd to sample different segments of the landscape.

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

Probably the most frequent question the Department gets from hunters is “which GMU should I hunt?” The answer depends on the hunting method and the target hunting experience. For example, GMU 699 is a small unit closed to modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters. Another example is that archery hunters are not allowed to harvest antlerless elk in every GMU.

Some hunters are looking for an opportunity to harvest a mature bull. Large mature bulls are found in District 17 but aren’t very abundant. WDFW directs hunters seeking mature bulls to spend their efforts in either the Quinault Ridge (638), Matheny (618), or adjacent Clearwater (615) GMUs. All three GMUs are adjacent to Olympic National Park (ONP) and have the reputation of producing some very nice bulls. The best success for five-point or better bulls is garnered by the September rifle permit hunters in either the Quinault Ridge (638) or Matheny (618) GMUs.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high elk densities, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario doesn’t readily exist in any GMU open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 17. Those GMUs with the highest elk densities tend to have the highest hunter densities. For many, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of elk. Others might prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of elk if that means there are also very few hunters. Note that many industrial timber companies have begun limiting access or charging a fee to access their land. This change has effectively, and sometimes dramatically, reduced hunter density on those lands.

Archers should consider that antlerless elk seasons are not uniform across all GMUs. Antlerless elk may be harvested during the general season in six GMUs, and three GMUs are open during early and late archery seasons. These differences are important when comparing total harvest or hunter numbers among GMUs. Muzzleloader seasons are not uniform either. Some muzzleloader seasons are open during the early muzzleloader season, while others are only available during the late muzzleloader season. Hunters should keep these differences in mind when interpreting the information provided in Figures 3 and 4.

What to expect during the 2024 season

Elk populations do not vary much from year to year, especially in District 17, which lacks the severe winter weather conditions that might result in a die-off. Consequently, WDFW expects the number of elk available for harvest to be similar to the 2023 season. . Hunter numbers do not typically change much from one year to the next, but recent actions by private timber companies to charge for access have reduced hunter numbers in those areas affected.

Weather can dramatically differ from year to year and has the potential to influence harvest rates. For example, 2012 and 2021 were hot, dry summers by Western Washington standards, which produced extreme fire danger warnings and caused many timber companies to close their lands to public access during the latter part of the general early archery season and the entire early muzzleloader season. Washington witnessed some very high temperatures in early summer this year, so conditions could result in extreme fire dangers in fall 2024. The best predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success.

Long-term harvest data (along with survey data) generally indicates that elk populations are stable in District 17. However, 2023 saw the lowest total elk harvest since 2008. This dip could indicate that even more elk are available in 2024. One possible factor: the Department noted fewer modern firearm hunters were afield in 2023. For more information related to the status of Washington’s elk herds, reference the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Figure 3. Elk harvested in District 17 during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2023. Totals do not include tribal harvest.

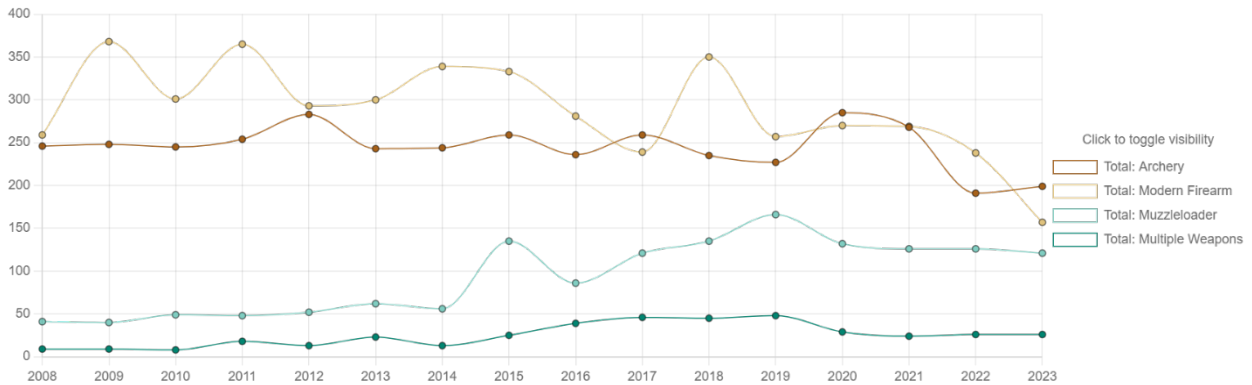
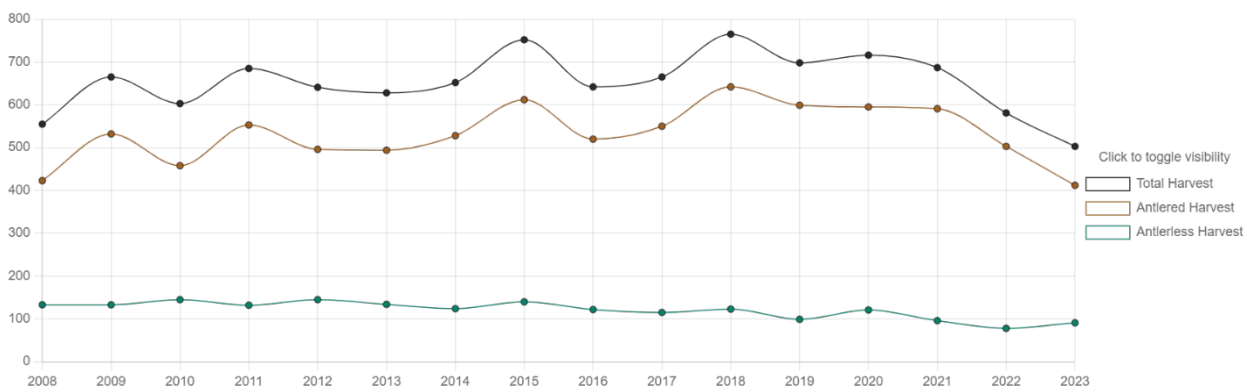


Figure 4. District 17 harvest totals for antlered and antlerless elk. Total elk harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Totals do not include tribal harvest.



How to find elk

When hunting elk in District 17, hunters should research and spend time scouting before the season. Predicting where elk are located is especially difficult after hunting pressure increases. Many hunters spend their time focused on timber harvests. Elk often forage in timber harvests and are highly visible when they do. Those highly visible elk often attract other hunters. Consequently, timber harvests can get crowded in a hurry. Many elk (especially bulls) will infrequently visit timber harvests during daylight hours. Instead, they may spend most of their day in closed canopy forests, swamps, or regeneration stands.



Corey Bronckhorst with elk taken from GMU 673 during the 2016 archery season.

Some generalities can be made about the landscape that will increase the odds of locating elk. When going to a new area, hunters are encouraged to cover as much ground as possible. Note areas where you see signs along roads and landings. Landings are often not graveled, making it easy to see fresh tracks. Scouting will reveal which areas hold elk and where to focus more intensive efforts.

After identifying areas with abundant elk signs, hunters should focus on areas that provide cover and are near timber harvests. During early seasons, when it is warm, these cover areas often include swamps, creek bottoms, river bottoms, or any place near water. Once the season progresses and temperatures cool, elk are less attracted to water, and locating them becomes more difficult. Hunting pressure also can force elk to use areas that provide thicker cover or are more inaccessible to hunters because of topography.

Later in the season, consult a topographic map and find benches located in steep terrain with thick cover. Elk often use these benches to bed down during the day. Finally, don't let a locked gate (provided that non-motorized access is allowed) keep you from going into an area to search for elk. Frequently,

these areas hold elk that have not received much hunting pressure, making them less skittish and easier to hunt. A popular approach to hunting behind gates is to use mountain bikes with trailers. Biking on timber company lands is facilitated by high densities of maintained gravel roads, but e-bikes are frequently restricted.

Roosevelt elk do not tend to move very far. If you found some animals but discovered that they have left the area, they are more than likely within one or two miles from where you first found them.

Elk areas

There are two elk areas in District 17: Elk Area 6010 (Mallis or Raymond) and Elk Area 6064 (Quinault Valley). Nearly all permit opportunities in District 17 are antlerless elk hunts and are associated with these elk areas. Elk Area 6010 was established in a location with chronic elk damage problems, and its primary purpose is to provide antlerless harvest opportunities to help control the growth of herds in localized agricultural areas.

Elk Area 6064 was established to help foster solutions between landowners and elk hunters. Special restrictions apply in each elk area. In Elk Area 6064, only Master Hunters are allowed to hunt elk during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons.

Elk Area 6010 was established to alleviate elk damage on private agricultural lands. Elk Area 6010 also contains tracts of public or private timber company lands where elk are not problematic. For the best opportunities, hunters are advised to visit and scout the area well in advance of their hunt and make the effort to speak with farm owners in the area regarding accessing their property.

Notable hunting changes

Several private timber companies in District 17 charge a fee to access areas previously open to the public. Property ownership changes irregularly. Hunters should contact landowners in areas they intend to hunt and determine the company's current policy. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the Olympic and Willapa elk herd areas. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something different altogether. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis

counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area.

Hoof disease is found throughout District 17 in both the Olympic and Willapa Hills elk herd areas. TAHD appears to be more prevalent among elk in the Willapa Herd area and southern end of the Olympic Peninsula. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help

To help combat TAHD in elk, hunters can:

- **Harvest a limping elk** from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.
- **Report elk:** Help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the Department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

Hunters can participate in the **TAHD Incentive Program** by harvesting a limping elk and submitting the hooves to WDFW. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (i.e. abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit.

WDFW continues working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. The Department's website has more information about [TAHD](#). Additional information on TAHD and the incentive program can be found on page 65 of the [Big Game Hunting Regulations](#).

Deer

Summary

Success rates: Depend on weapon type and GMU. For the entire district, hunter success generally ranges from 15-20%.

Recent trends: Observable increase in harvest last year compared to the year prior. GMUs with highest harvest include 660, 663, 672, and 648.

General information, management goals, and population status

Columbian black-tailed deer (black-tails or black-tailed deer) are the only deer species in District 17. Deer hunting opportunities in District 17 range from marginal to very good. The best opportunities to harvest a black-tailed deer in District 17 occur in GMUs 663, 648, 672, and 660.

In Washington, black-tail harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. All areas of District 17 are managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing deer populations while minimizing conflicts with people. Management objectives include maintaining deer populations to have a minimum of 15 bucks per 100 does in the post-hunting season population.

WDFW does not attempt to survey deer populations to estimate their total numbers in District 17. Harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort help to supplement a formal population size estimate. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor population size trends, and the agency is currently evaluating new approaches to monitor black-tailed deer populations.

Finding an effective way to monitor black-tailed deer populations has been an ongoing management challenge. Black-tailed deer are secretive and use densely vegetated habitats. Their ability to remain unseen substantially lowers the probability of detection through aerial surveys. The small number of deer observed results in insufficient sample sizes to monitor population trends or demographics (buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios).

Overall deer harvest has varied widely over the long-term (2008-2023) with a low point of 1,095 animals harvested in 2011. The most recent high point was 2016 when 1,837 were harvested. That was followed by another low of 1,258 deer in 2017, then varied between 1,476 and 1,674 deer through 2021. Last year (2023) was a total estimated 1,499 bucks and does. Long-term trends in harvest data seemed to indicate somewhat stable deer populations. The seemingly steep decline from 2016 to 2017 is surprising and without an obvious biological cause. For more information on the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should reference through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trends Report](#).

Antler points and age

Prior to mandatory reporting in 2001, WDFW staffed field check stations to gather information of age structure. Hunters have frequently asked if there is a correlation between age and antler points. During the fall of 1979, tooth samples were collected from bucks harvested in Western Washington and sent in for cementum annuli aging. Of the total of 36 buck deer tooth samples collected, 25 (69%) were spikes and two points. The remaining bucks sampled were at least three points or better (31%), with four of the three-points being 2.5 years old at time of harvest.

A more accurate assessment of the age of buck deer harvested in Western Washington has occurred recently. WDFW collected hundreds of tooth samples from successful black-tailed deer hunters during the 2019 and 2020 seasons. Reported number of antler points was submitted with each tooth, and samples were sent to a laboratory for analysis of cementum annuli to determine age. A table of the results is plotted below. Generally, the number of antler points increases with age. However, a 3-year-old buck may still be a spike, and an 11-year-old buck could be a two-point. Conversely, a yearling could have four points.

Table 4. Average age of black-tailed bucks harvested in Washington compared to the highest number of reported antler points.

Max antler points (1 side)	Average age – Rounded to nearest ½ year	Total submissions
1 (Spike)	1 Year	65
2	3 Years	120
3	4 Years	97
4	4 ½ Years	65
5	5 Years	30
6	6 Years	4

Which GMU should deer hunters hunt?

The best GMU to hunt deer depends on the hunting method and target hunting experience. Some hunters are looking for the best chance to harvest a large, mature buck, while others want to harvest any legal deer or simply be in an area with few hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have:

- High numbers of deer
- Low numbers of hunters
- High hunter success rates

Unfortunately, the perfect scenario does not exist in any GMU that is freely open to the public during any season within District 17. GMUs with the highest deer numbers tend to have the highest hunter numbers.

For many, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them to avoid a GMU with many deer. Others prefer to hunt areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if they can avoid other hunters.

What to expect during the 2024 season

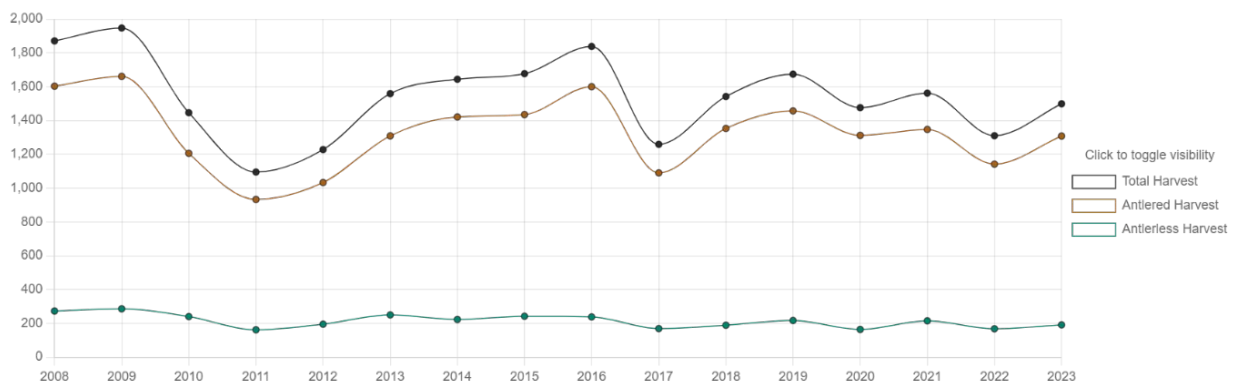
Deer populations do not change dramatically between typical years. Winter weather conditions rarely cause die-offs within District 17. Consequently, the Department anticipates the total quantity of deer available for harvest to be similar to previous seasons.

Hunter numbers do not change dramatically between typical years unless regulations are significantly modified or access is closed. The best predictors of expected general season harvest are recent trends in:

1. Harvest
2. Hunter numbers
3. Hunter success

The following chart provides trend data for harvest statistics. Total harvest is consistent with low harvest years occurring in 2011 (1,095 deer taken) and 2017 (1,259 deer taken). Boom years occurred in 2009 when almost 2,000 deer were harvested and 2016 when an estimated 1,838 deer were harvested.

Figure 5. Buck and antlerless deer harvested in District 17 during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2023. Harvest totals include special permits but not tribal harvest.



How to find and hunt black-tailed deer

The key to harvesting a black-tailed deer in District 17 is scouting. Black-tailed deer are present throughout the district and in nearly every habitat. Deer numbers differ among habitats and the highest densities are frequently associated with 3- to 9-year-old timber harvests. These young tree stands provide large amounts of cover and food.

Many hunters focus efforts on new timber harvests. Deer in these areas are much more visible than most other habitats. However, deer know they are exposed and typically visit timber harvests at night, early dawn, and dusk. Hunters should also explore areas near these openings. Areas with decent cover are more likely to contain deer for most of the day. Large amounts of deer sign in an area indicate deer are in close vicinity.

Over several years, WDFW fitted female deer in Capitol State Forest (GMU 663) with GPS collars as part of a larger study throughout Western Washington. The goal was to better understand the effects of timber management practices on deer survival and productivity. These GPS collars automatically upload the deer's location via satellite several times a day. The data gives biologists a detailed look at black-tailed deer movements and habitat use.

None of the deer monitored in WDFW's doe study used an area larger than .38 square miles (243 acres). The average home range size was .14 square miles (86 acres). Some deer used an area no bigger than 45 acres for an entire year. If a hunter sees signs of deer in an area, but no deer, they should be patient or change their approach.

Traditional approaches to hunting black-tailed deer include still-hunting or sitting patiently in high-use areas (timber harvests, highly traveled trails, or funnels) until the deer appears. A less well-known, or less-used, technique is rattling and grunting to simulate two bucks fighting over a doe. The rattling technique is more common with white-tailed deer but can be effective on black-tailed deer as well. A quick internet search on the technique yields plenty of evidence to illustrate its effectiveness when conditions are right.

Buck movements tend to increase during the rut, and they are less wary than other parts of the year. The last week of October and first week of November seem to be when male deer are most susceptible to harvest.

Notable hunting changes

Several private timber companies in District 17 are shifting to fee-access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Typically, these companies post signs at primary roadways, but hunters should be aware of changes. WDFW advises hunters to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the current policy regarding land access. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

Black bears are present throughout District 17. Numbers vary among GMUs, and harvest can change noticeably from year to year. The best places to harvest bears are usually in GMUs 648, 660, and 663. Other GMUs worth mentioning are 618, 638, 658, 660, 672, and 681.

Bear seasons are primarily designed to maintain stable populations.

Existing bear populations are not expected to have much impact on big game herds. Three statistics used to assess black bear harvest are:

- Proportion of females harvested
- Median age of harvested females
- Median age of harvested males

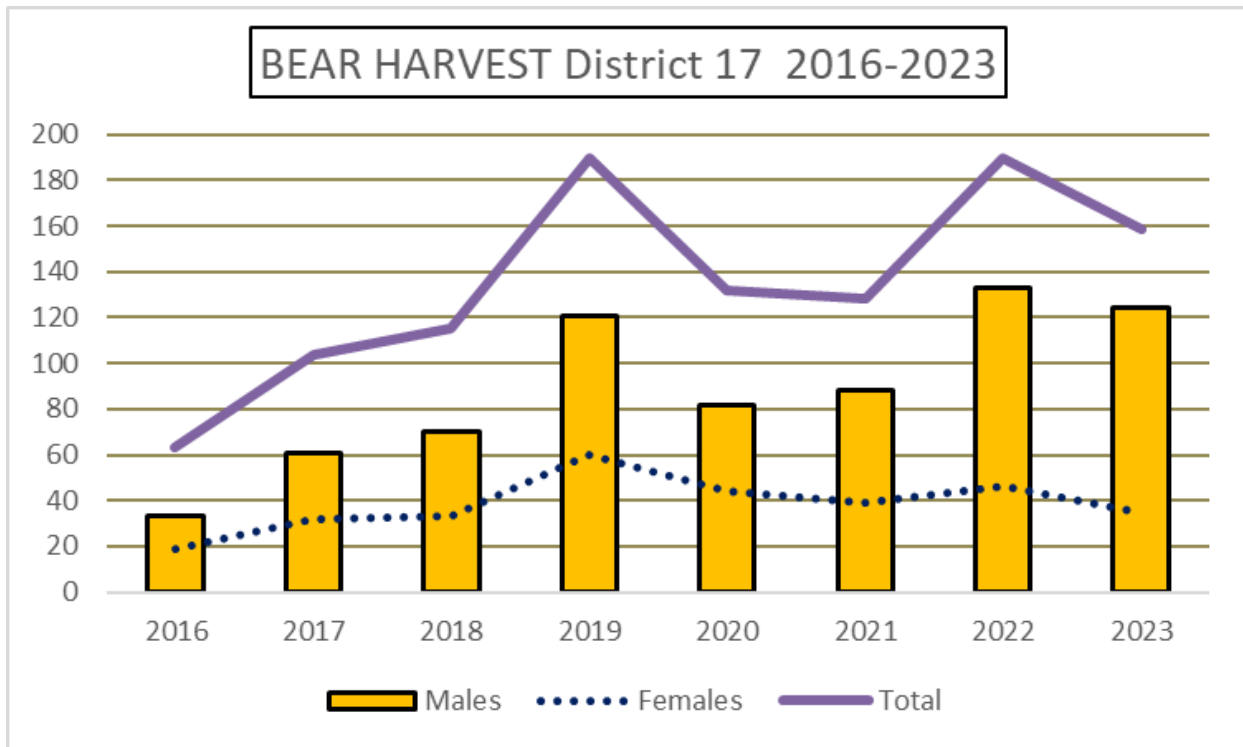
WDFW initiated surveys in 2019 to estimate bear density in portions of Region 6. The initial study area was in the Fall River GMU (672). The resulting estimates are expected to help the agency formulate management objectives and understand the relationship between the number of bears in the area, habitat characteristics, and annual harvest rates. For Fall River, bear density was estimated at just under eight bears per 100 square kilometers of habitat in the summer of 2019, one of the lowest densities in the state.

What to expect during the 2024 season

Most bears are probably harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Overall hunter success is low, but annual harvest can vary widely from year to year, and 2019 and 2020 had some of the highest harvest rates for the past 10 years. Depending on the GMU, between 4% and 15% of District 17 bear hunters were successful in 2019. Since 2001, the district's overall hunter success has typically ranged from 4% to 8%. District-wide, bear hunter success in 2019 was 11%. Hunter success rates are likely higher for those that specifically hunt bears compared to those that take bear incidentally during deer or elk season.

Annual bear harvest in District 17 increased from 2002 to 2008. Harvest declined sharply during the 2009 season but rebounded in 2010. Bear harvest has since remained generally stable to increasing, although 2014 was a low year while 2019 and 2022 were high years.

Figure 6. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 17, 2016–2023. Estimates do not include bears harvested during historic spring permit seasons or removed because of conflicts with people or timber damage.



More bears are typically harvested during the general season in GMU 648 than any other GMU. GMUs 642, 658, 660, 663, 673, and 681 are also regular producers of bears during the fall general season.

How to find black bear

Black bears are common and occur at high densities in some locales. However, bears in District 17 are seen infrequently because of thick vegetation dominating the landscape. Consequently, scouting is extremely important when hunting for black bears.

Black bears occupy a variety of habitats, and it can be difficult to narrow down where to find them. Because bears have an incredible sense of smell, hunters should focus on open terrain. When out in the open, a bear can be seen from a distance without alerting it. In dense cover, a bear is likely to smell a hunter before being seen and move to avoid an encounter. Bears are often located in timber harvests with a lot of berry-producing shrubs. Examples include:

- Elderberries
- Salmonberries
- Huckleberries
- Blackberries
- Salal berries
- Cascara

During the fall, hunters should seek timber harvests with these types of shrubs and search for bear sign. Fresh signs indicate a bear is visiting that stand. Patient hunters who watch these areas for extended periods of time can increase their chances of harvesting a bear.

Notable changes

Since 2023, bear season starts Aug. 1 across the state and hunters can purchase up to two bear tags during the license year.



Bear photo from GMU 672 survey site. Photo by WDFW.

Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status

Cougars occur throughout District 17, but densities vary among GMUs. WDFW manages cougar populations in District 17 primarily to maintain a stable population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW shifted away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested and implemented a standard season coupled with harvest guidelines.

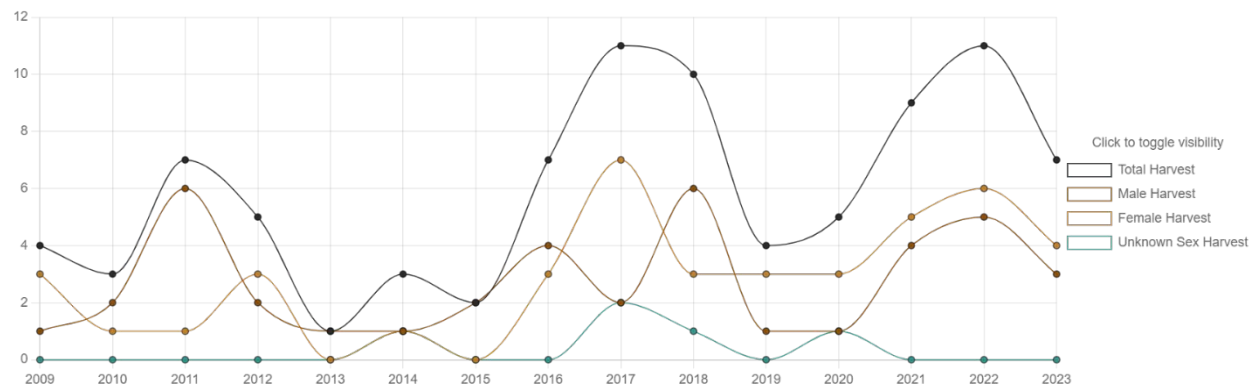
WDFW established harvest guidelines with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population. Cougar season rules changed for the 2024 hunting season and are summarized in the Notable Hunting Changes section below. Anyone planning to hunt cougar should confirm the season is open by calling 1-866-364-4868.

What to expect during the 2024 season

In 2024, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted several changes to cougar management guidelines that may affect hunting in several areas. These changes are described in the Notable Hunting Changes section below. It is most important for hunters to know that the season may close at any time in any hunt area, depending on the amount of cougar removals that occur. So, hunters should check the hotline regularly before and during the hunting season to make sure the season is still open.

Cougar harvest in District 17 varies greatly. Deer and elk hunters harvest most cougars opportunistically. Since 2001, the average number of cougars harvested in District 17 is six. Young animals are overrepresented in the harvest. Most cougar harvest in District 17 (Figure 7) has occurred in GMUs 642, 648, and 651.

Figure 7. Trends in the number of male and female cougars harvested during the general cougar season in District 17, 2009–2023.



Notable hunting changes

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted several rule changes for the 2024 cougar hunting season. This season setting structure or rule may change for future seasons as discussions about cougar hunting in Washington continue. To summarize the changes for the 2024 cougar season:

- Season dates: Sept. 1 – March 31 or when the cap is reached, whichever comes first.
- All population management units (PMUs) or hunt areas currently with a harvest guideline will now have a harvest cap.

- The cap is based on an estimated cougar density of 2.3 cougars per 100 square kilometers and a 13%intrinsic growth rate.
- All known human-caused mortalities of cougars 18 months old and older will count toward a 13% or 20% cap.
- The count of cougars removed starts April 1 and includes removals associated with depredation, conflict, public safety, hunter harvest, and the like.
- If total removals reach the 13% cap, the hunt area will close to hunting.
- If total removals reach the 13% cap before the hunting season, the cap increases to 20% and the hunting season will open, but could close at any time if removals reach the 20% cap.
- None of the rule changes prohibit the removal of cougars associated with depredation or public safety concerns.
- Finally, the Department may close hunting in any hunt area before the cap is reached, upon consideration of factors such as disease, suspected additional mortality, or any other issue affecting the cougar population.
- Call the cougar hunting season hotline, 1-866-364-4868, before you hunt.

Table 5. Harvest cap for hunt areas in District 17.

Hunt Area	13% Harvest Cap	20% Harvest Cap
618, 636, 638	5	7
642, 648, 651	7	11
658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, 699	11	16

Ducks



Hunting dog in action. Photo by WDFW.

Common species

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 17. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, mallard, green-winged teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, and common goldeneye, occur in low numbers. Nesting wood ducks are often in the Chehalis River Valley early in the season and provide a unique hunting opportunity. Hunters occasionally find sea ducks, including scoters and long-tailed ducks, in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor.

Mallards are Washington's most abundant duck species. Consequently, they constitute the majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically $\geq 50\%$). In contrast, American wigeon are the most abundant duck species in District 17. During previous aerial surveys of Willapa Bay, American wigeon typically comprised 50% to 60% of ducks observed. Hunters should expect to primarily harvest American wigeon, northern pintail, and mallard. Green-winged teal are abundant early in the season but decrease as the season progresses.

Migration chronology

Hunters find very few ducks during late spring and early summer. Beginning in mid to late September, birds within the Pacific Flyway migrate south from Alaska. (Hunters have harvested banded ducks marked from the Central Flyway along coastal Washington, indicating that some movement between flyways exists.) Duck numbers continue to increase until peaking in late October and early November. Migrating ducks do not appear to remain in District 17 for long, instead using the district for stopover (resting) sites on their journeys south.

Consequently, the number of ducks located inside District 17 likely varies daily. Total duck numbers decline precipitously once the flow of migrants from Alaska has stopped. By the December holiday season, duck numbers are typically 5% of what they were at the end of October. Unlike Eastern Washington, weather doesn't alter migration chronology in coastal Washington. Regardless of the weather, duck numbers decline at about the same point each year.

Concentration areas

In general, waterfowl concentrations occur in Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and the Chehalis and Willapa River valleys. The exact locations where duck concentrations occur depend on many factors (hunting pressure, weather, food, etc.) that can change daily.

Waterfowl concentrations shift around the bay each winter. Small, forested wetlands also provide areas where migratory ducks may congregate. In the river valleys after large soaking precipitation events, hunters can find dabbling ducks in areas where sheet water has accumulated. The number of ducks using these small bodies of water can be surprisingly high. Hunters should scout a few days before hunting to locate where ducks are congregating and/or where sheet water is likely to occur.

Population status

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species. Breeding duck populations in Western Washington weren't monitored until 2010, when WDFW developed and began flying established transects in five areas. WDFW flies surveys in April and early May. One of the selected areas occurs in District 17 and is associated with the Chehalis River Valley. There was a two-year gap in flights due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but flights resumed in 2022.

In 2024, the breeding population in the Chehalis River Valley was estimated at 8,519 ducks. This is up from the 7,383 estimated ducks in 2023 and similar to the 8,442 in 2022.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Breeding duck numbers in Alaska are the biggest factor affecting duck hunters in Washington. Historic harvest can provide insight into probable hunting opportunity. Overall, harvest trends since 2016 have risen slightly and are more similar to the average total number of ducks harvested since 2010. The 2023 duck harvest in Pacific County was the lowest since 2004 (Figure 8), whereas harvest in Grays Harbor County was the highest since 2014 (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Trends in Pacific County duck harvest, 1997–2023.

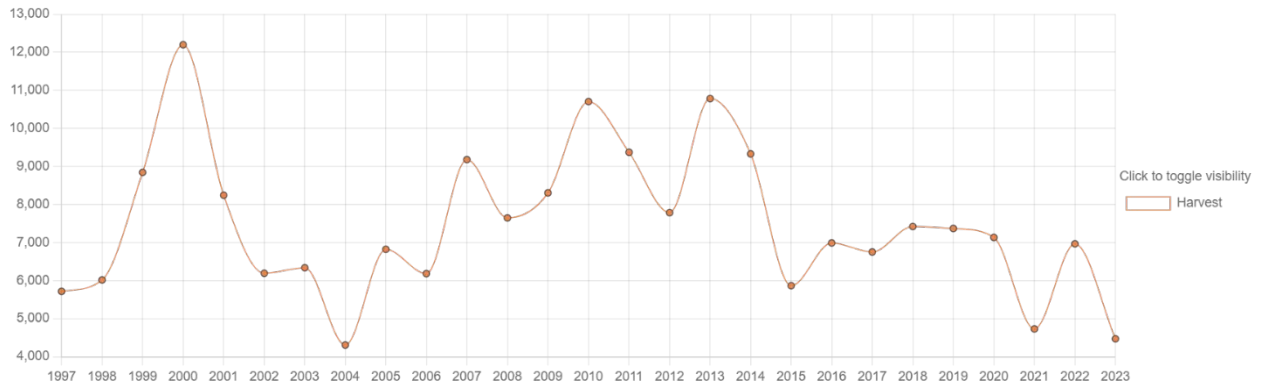
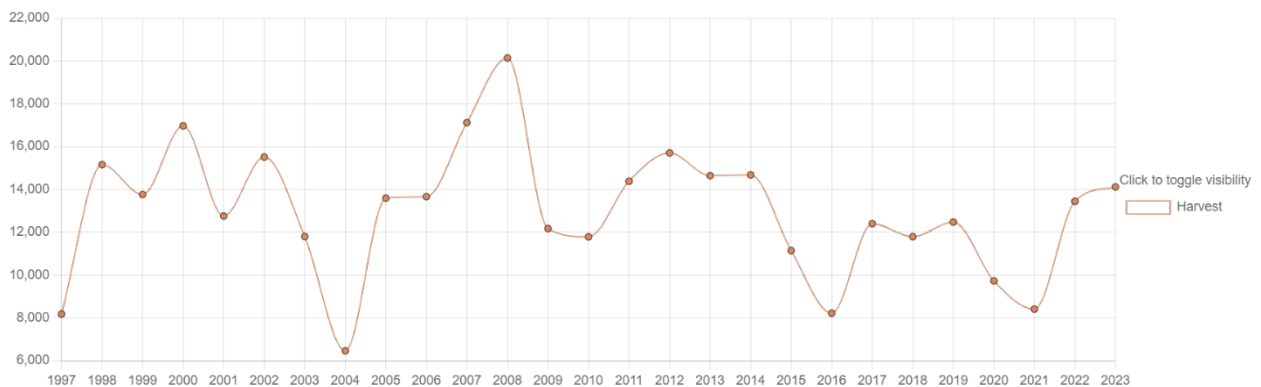


Figure 9. Trends in Grays Harbor County duck harvest, 1997–2023.



Hunting techniques

Duck hunting techniques should vary depending on where hunters choose to hunt. Traditional setups work best when hunting inland waters around ponds, rivers, or feeding areas. Birds are most active in early morning and late afternoon, as they move between resting sites and feeding areas.

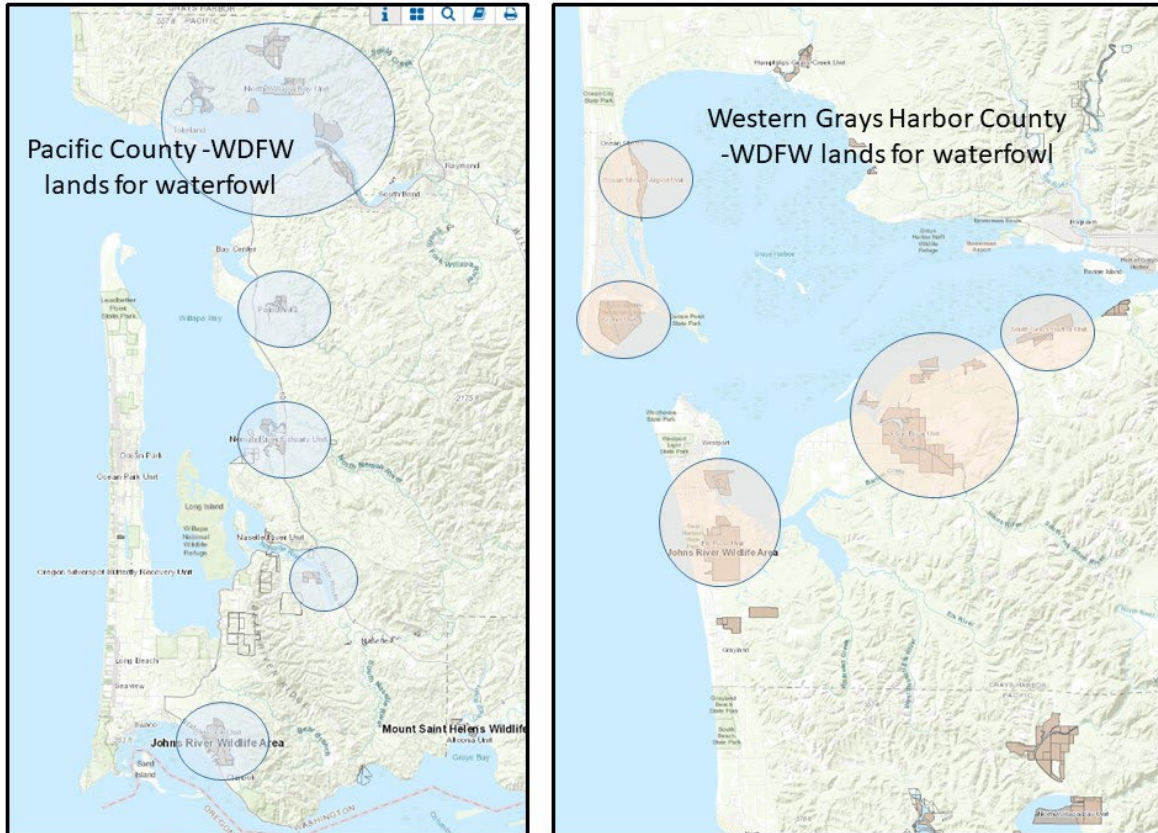
Tides influence hunting the coastline of Willapa Bay or Grays Harbor. Regardless of the time of day, ducks along the coastline tend to move very little at either low or high tide. Hunters can expect very little movement during tidal extremes. However, bird activity and opportunities increase when the tide is going out or coming in. A perfectly timed tide can provide success to coastline hunters at 3 p.m., unlike traditional waterfowl hunting areas that are typically limited to early morning and late afternoon. For more information, reference the [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) webpage.

Public land opportunities

Many WDFW wildlife areas in District 17 offer good waterfowl hunting. The following map (Figure 10) is intended to provide hunters with the general location of these wildlife areas, but hunters should visit the [WDFW waterfowl hunting page](#) or the Go Hunt application for more information.

The website includes waterfowl information related to location, current management activities, and common species. Other public land opportunities occur on the [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#).

Figure 10. WDFW lands and waterfowl hunting areas within western portion of District 17.



Notable hunting changes

WDFW has approved 38 harlequin duck permits for the 2024-2025 duck season. These permits will be distributed through a drawing that all eligible applicants may enter.

Thirty-eight permits were made available to eligible applicants through an August drawing; the application period was July 1 to Aug. 14. To apply for a Harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington small game hunting license, migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. For more information, visit the WDFW [Harlequin duck hunting permit page](#). **Harlequin permit hunters should look to other portions of Region 6 to fill their permit. District 17 does not have high numbers.**

Geese

Common species

Four subspecies of Canada goose can be found in District 17: western, dusky, lesser, and Vancouver. Three subspecies of cackling goose include cackling, Taverner's, and Aleutian. Hunters can find large numbers of black brant in Willapa Bay beginning in late January and early February. Occasional flocks of snow geese and white-fronted geese occur.

Migration chronology and concentration areas

The timing of migration for geese in District 17 is nearly identical to that described for ducks. Few geese reside locally in the district. Starting in September, waves of migrant geese begin showing up from Alaska. One distinct difference between ducks and geese is that goose numbers do not decline in late November as sharply as duck numbers. Many geese choose to stay the winter in the agricultural areas of District 17, where they find food. Brant are distinct from other goose species and are mostly found in Willapa Bay starting in the latter half of December or early January.

Most geese aggregate in agricultural lands around the Willapa and Chehalis river valleys. Some properties routinely have geese. Generally, the specific fields where geese concentrate changes on a weekly basis. The Willapa and Chehalis river valleys are not expansive, so relocating geese is not difficult. Hunters are likely to find brant, in contrast to other geese, almost exclusively in close vicinity to where eel grass is found.

Population status

Very few geese breed in District 17. Consequently, WDFW does not survey for breeding geese within the district. Long-term goose nest surveys have occurred elsewhere in Washington. Portions of the lower Columbia River have small but relatively stable breeding populations.

Wintering populations are hard to survey effectively, because geese forage widely in agricultural areas that make them difficult to locate. The number of geese observed in Washington during the midwinter waterfowl surveys has been relatively stable since the early 2000s.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Historically, most goose harvest has occurred in Grays Harbor County during the regular season. A decline in goose harvest for Grays Harbor County in 2015 may partially be attributed to its inclusion into Goose Management Area (GMA) 2. Pacific County goose hunters have long been required to obtain southwest goose authorizations, and the number of Pacific County hunters has not changed significantly. The Department expects the number of Grays Harbor County goose hunters will gradually increase as hunters obtain their southwest goose authorization.

Given the current trends in populations farther north, goose hunting opportunities in District 17 are expected to remain consistent. Hunters can expect to harvest an average of one or two geese per day.

Hunting techniques

Goose hunting is almost standardized. Goose hunters find agricultural areas where geese feed and set up well before daylight in portions of the field where geese are known to concentrate. In District 17, feeding geese tend to congregate in pastures containing cattle operations. Most goose hunting opportunities occur on private property. Hunters must obtain permission before hunting private lands.

During the early September goose hunting season, noticeable concentrations of western Canada geese have been observed in and around Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay. These areas tend to congregate molting geese earlier in the season, and those recently molted birds seem to continue to use those areas throughout the early season. Goose surveys previously conducted around Baker Bay, near the community of Chinook, documented many geese. Many areas where geese are found require boat access, but favorable goose hunting can occur near shore using traditional methods.

Inclement weather may force local and migratory geese farther upland and into river valleys. This tends to occur more frequently during the regular goose season that starts in October. High easterly winds may force birds to land in fields where they become less exposed to the wind but are more vulnerable to hunters.

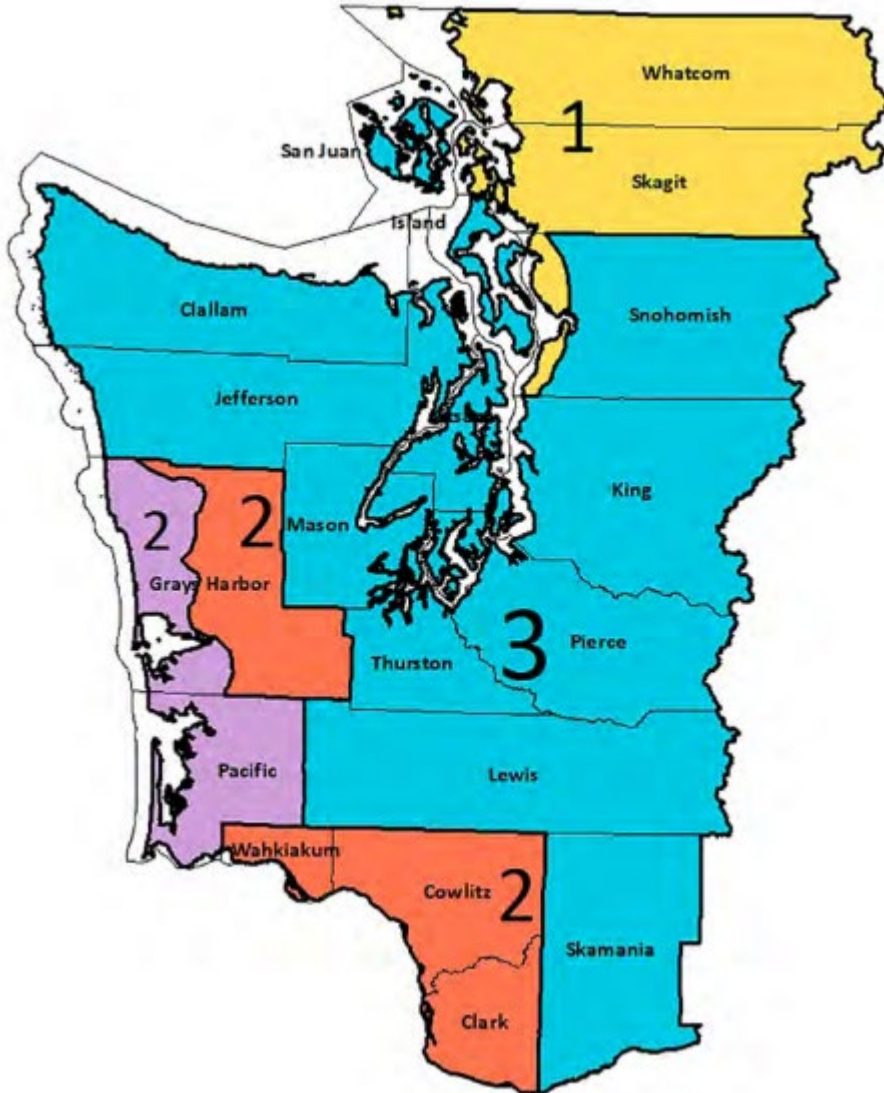
Special regulations

Both Pacific and Grays Harbor counties are contained within **GMA 2** (Figure 11). Special regulations apply in this GMA to prevent harvest of dusky Canada geese. These special regulations include:

- Hunters must possess a valid migratory bird hunting authorization for **GMA 2** to hunt geese, except during the September goose season.
- February and March seasons are closed on WDFW wildlife areas and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) wildlife refuges.
- Hours are 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours to 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours. If a hunter takes a dusky Canada Goose, the authorization will be invalidated and the hunter will not be able to hunt in GMA 2 for the rest of the season, including the special late goose season.
- A mandatory Harvest Report Card is issued for hunters to record the number and species composition of their daily bag. Hunters are required to report their harvest onto this card as soon as practical after harvesting a goose.

WDFW strongly recommends that hunters review the most recent [Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) pamphlet to ensure they are following current regulations. Pamphlets are available at WDFW's website and at any retailer that sells hunting licenses.

Figure 71. Western Washington goose management areas.



Public land opportunities

Many wildlife areas in District 17 provide a chance to hunt geese. Check the earlier map or review WDFW’s [“Let’s go waterfowl hunting”](#) publication for more details. Additionally, some landowners have enrolled in WDFW’s Private Lands Access Program. Those lands provide additional hunting opportunities for the public. Reference the private lands section for more details or visit the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#).

Notable hunting changes

Canada and cackling goose daily bag limits for GMA 2 were reduced to three geese per day starting in the 2022-23 season.

Forest grouse

Species and general habitat characteristics

District 17 has two species of grouse: ruffed and blue (sooty). Ruffed grouse are the most abundant and occur at lower elevations and valley bottoms. Throughout the west, ruffed grouse typically prefer habitats that support abundant deciduous shrubs or small trees, particularly along stream corridors and other areas along rivers. These thick, somewhat impenetrable habitats provide protective cover for ruffed grouse. West of the Cascades, stands of red alder can provide suitable habitat for ruffed grouse.

Blue grouse can be found in higher-elevation habitats, but overlap does occur. Blue grouse are usually found in the uplands at elevations above 1,000 feet and may be found above 6,000 feet. Across Oregon and Washington, blue grouse prefer coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir and true fir. At higher elevations, birds are primarily found in western and mountain hemlock, lodgepole pine, and white bark pine. The Ruffed Grouse Society has developed an interactive map for blue and ruffed grouse habitat on national forest land. *The map only includes a small portion of land in District 17 that belongs to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). State and private lands are not portrayed. The map is only a guide to habitat and may not accurately predict where grouse can be found.*

Population status

WDFW no longer conducts surveys to monitor ruffed grouse populations in District 17. The Department uses harvest data trends to supplement formal population estimates. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch per unit effort (or “grouse per hunter day”) is the best indicator of population trend. In District 17, grouse harvest per hunter day last year was 0.32 birds per hunter day in Grays Harbor County and 0.22 birds per hunter day in Pacific County.

To obtain better information on grouse population status and demographics, WDFW conducted a pilot effort in 2016 to collect grouse wings and tails from harvested birds in portions of Grays Harbor County. Results from the 2018 season are listed below (Figure 9). This collection effort is expected to continue through 2024 with collection barrels at strategic locations in the district.

Table 6: The number, sex, age, and species of forest grouse harvested in Grays Harbor County during the 2018 hunting season, Sep. 1 – Dec. 1.

Species	Female	Male	Unknown Sex	Juvenile	Yearling	Adult	Breeding Age*	Total collected
Ruffed	1	3	8	8	0	0	4	24
Blue	25	19	0	31	2	9	2	88
Totals	26	22	8	39	2	9	6	112

*Breeding age denotes birds with molt patterns that showed they were of breeding age but could not be distinguished as yearling vs adult.

Collecting grouse wings and tails helps the Department to monitor species, sex, and age ratios in the harvested population to inform production and composition. WDFW encourages hunters to contribute to these collections. Hunters can find wing collection barrel locations on the [WDFW website](#). The table below identifies the percentage of birds harvested throughout Washington by species. Hunters in District 17 will either be in the Olympic or Southwest zone.

Table 7: Percentage breakdown of grouse species harvested across the different geographic zones of Washington derived from hunter harvest submissions in 2018 to grouse wing collection barrels.

Zone	Blue	Ruffed	Spruce
North Central	52%	29%	20%
North Puget Sound	38%	62%	0%
Northeast	16%	78%	6%
Olympic	44%	56%	0%
South Central	76%	24%	0%
Southwest	22%	78%	0%
Unknown	53%	47%	0%
Total	36%	59%	5%

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Grouse harvest in District 17 declined from 2019 to 2022; however, harvest more than doubled from 2022 (1,792 birds) to 2023 (3,601 birds). Hunters harvest most grouse in Grays Harbor County. Grouse wing samples reveal that hunters harvest a higher percentage of blue grouse in Grays Harbor County compared to Pacific County. This higher take of blue grouse may be related to the amount of Grays Harbor County's higher accessible terrain, which tends to be more characteristic of blue grouse habitat and has a significant amount of USFS lands.

Hunting techniques and where to hunt

A generally effective way to hunt grouse is by walking roads and shooting birds as they flush or after they roost in a nearby tree. Grouse are present in higher densities along roads with little traffic. Consequently, hunters should target roads behind locked gates or those that have been decommissioned. To learn more about hunting grouse, please reference [WDFW's upland bird hunting publication](#).

Notable hunting changes

No notable changes. The season runs from Sept. 15, 2024, to Jan. 15, 2025.

Pheasants

The Western Washington Pheasant Release Program provides all pheasant hunting opportunities in District 17; the district doesn't have self-sustaining pheasant populations. The release program primarily provides an upland bird hunting opportunity and encourages participation from youth and senior hunters. Each year, 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released at 25 sites, two of which (Chehalis River and Chinook) are in District 17. The Chinook Release Site is in Pacific County, and the Chehalis River Release Site is in Grays Harbor County. Reference the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) publication to learn more.

In a typical year, the program releases around 1,000 pheasants from the Chinook site and at Brady. A special youth hunt will occur in September as well as a senior hunt (65 and older). Pheasant releases end Dec. 15. Hunters should be aware that special regulations apply on Western Washington pheasant release sites. Notably:

- Hunters must buy a Western Washington pheasant license.
- Non-toxic shot is required.
- Hunting hours are between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The Department has additional information about pheasant release sites at: wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations/pheasant-release.

Quail

Mountain quail rarely occur in District 17. This district doesn't contain any sizable population, and sightings are rare. The few sightings that occur are usually located in 5- to 10-year-old timber harvests with abundant shrub cover and pine saplings. Some sightings occur in brushy cover near agricultural land. In 2023, hunters reported very few quail harvests in Grays Harbor County and none in Pacific County.

Turkeys

District 17 doesn't feature any turkey populations. Generally, hunters report fewer than 30 turkey harvests for all southwest Washington during any given year. The only area wildlife managers knew to have any number of birds in District 17 was in the Willapa River Valley on Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) managed land in the southern part of GMU 672. Any other flocks in District 17 are small (<15 birds), occur on private agricultural lands, and are thought to be pen-raised birds that nearby landowners release.

Most turkeys previously found in District 17 were eastern wild turkeys. About 400 eastern wild turkeys were introduced into southwest Washington from 1987-2000. Introduction was discontinued because turkey populations did not grow or expand, and suitability models indicated southwest Washington habitats were unlikely to support viable turkey populations.

Band-tailed pigeons



Band-tailed pigeon. Photo By WDFW.

General description

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest pigeon species in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

Population status and trend

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. Surveys occur at 16-plus mineral sites where band-tails congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Band-tailed pigeon harvest in District 17 once measured thousands of birds. Bag limits were 10 birds per day until 1950, when statewide harvest was estimated at 90,000 birds. However, overharvest and habitat changes caused significant decline in overall numbers. Harvest in District 17 previously accounted for 30% of the statewide harvest. Annual harvest in Grays Harbor County averaged 80 birds for the decade following 2002, which was the highest average annual harvest among the 19 counties where band-tails are harvested. The maximum total harvest for District 17 since hunting resumed in 2002 was 265 birds. The total statewide harvest has never exceeded 2,100 birds.

Where and how to hunt band-tailed pigeons

Band-tailed pigeons frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in 5- to 10-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests that band-tails use is difficult. Hunters should locate feeding and roosting sites. Upon finding a good site, sit patiently and wait for harvest opportunities.

Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season.

WDFW wildlife managers knew of only one mineral site within District 17 prior to 2021, when WDFW invested effort to discover additional sites as part of new research. We've discovered at least four mineral sites in District 17 since the start of this research. Please contact WDFW if you know of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Pacific or Grays Harbor counties.

Special regulations

Since band-tail seasons re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization and submit their harvest to the Department using harvest cards after the season has closed. These regulations will apply in 2024 as well. Hunters should review the 2024 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

Research

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of Districts 16 and 17. WDFW has fitted 36 birds with transmitters that are programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.

This project will help the Department to expand knowledge of band-tailed pigeons in areas where mineral sites have not been identified, allowing WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

- More accurately index the statewide population via mineral site surveys.
- More expertly manage our band-tailed pigeon harvest seasons to potentially allow an expanded hunting opportunity.
- Provide detailed information on resource selection to inform how to manage habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research has helped the Department identify new mineral sites in Grays Harbor County. Hunters and members of the public fund this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. The project is expected to continue through 2025 across various districts within Region 6.

Other small game

Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 17, but aren't covered in detail, include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot.

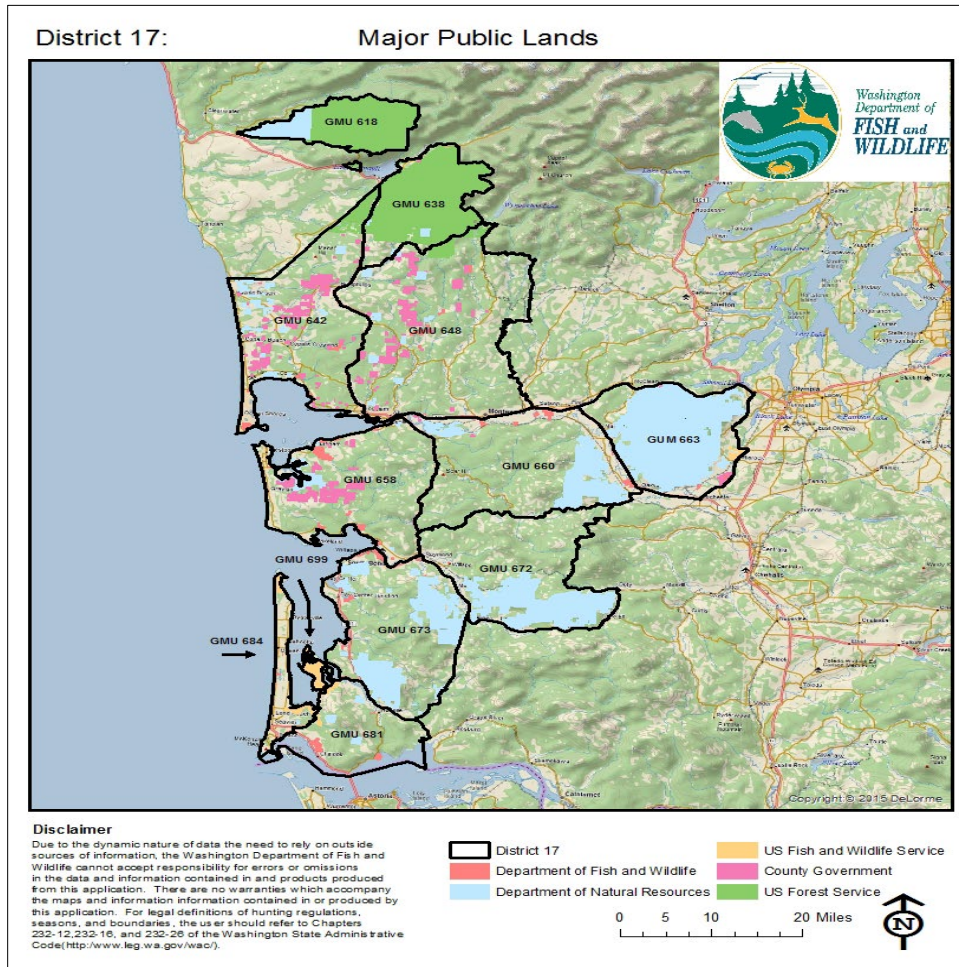
Major public lands

District 17 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities, though they do exist on lands administered by USFWS, DNR, USFS, WDFW, and Grays Harbor County.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include 618, 638, and 663. Large tracts of DNR-managed lands also occur in GMUs 660, 672, and 673. Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occurs in portions of GMUs 681 and 684. GMU 699 is an island, and the entire unit is part of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

Most other public land opportunities in District 17 occur primarily on WDFW wildlife areas or on lands managed by Pacific and Grays Harbor counties. For more information on WDFW wildlife areas, visit [the Department website](#). For resources available to locate public lands, please reference the Online Tools and Maps section below. Figure 18. Location of public lands open to public access within each District 17 GMU.

Figure 19. Location of public lands open to public access within each District 17 GMU.



Private industrial forestlands

General information

Most hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, occur on private industrial forestlands. Timber companies that own large tracts of land and are the most well-known include Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Manulife, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global. However, hunters should be aware that there are many other smaller timber companies with operations in District 17.

WDFW recognizes that some great hunting opportunities occur on private industrial forestlands and works cooperatively with private timber companies to maintain reasonable public access during established hunting seasons. Private industrial forestlands have always been open for public access, but hunters should always remember that access to private property is a privilege.

Increasingly, timber companies have restricted public access and shifted toward a permit system to limit the number of hunters on their lands. A primary reason for access restrictions is hunter disrespect of the landowner rules. WDFW reminds hunters to remember the following when on private industrial forestlands:

- Hunting on private lands is a privilege; treat them with respect.
- Obey posted signs.
- Leave gates as you found them.
- Pack out trash.
- Be courteous.

Important notes about access for the 2024 season

A variety of fee access programs are in place and vary by area and company. However, all programs at the time of this writing fall into three general categories: permit-unlimited, permit-limited, and leases. These fees also apply to other outdoor recreational activities, including hiking, camping, mountain biking, and fishing. General descriptions of these three programs are as follows:

Permit-unlimited

Hunters must purchase an access permit, but an unlimited number of permits are available. Only valid permit holders are allowed to recreate in areas associated with the permit.

Permit-limited

A set number of permits are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Only people who have secured one of the limited permits are allowed to recreate in areas associated with that permit. Permits are anticipated to cost several hundred dollars. Weyerhaeuser implemented this type of system in their Pe Ell Unit (GMUs 672 and 506) during the 2013 season.

Leases

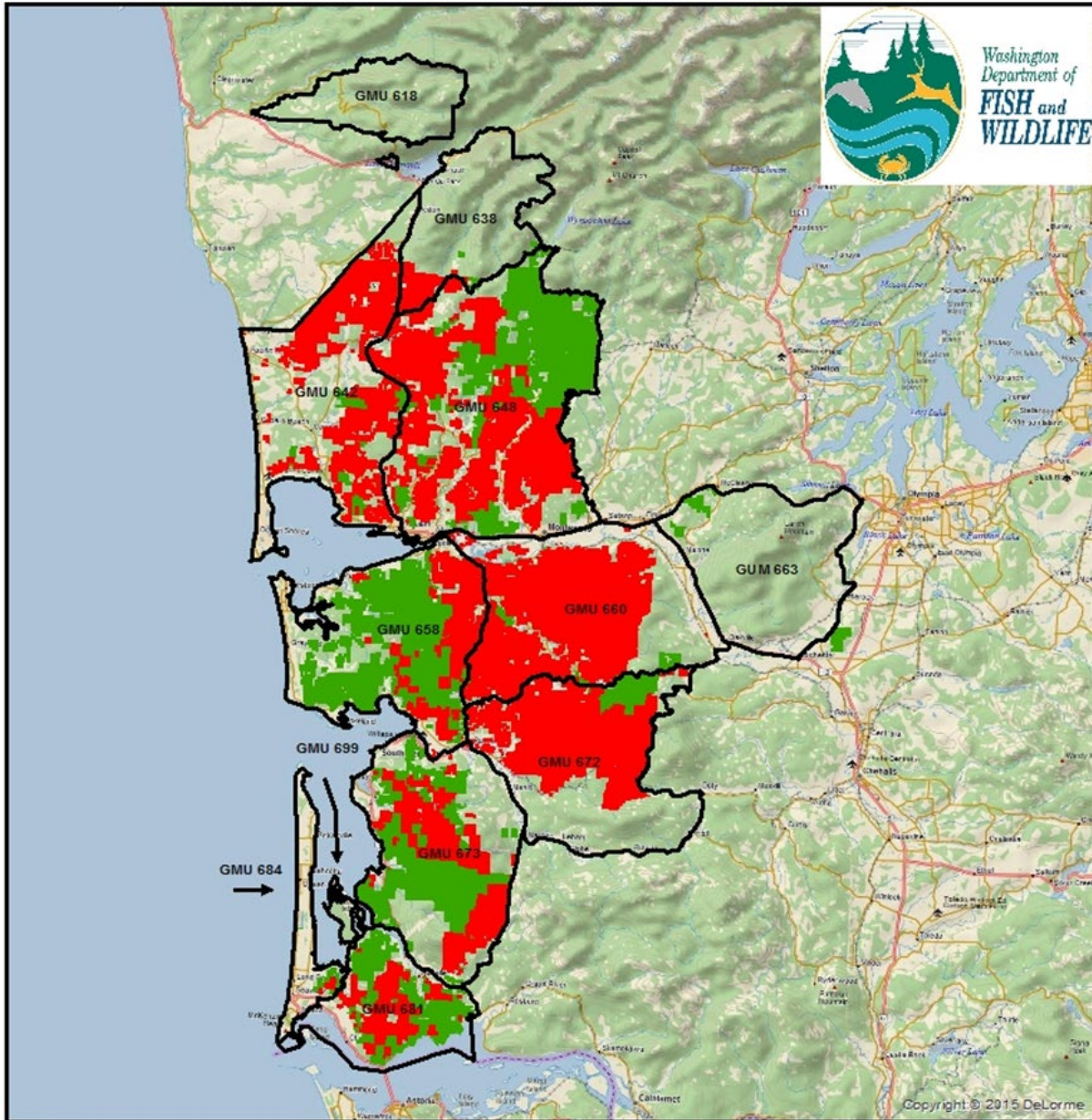
Designated tracts of land are leased to an individual or group, and only the lessee and their family are allowed to access that land. The cost of a lease can be several thousand dollars.

Many timber companies are charging access fees in areas where they have historically offered free access. Consequently, it is very important that hunters take the time to contact landowners in areas where they plan to hunt, so they know whether the company's access policy for that area has changed.

The following map represents areas in District 17 where WDFW knows timber companies will require a fee to recreate on their property. However, the broad implementation of access programs by several timber companies since the 2013 season has been a very dynamic process. The map represents what has been presented to WDFW as of Aug. 4, 2017. Some areas presented as free access (green) could become fee access (red) when hunting seasons begin Sept. 1. Thus, hunters should use this map as a general reference and understand it is ultimately their responsibility to contact the appropriate timber company to determine how hunter access will be managed in the areas they plan to hunt.

Figure 110. Private timber company ownership in District 17, including free access (dark green) and permit and fee required (red) lands. The map represents data available Aug. 4, 2017, and may change at any time.

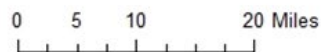
District 17: Private Forest Lands Access



Disclaimer

Due to the dynamic nature of data the need to rely on outside sources of information, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions in the data and information contained in and products produced from this application. There are no warranties which accompany the maps and information information contained in or produced by this application. For legal definitions of hunting regulations, seasons, and boundaries, the user should refer to Chapters 232-12, 232-16, and 232-26 of the Washington State Administrative Code (<http://www.leg.wa.gov/wac/>).

-  District 17
-  Private Forest Lands - Fee Access
-  Private Forest Lands - Free Access



Basic access rules

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forestlands vary by company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide rules on signs at access points (gates), on their website (if they use one for public communication), or to hunters who call to inquire about access (review contact information below). However, WDFW encourages hunters to follow some basic rules if they find themselves in an area they are unfamiliar with and are in doubt about specific landowner criteria. The following are intended to be general guidelines of the basic access rules that are commonplace on many private industrial forestlands. Timber companies may have restrictive rules in place, and it is ultimately the responsibility of hunters to make sure they are familiar with those rules.

- Respect the landowner and other users.
- Obey all posted signs.
- A logging road without a sign does not mean it is open for public access.
- Drive slowly with headlights turned on when on roads open to public access.
- Avoid areas of active timber harvests.
- No camping, littering, off-road-vehicles (ORVs), off-road driving, target shooting, or forest product removals.
- An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.
- Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors that propel or assist the rider.
- Private forestlands are usually closed to public access during hours of darkness.

Failure to obey landowner rules can result in prosecution for trespassing and or even a *persona non grata* from the landowner.

General overview of access allowed by major timber companies and nonprofits

Manulife

Manulife industrial forestlands have different levels of access based on management areas. All Manulife industrial forestlands in GMUs 658, 673, and 681 are only open to non-motorized access. During modern firearm seasons, some key main lines are opened to disperse hunters and allow access to interior areas.

Rayonier

Rayonier currently has three levels of access: seasonal permit, recreational lease, and general permit access. For seasonal permit and recreational lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to access rules established by Rayonier. Areas under general permit access require the purchase of a permit from the company. District 17 GMUs with Rayonier lands include 638, 642, 648, 658, 673, and 681. Maps and other information are available on their website.

Forest Investment Associates (FIA)

FIA owns large blocks (more than 30,000 acres) of former Rayonier land primarily in Pacific County (GMUs 673 and 658) with some parcels in Grays Harbor County. FIA respects leases and permits associated with those Rayonier lands. Other FIA lands are open for hunting. American Forest Management administers the permit system for much of the FIA holdings.

Green Diamond

Green Diamond manages hunter access using the dot system and posts access rules at their gates. All of their lands in District 17 are currently open to non-motorized public access. As hunting seasons approach, they usually begin opening additional roads to public access if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Green Diamond ownership are 642, 648, 658, and 660.

Campbell Global

Campbell Global uses the dot system to manage hunter access and posts access rules at their gates. As hunting season approaches, Campbell Global normally opens some roads to motorized access if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Campbell Global-managed timberlands are 648, 658, 672, 673, and 681.

Weyerhaeuser

Weyerhaeuser currently has three levels of access in District 17: general access permit areas, enhanced permit areas, and lease areas. For permit and lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to rules established by Weyerhaeuser. District 17 GMUs with Weyerhaeuser ownership are 648, 658, 660, and 672.

The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy owns more than 6,000 acres in Pacific County in GMU 681. There is open walk-in access during most of season. Vehicles are not allowed.

Special notice for archery and muzzleloader hunters

Private timber companies have traditionally opened their lands to modern firearm hunters during established seasons. Archery and muzzleloader hunters may not have full access, particularly in vehicles. Access levels change and can vary by season, year, or landowner. Most often, access is influenced by industrial fire classification issued by DNR. Hunters are urged to respect landowners and adhere to any access restrictions they have implemented.

General description of the “dot” system

Several timber companies in District 17 use the dot system, including Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global. This is a system of colored dots posted at the start of a road to indicate

what level of access is allowed beyond that point. It is intended to give the public a clear understanding of what roads are open to public motorized access.

Normally under the dot system, access is granted for daylight hours only. Landowners usually understand that some hunters go in an hour or so early to get to their hunting areas and sometimes may come out a little late. Hunters should always stop and read signs. While several landowners use the dot system, they all have minor differences. In some cases, landowners close gates in the evenings to prevent unauthorized access.

- Red Dot – No motorized access
- Yellow Dot – Motorized access on weekends only
- Green Dot – Motorized access for licensed vehicles on maintained roads
- No Dot – No motorized access

Contact information for major timber companies

Some landowners have hotlines and/or websites where hunters can find information about public access. However, many do not have staff members dedicated to answering hunter questions. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to public access on private industrial forestlands.

Table 7. Contact information for District 17 timber companies.

Timber Company	GMUs	Phone Number
Manulife Investment Management (no website)	658, 673, 681	360-795-3653
Manulife	Various other GMUs	800-782-1493
Rayonier	Various	360-533-7000
Green Diamond	Various	360-426-3381
Weyerhaeuser	Various	800-636-6531
Forest Investment Associates	658, 673	404-261-9575
Grays Harbor County	642, 648, 658	No phone number
Olympic Resource Management	642, 648, 658, 673	No phone number
Lewis and Clark Timberlands	684	No phone number

General overview of hunter access in each GMU

One of the most common questions the Department gets from hunters is, “what is hunter access like in the GMU I want to hunt?” Generally, this question refers to the amount of motorized access and not access in general. It is important to differentiate the two, because hunters enjoy a high level of access in all District 17 GMUs. However, the type of access varies between motorized and non-motorized.

The Department developed the following rating system for District 17 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they are thinking of hunting. Access ratings are specific to the level of motorized access allowed and does not refer to the level of access in general. Several GMUs have fee access areas that grant the permit or lease holders a higher level of access. The following ratings are based on a hunter not having a lease or permit.

More information about each rating is available below:

- **Excellent** – Most, if not all, of the main logging roads are open, as well as most of the spur roads.
- **Good** – There is a mix of open and closed roads, with some main logging roads open, but many of the spur roads are closed to motorized access.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is closed to motorized access but may be open to non-motorized access.

Information provided is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Information is updated when available. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have other questions related to hunter access.

GMU 618 (Matheney) – Access Rating: Excellent

GMU 618 is dominated by federal lands included in the Olympic National Forest. The minority of land not managed by USFS is under state management via DNR.

GMU 638 (Quinault Ridge) – Access Rating: Good

The majority of GMU 638 is associated with the Olympic National Forest and managed by USFS. There are numerous small landowners in areas outside of the national forest. Many of the more productive areas are private lands not considered industrial forestlands. The Quinault Valley is not recommended for hunters who are not familiar with landownership boundaries. Rayonier also has some signed recreational lease areas.

GMU 642 (Copalis) – Access Rating: Poor

The primary landowner in this GMU is Rayonier, with recreational lease, seasonal permit, and general access areas.

GMU 648 (Wynoochee) – Access Rating: Poor

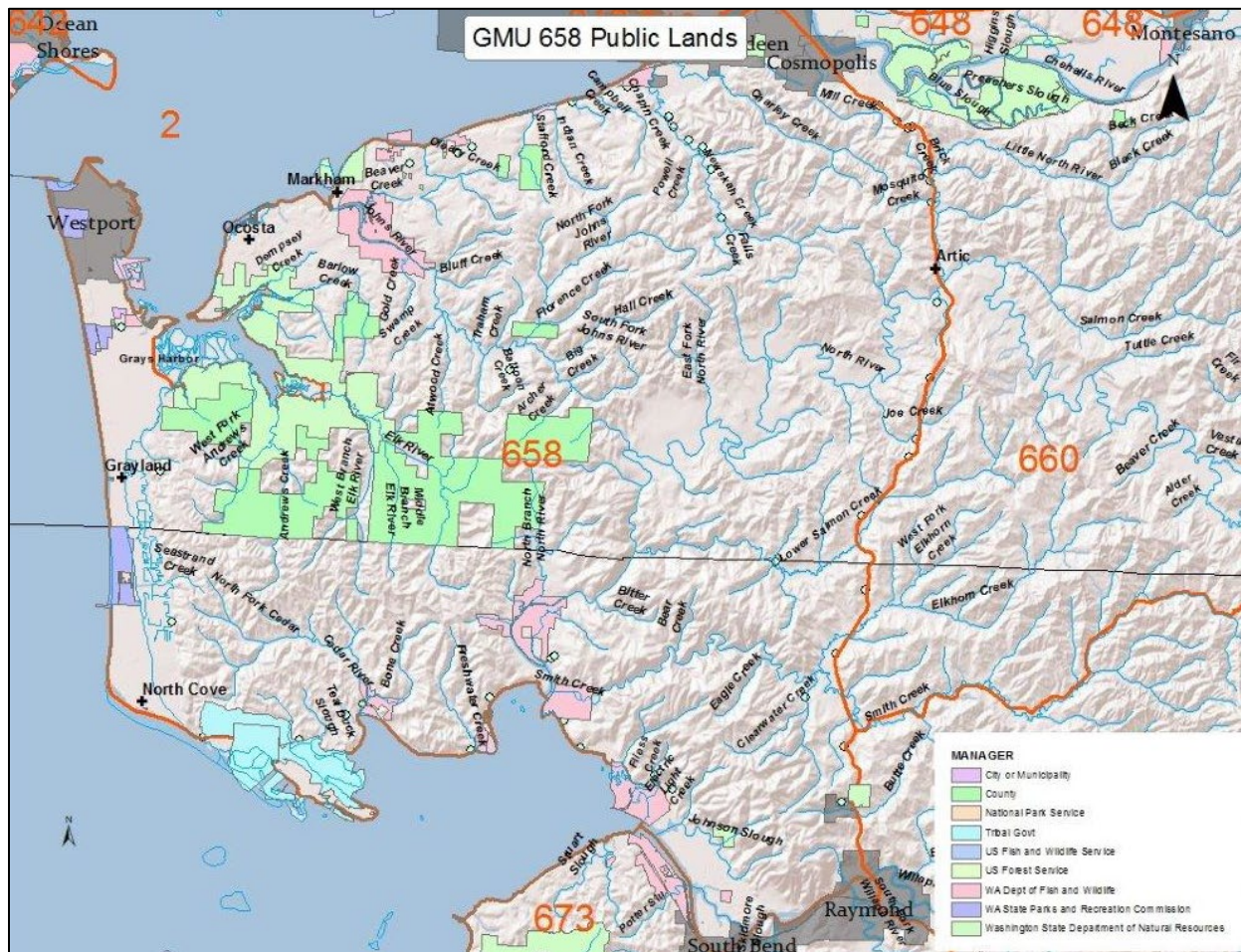
Overall, GMU 648 consists mostly of private industrial forestlands, but there are also several smaller landowners. Primary landowners in GMU 648 include Weyerhaeuser, Rayonier, Green Diamond, Fruit Growers, Grays Harbor County, and Campbell Global. A portion of the GMU is comprised of the Hoquiam and Aberdeen watersheds, which are closed to public access. In addition, several landowners have a cooperative road management agreement with WDFW. Hunters should follow all posted signs. Rayonier has a few signed lease access areas in this GMU. Most Rayonier lands in this GMU are managed under their general access program.

GMU 658 (North River) – Access Rating: Good

Primary landowners in GMU 658 are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Grays Harbor County, Campbell Global, Green Diamond, and DNR. Overall, access is good but varies among landowners. The majority of Hancock property is gated, but some main logging roads are open during the general modern firearm season. DNR lands in this GMU are surrounded by private forestlands but accessible by non-motorized access across private timberlands. Many landowners surrounding the public lands open gates for reasonable access once fire seasons end. Rayonier has some recreation leases and general access areas in this GMU. Access to Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU is restricted to permit and lease holders.

WDFW recently added 1,500 acres to the Elk River Unit just south of Westport and east of Twin Harbors State Park. These lands are not yet included in the following map.

Figure 111. Map of public and tribal land ownership in GMU 658.



GMU 660 (Minot Peak) – Access Rating: Poor

The primary landowner in GMU 660 is Weyerhaeuser. All their lands in this GMU are managed under their general access permit program. DNR owns a small portion of this GMU. To prevent elk from being pressured onto farms in the Chehalis Valley, motorized access is limited on DNR-managed lands.

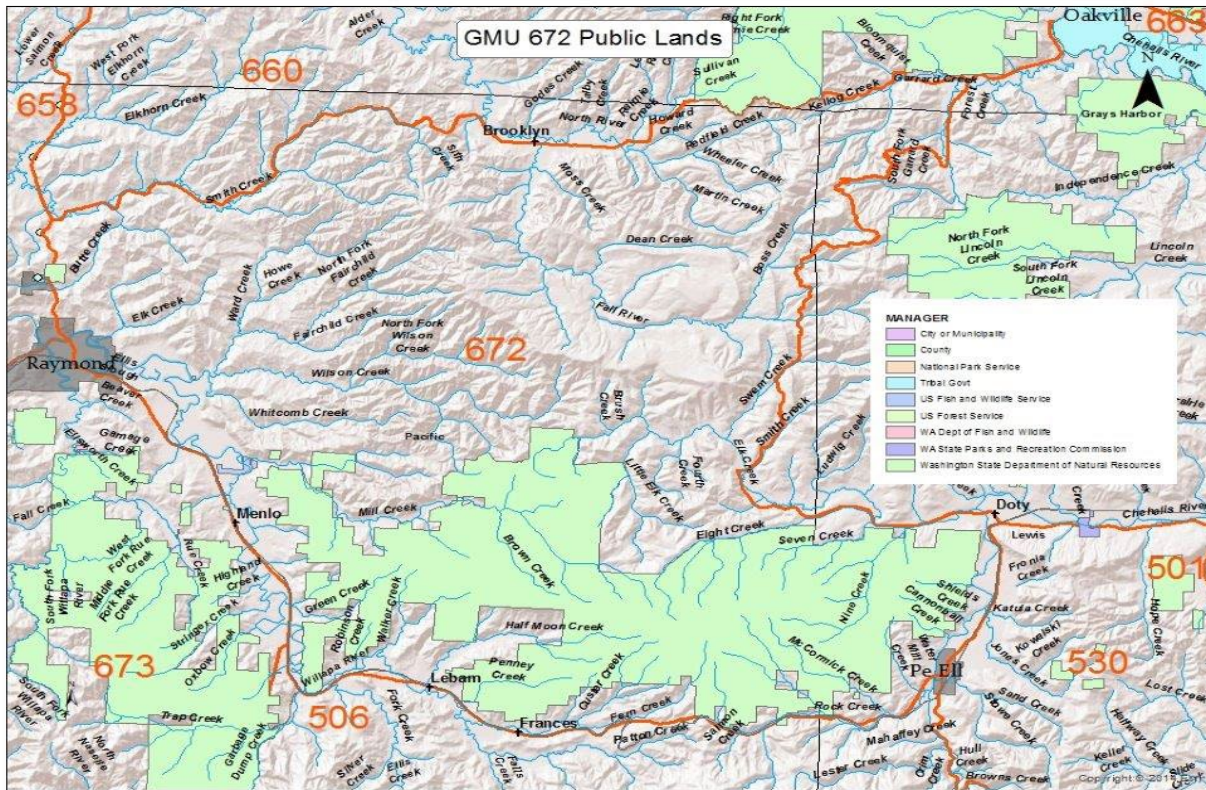
GMU 663 (Capitol Peak) – Access Rating: Excellent

DNR owns and manages the majority (more than 80%) of GMU 663, and most roads are open to motorized access during the modern firearm deer season. This area also has ORV trails. Hunters should adhere to all posted rules.

GMU 672 (Fall River) – Access Rating: Good

The primary landowners in GMU 672 are Weyerhaeuser and DNR. All Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU are only accessible to permit holders.

Figure 112. Map of public land ownership in GMU 672.



GMU 673 (Williams Creek) – Access Rating: Poor

Access in this GMU is quite variable and depends on the landowner. Primary private timberland owners are Hancock, FIA, Hampton, and Campbell Global. DNR also owns large tracts of land. In most areas, Hancock limits access to non-motorized but opens a few main logging roads during the general modern firearm season to disperse hunters and allow some interior access. FIA has recreational lease and fee access areas in this GMU available through [American Forest Management](#).

GMU 681 (Bear River) – Access Rating: Good

Hunters can expect a lower level of access than in the past. The dot system is used by some owners, but it is not consistent because of the checkerboard ownership. Primary private landowners are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, and the Nature Conservancy. Rayonier has some leased lands in this GMU and some general permit access areas. Portions of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 681, and hunters should [contact the refuge](#) before hunting on the refuge, as special regulations apply in some areas. Hunters can also call the refuge at 360-484-3482. Nature Conservancy lands are open to hunting, but motorized access is restricted. Weyerhaeuser has recreational lease and permit access areas in this GMU.

GMU 684 (Long Beach) – Access Rating: Poor

Except for Leadbetter Point, the majority of this GMU consists of private property. Hunters should make sure they have permission to access private property in GMU 684. Portions of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 684, and hunters planning to hunt on the refuge should [contact the refuge](#) beforehand or call 360-484-3482, as special hunting regulations apply.

[Lewis and Clark Timberlands](#) owns some property in the unit. Access is allowed via a no-cost permit found at: <https://nncpermits.com/PermitHome.aspx>

GMU 699 (Long Island) – Access Rating: Poor

USFWS owns and manages the entire GMU. Access is by boat only, but camping is allowed in designated areas. Hunters should contact [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#) for details or call 360-484-3482.

Private Lands Access Program

Several private landowners in District 17 are enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, cooperative agreements with these landowners have not been finalized. Most landowners are expected to renew their cooperative agreements for the 2024 hunting season. Hunters are encouraged to check or call the Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) to periodically check for updated information.

Online tools and maps

Most District 17 GMUs are a checkerboard of ownerships, and it can be challenging to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. Fortunately, several online tools and resources are available. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources:

DNR public lands quadrangle (PLQ) maps

The best sources for identifying the specific location of public lands are [DNR PLQ maps](#), which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website.

Online parcel databases

Hunters can search Pacific County tax parcels using [Mapsifter](#), a mapping program that allows users to zoom in to their area of interest, click on a parcel, and identify who owns that parcel.

Hunters can search Grays Harbor tax parcels on the [Grays Harbor County website](#).

Private industry has downloadable mobile applications, which can be user friendly and highly functional when afield.

WDFW's "Places to go hunting" webpage

WDFW's updated webpage includes additional information on "[Places To Go Hunting](#)." This page includes large format printable GMU maps.