

2018

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Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 11 HUNTING PROSPECTS

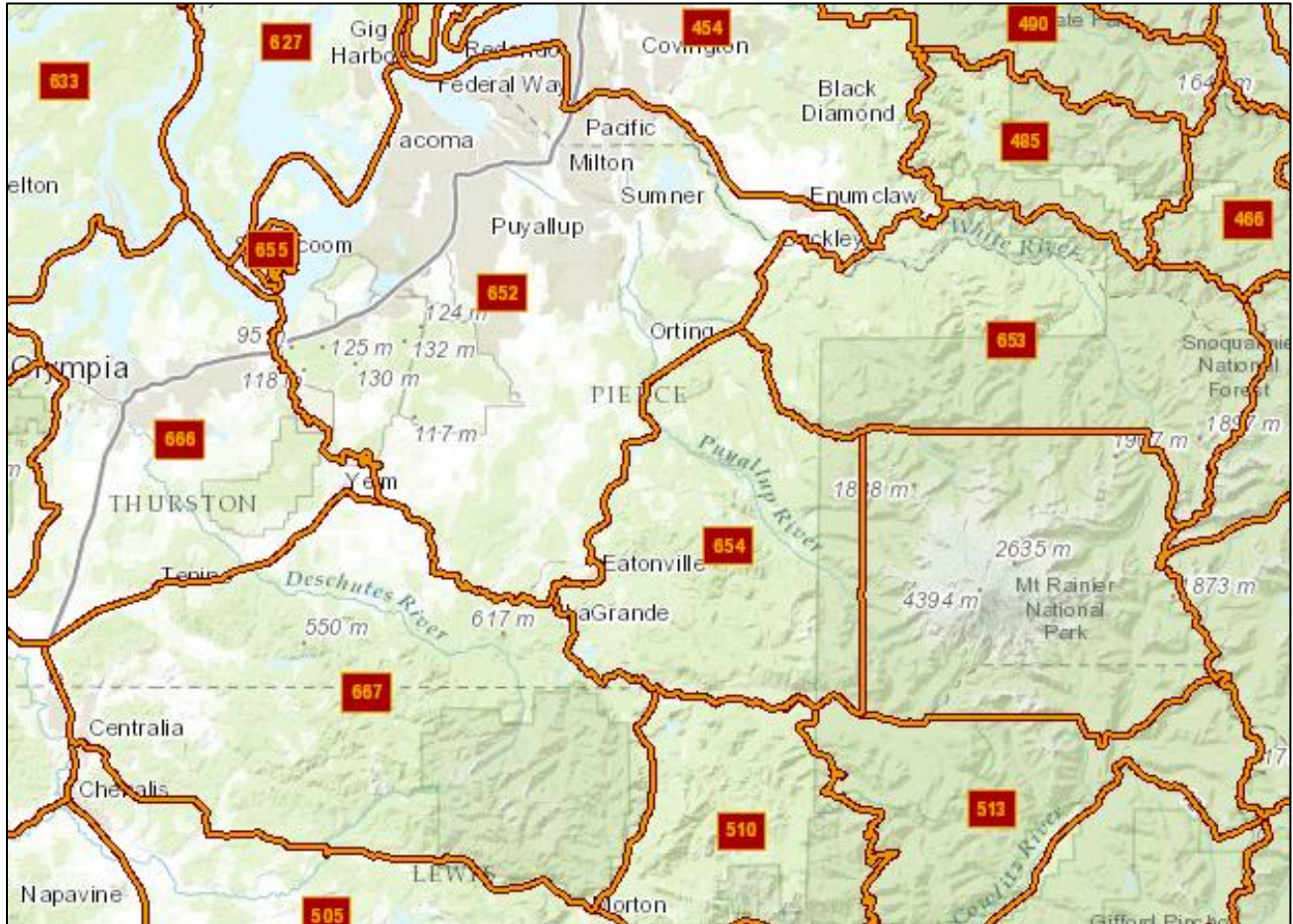
Thurston and Pierce counties and GMU 667 of Lewis County

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DISTRICT 11 GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Game Management Units (GMUs) that comprise 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 both 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.



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 hunting on waterways of Puget Sound to deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW's Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie wildlife areas (GMU 667), and Washington 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 accessed free of charge. U.S. Forest Service land (federal) surrounding Mount Rainier National Park in the eastern portion of the district is also accessible free of charge.

Hunters and anglers can find maps and land ownership information at the following:

- Pierce County: <https://matterhornwab.co.pierce.wa.us/publicgis>
- Thurston County: <http://map.co.thurston.wa.us/Html5Viewer/Index.html?viewer=Parcels.Main>
- Lewis County: <http://maps.lewiscountywa.gov/topic/assessor-parcel-maps/>
- WDFW statewide: <http://apps.wdfw.wa.gov/gohunt/>

Timberlands throughout the district are owned or managed by various private commercial timber companies, each having their own access regulations, including some with fee access programs. Hancock Timber Resource has sold significant land to various other companies/tribes in Pierce County (see Figure 1 below). Although most of those new owners still run their public access through Hancock's Fee Access Program, this is likely to change in the coming years with each company controlling its own access program. Most of these commercial timberlands provide excellent small and large game hunting opportunity.

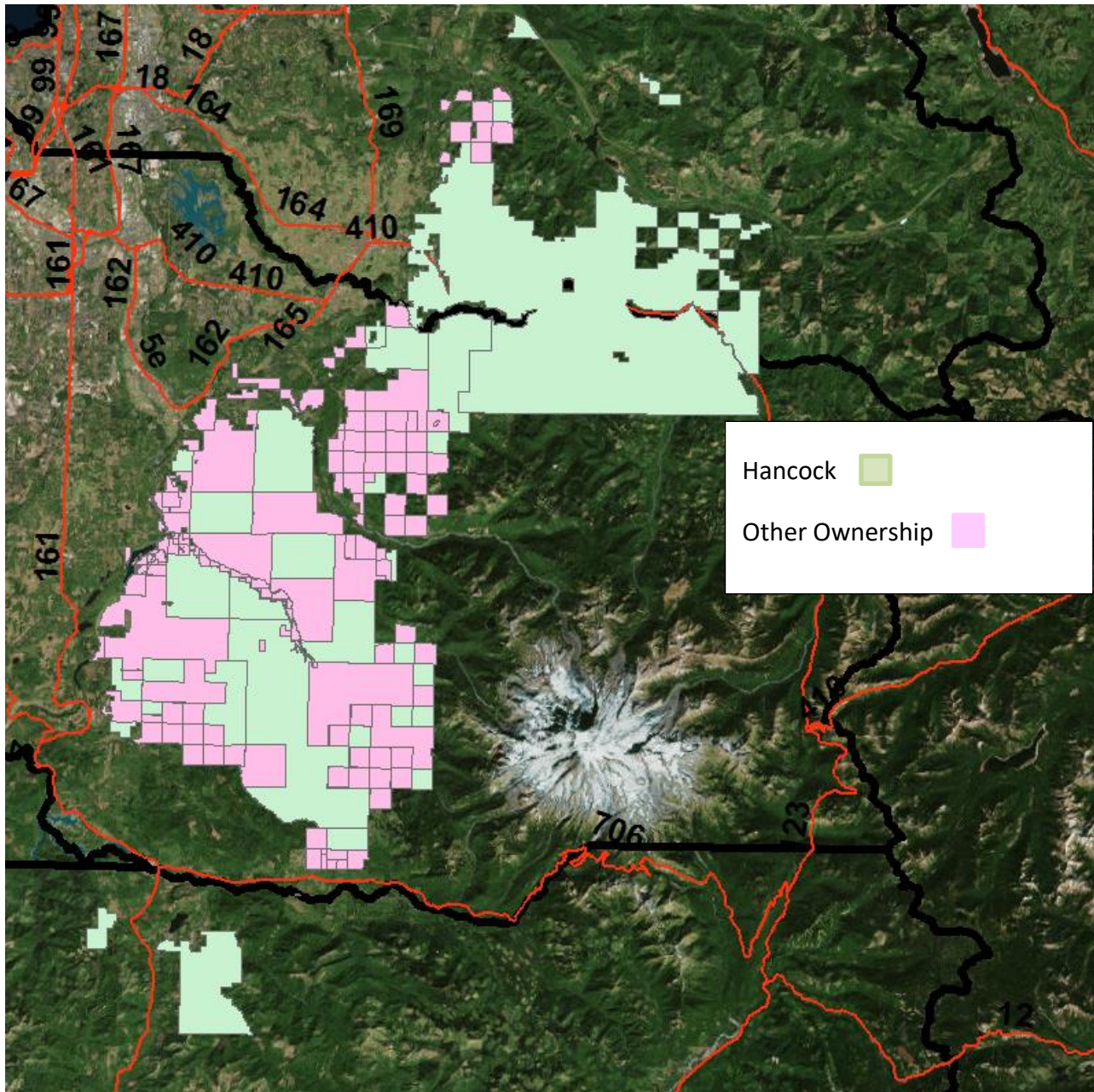


Figure 1. Hancock Timber Resource and neighboring commercial private timberland ownership, Eastern King, Pierce, Lewis counties, 2018.

In eastern Pierce County (GMUs 653 and 654), the following ownership and contact information may be found:

- Hampton Lumber/Mid Valley Resources (access managed under Hancock Access Program): <http://www.hamptonlumber.com/our-company/>.

- Hancock Timber Resource: <http://www.hancockrecreation.com/>
- Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (access managed by Hancock Access Program): <http://www.muckleshoot.nsn.us/services/culture--wildlife/wildlife-program.aspx>
- Pope Resources (Olympic Resource Management; access managed under Hancock Access Program): <http://www.orm.com/Timberlands/PublicUse.aspx>
- Weyerhaeuser: <https://www.weyerhaeuser.com/timberlands/recreational-access/>

In Thurston County (GMUs 666 and 667):

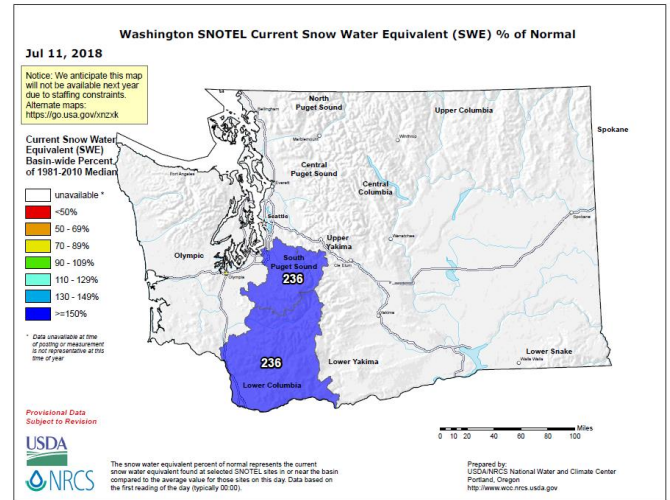
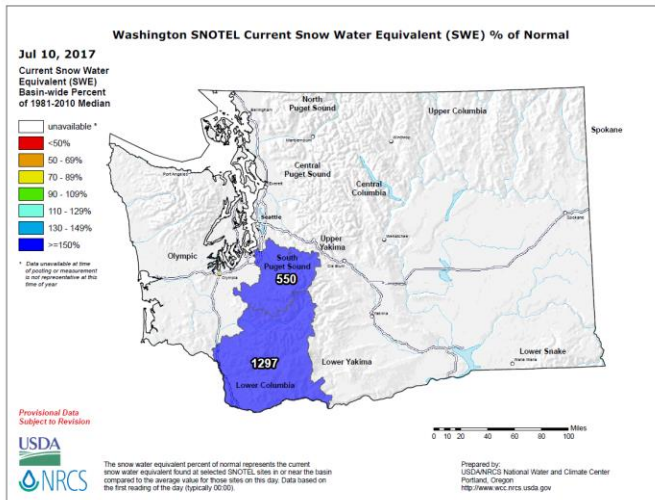
- Manke Lumber Company: <http://www.mankelumber.com/contact.html>
- Port Blakely: <https://portblakely.com/us-forestry/public-access>
- Weyerhaeuser: <https://www.weyerhaeuser.com/timberlands/recreational-access/>

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 during the hunting season. 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 the South Puget Sound Region.

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston counties. Maps of Pierce County firearm restriction areas can be seen on the Pierce County website's [Public GIS tool](#) and the Pierce County firearm regulations can be [found here](#). Maps of no-shooting and controlled shooting zones in Thurston County can be [seen here](#).

The South Cascades of Washington, including District 11, retained higher than average water within the snowpack from fall 2017 to late spring 2018 compared to long range median (although less than the preceding year--see graph below). Although such a trend represents higher snowfall and can result in over winter mortality of big game, it also results in early and abundant forage for game species that survive. In general, the conditions favor a good hunting season in 2018-19.

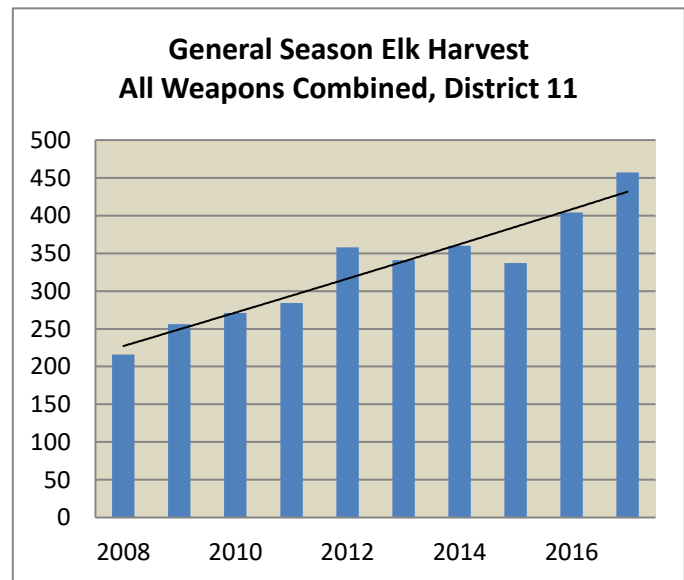
Two notable wildfires in 2017 occurred within District 11: the Norse Peak and American fires. These fires burned a total of 56,241 acres in eastern Pierce and Yakima counties according to the USFS. Hunters should be advised that downed logs/brush and dead standing timber continue to pose a safety hazard to recreationists in most the burned area, so take caution. The fires are expected to have benefitted big game species by opening the canopy, adding nitrogen to the soil, with a resulting lift to forage species. Consistent moisture through slow release snow pack will add to the benefit, which is good news to hunters in 2018-19.



Snowpack conditions from South Puget Sound to Columbia River as percent of normal July 2017 vs July 2018 (NRCS 2018).

ELK

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier Elk Herds are partially contained in District 11, providing ample opportunity to harvest elk. Elk availability should continue to increase in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier Elk Herds continues to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 15 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in that unit. Hunters report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt.



The larger portion of each elk herd migrates down from high alpine meadows in Mount Rainier National Park to lowland winter range. Public lands and private commercial timberlands bordering the park are good prospects. Hunters are encouraged to scout for elk leaving the Mount Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area and the White River into the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Forested areas off USFS Roads 71, 73, and 74, and Bullion and Big Crow Basins 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. USFS, which permits the ski resort, wants to remind hunters that service roads built and maintained by Crystal Mountain Ski Resort are not open to the public, but hunters may ask for permission from the ski resort to haul out a harvested animal.

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 boot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. UW 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 as follows: entire 5 Road is closed, the 8 Road is open from Ashford to Scott Turner Road, and the 6 Road is closed except for hunter's having a disabled access permit (see Disabled Hunting on the WDFW website for more information). 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. Call the DNR office in Enumclaw if you have a question about a specific road (360-802-7055). Maps of Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forest, as well as other Washington Department of Natural Resource public lands in the South Puget Sound, can be [found here](#). Hunters can legally walk, bike, or horse ride behind locked gates for hunting unless otherwise posted.

Subherds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and Skookumchuk Wildlife Area (GMU 667). Hunters are encouraged to scout the area from the [Skookumchuk Wildlife Area](#) south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is only allowed under specialized permits which require a mining escort (two senior and two disabled weekend permit hunts will be offered in 2018, five permits each). Some elk can occasionally be found and hunted on the West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area in south Thurston County (GMU 666) and on JBLM property in Pierce County (GMU 652). Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744), and off Delphi Road SW in western Thurston County



Successful late season deer hunter, GMU 654 District 11.

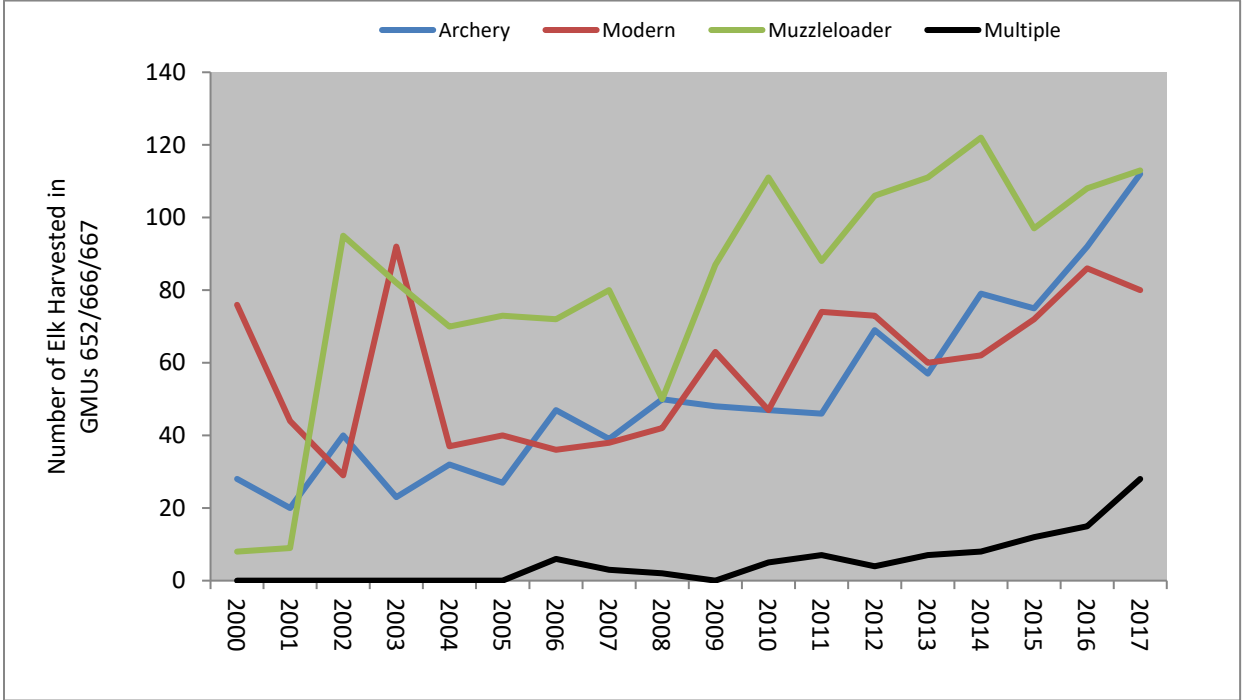
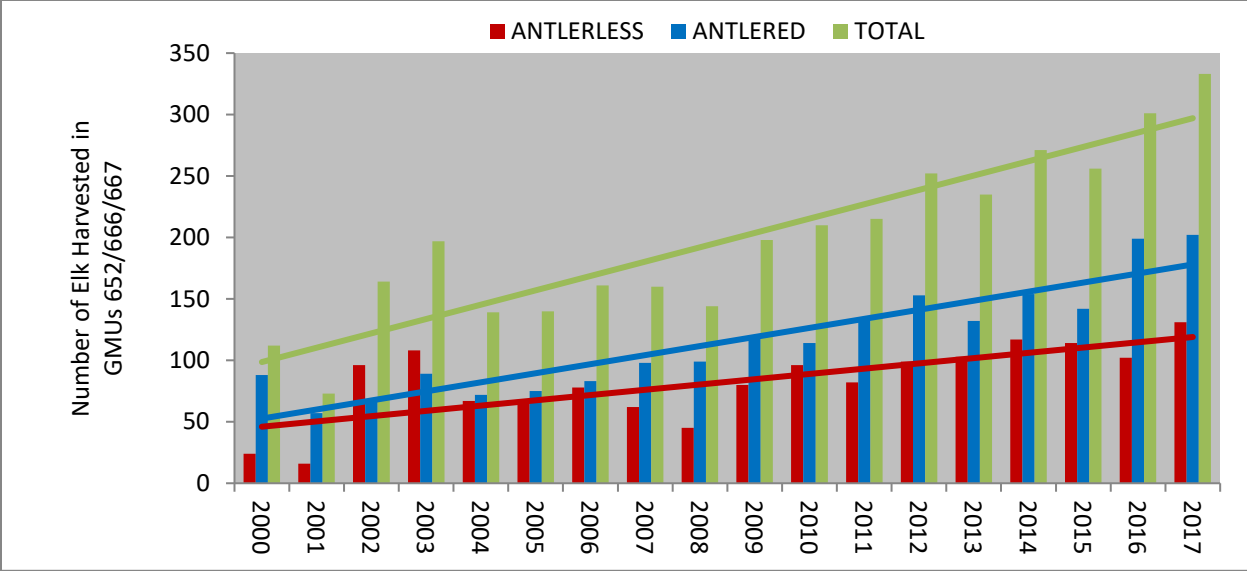
(GMU 666). Elk cannot be hunted on property owned by USFWS near 123rd Ave SW in the Black River refuge of GMU 666 (e.g. former Weaks Dairy).

Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Rd SW). However, hunters must request permission to access private lands, and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g. visit property and ask for permission). Elk Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced in size to encompass

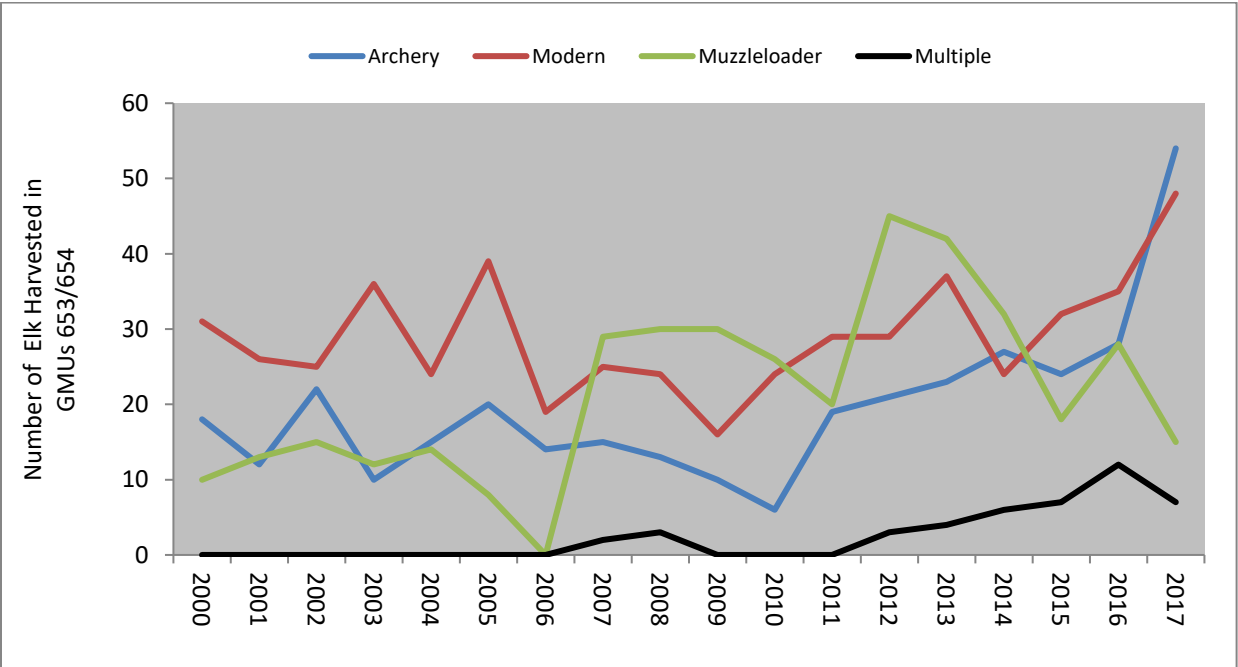
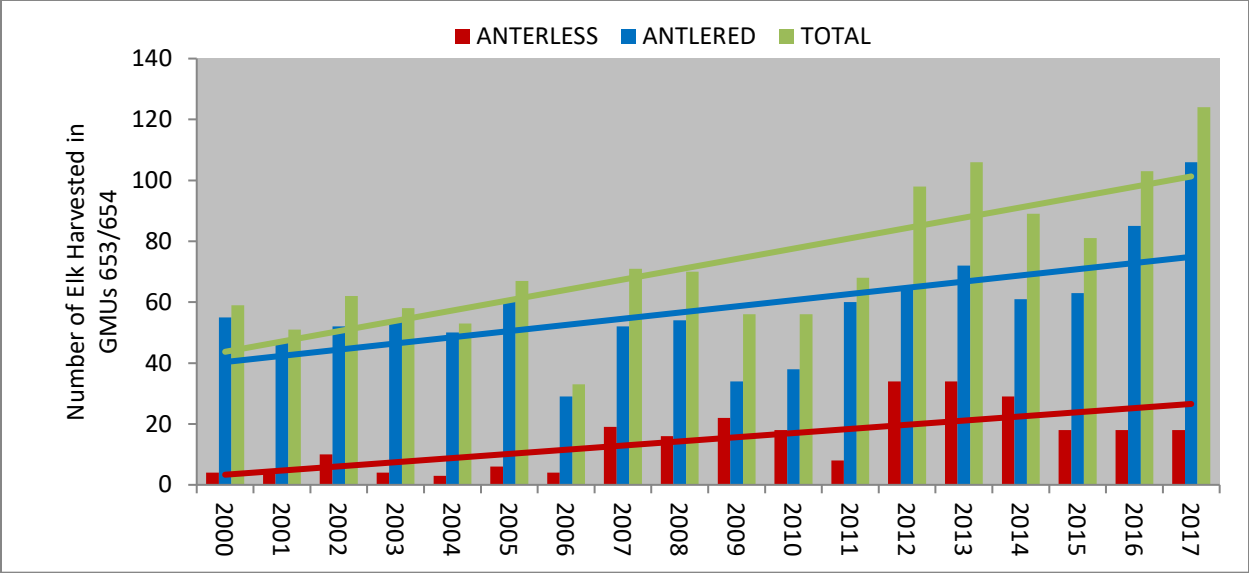
primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. There were several new hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aimed at conserving elk for tribal purposes on the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 was expanded and provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season, as well as three separate winter antlerless hunts allowing up to 10 elk per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is comprised primarily of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes, and supports approximately 150-200 total elk. Access to these properties is limited and hunters interested in these hunts are encouraged to obtain access prior to applying for these permits. The local WDFW conflict specialist may be able to assist with suggesting access sites.

Three antlerless elk permit hunts for controlling private property damage are also provided in the Hanaford Elk Area 6069, which provide five permits each (a November, December and January hunt). Finally, general Region 6 Master Hunter elk permits (hunt choice #2717 in 2018) are also available. Hunters drawn are often sent to damage properties in both the Buckley/Enumclaw and Hanaford area, as needed, and elsewhere in the region. Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation.

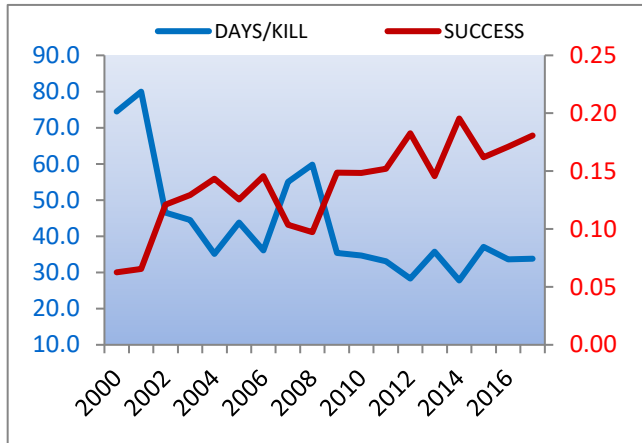
General season elk harvest has been gradually increasing over the past several years for all weapons within GMUs 652, 666, and 667. This makes for good prospects for harvesting an elk in those GMUs in 2018. Muzzleloaders experienced the highest harvest and for many years the highest increasing trend in harvest in those GMUs followed by archery and modern firearm.



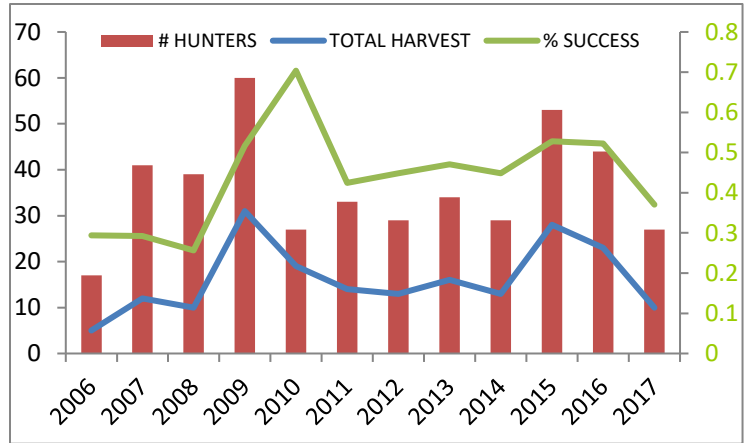
Although the overall harvest trend has been gradually increasing in GMUs 653 and 654 since 2000, muzzleloader actually declined. This is partly reflected in changes in hunting regulation opportunity for muzzleloaders over the years but is balanced by greater opportunity in other units.



Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Hancock Timber Resources Group managed forestland (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653, and White River Tree Farms owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and managed by Hancock in GMU 653) all support elk but require a vehicle access permit obtained by contacting the company directly (see more information under Deer). Hunters who opt to buy the access permit can expect to see good numbers of elk on Hancock and other commercial timberlands, particularly in GMUs 653 and 654.

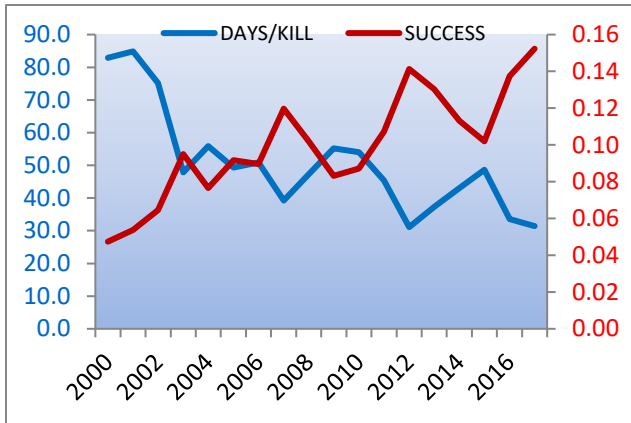


GMU 652 (all weapons)

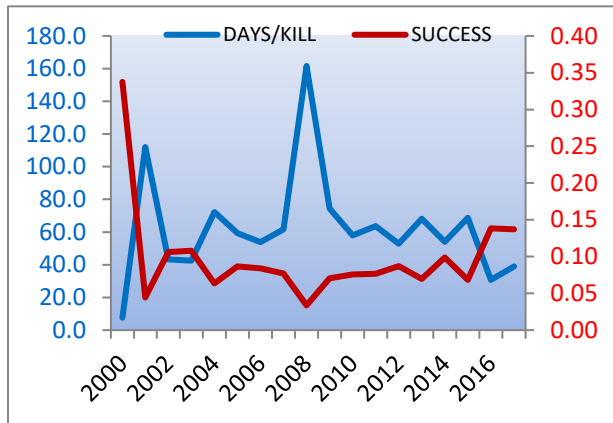


GMU 653 (bull permit only hunt)

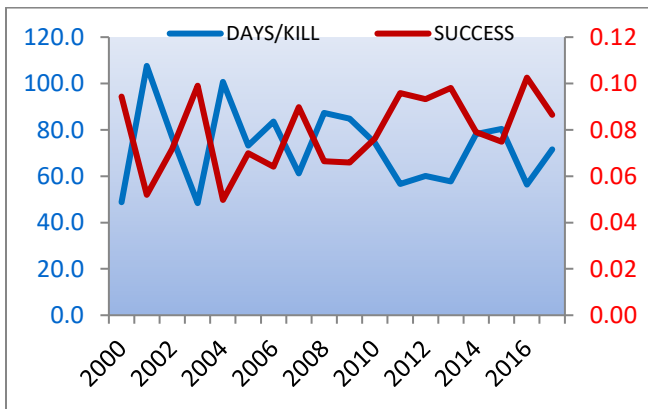
Hunter success as expressed by the number of days it took to harvest an animal is displayed in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (GMU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk). Success has been generally increasing in most GMUs over the past 10 years. This is tracking elk population recovery in both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. The exception is the Deschutes GMU 666, where access to hunting grounds is difficult due to the higher percentage of privately owned land. Regardless, success for hunters that have gained private land access in that GMU has remained stable and thus prospects are good for those hunters obtaining access in 2016-17. Elk hunters are also less successful in GMU 667, which in general supports fewer elk than the northern GMUs. The bull only permit hunt in GMU 653 has the highest success rate in the district, averaging 40 percent since it began in 2006. This is a rugged, high alpine hunt, but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit.



GMU 654 (all weapons)



GMU 666 (all weapons)



GMU 667 (all weapons)

DEER

Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited. Surveys are not done annually, and when they are done, they have consisted of one survey done in the highest quality location (Vail Tree Farm). Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, timberlands worthy of scouting for both deer and elk include the Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group managed properties (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653, and White River Tree Farms owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and managed by Hancock in GMU 653), DNR's Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMUs 654) and DNR and USFS managed lands (scattered across GMUs 653 and 654).



District Biologist with successful deer hunter at Vail Tree Farm deer check station in the Skookumchuck Unit 667.

A limited access recreation program is in effect for Vail Tree Farm. Hunters are required by Weyerhaeuser to purchase an access permit in order to access Vail Tree Farm. Motorized and non-motorized permits allow access Aug. 1 – July 23 and typically sell out well in advance of the hunting season. All forestry operations continue during the permit season. To see or purchase permits and additional information, go to [Weyerhaeuser website](#) or call 866-636-6531. Hancock Timber Resources also requires an access permit for motorized access into the Kapowsin Timberlands, Eatonville Tree Farm (owned by Hancock), White River Tree Farm (owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe but managed by Hancock). Access into Kapowsin and Eatonville by horseback, walking, or bicycling is also allowed, but only if you have a motorized access permit, as there is currently not a non-motorized access program for these areas. Non-motorized access is allowed through the non-motorized access program into the White River Forest. Permits allow access April 1, 2018 – March 30, 2019, with no access from July 1-4 or during the elk bull season. To see or purchase permits and additional information, go to the Hancock [website](#) or call 800-782-1493.

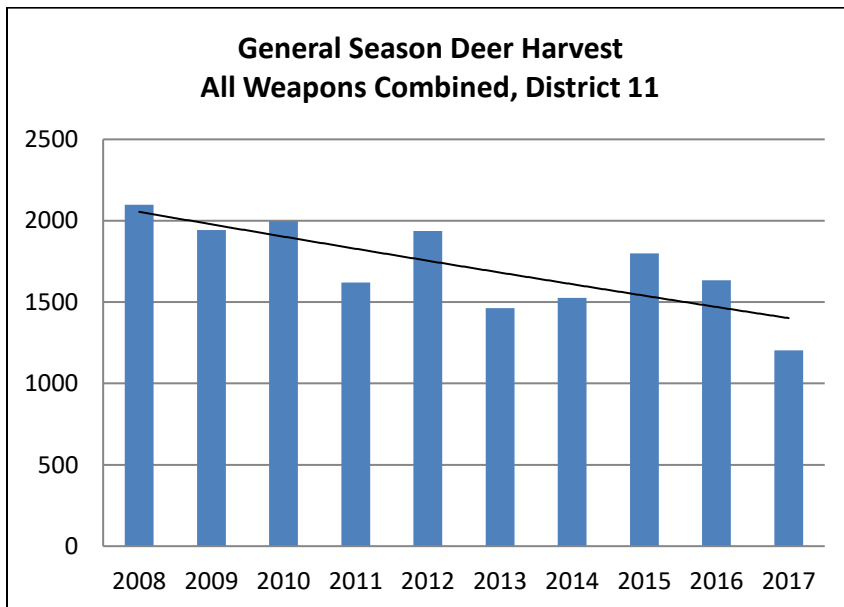


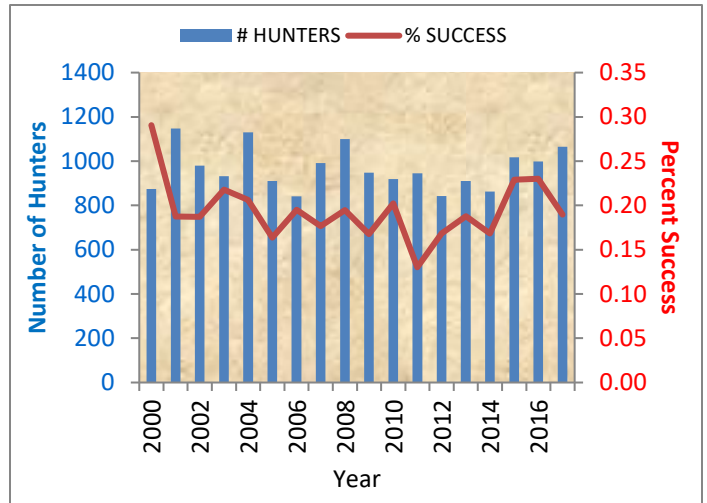
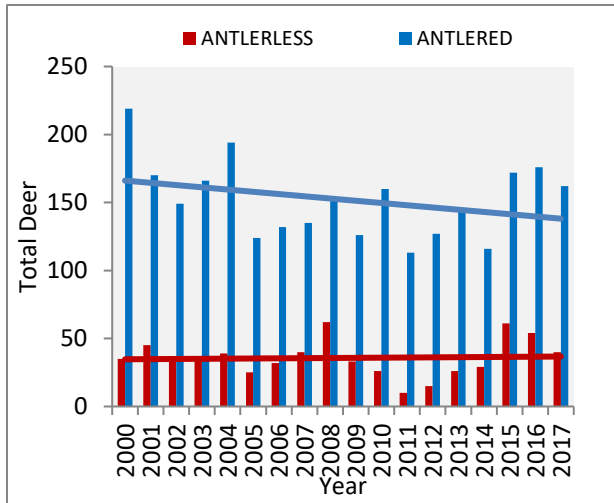
High elevation trophy black-tail hunting experiences can be found in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654 accessed by US Forest Service road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (see description under Elk).

Deer harvest in District 11 has continued to decline since 2008, and most notably in 2017. Harvest regulations have altered somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the years, which plays a role in harvest trends. Harvest in most GMUs in the district have remained stable over the past 10 years (note: declining trend in GMUs 653 and 667 are caused by one year spikes in harvest only and don't reflect a trend). This includes GMU 667 remaining stable despite Weyerhaeuser's transition to a permit only access system on the Vail Tree Farm, which composes a bulk of that unit's harvest. Anderson Island was previously

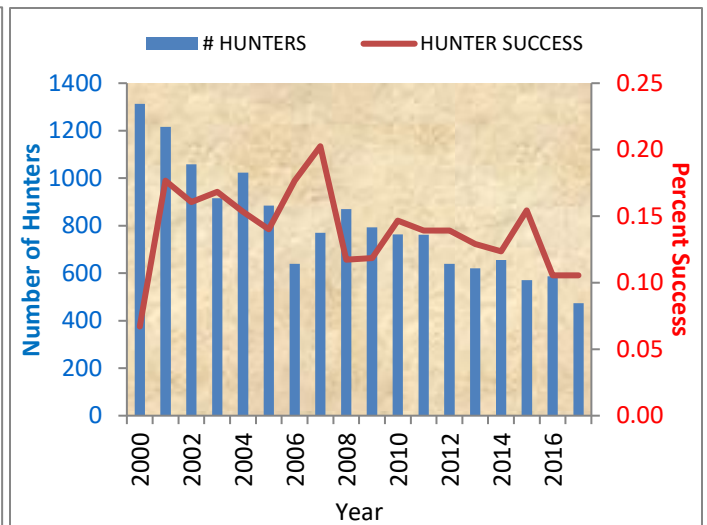
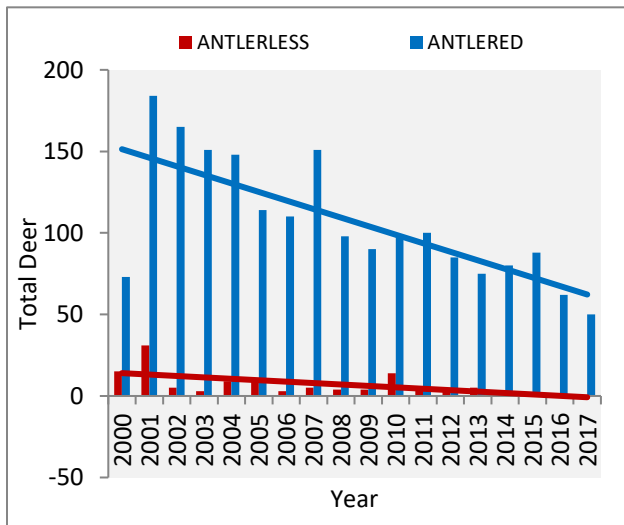
Opening day modern firearm season [SMSgt S. Tkach III (Ret), 2015].

Deer Area 6014 and had antlerless permit hunts only. The entire island became GMU 655 in 2013 and has since provided both general seasons (both sex) and antlerless permit hunts (55 permits in 2018-19). Ferry logistics and property access reduce the actual harvest despite plentiful deer on the island. GMU 655, followed by GMU 667, continues to have the highest deer hunter success rates, while GMU 653 has the lowest of any District 11 GMU.

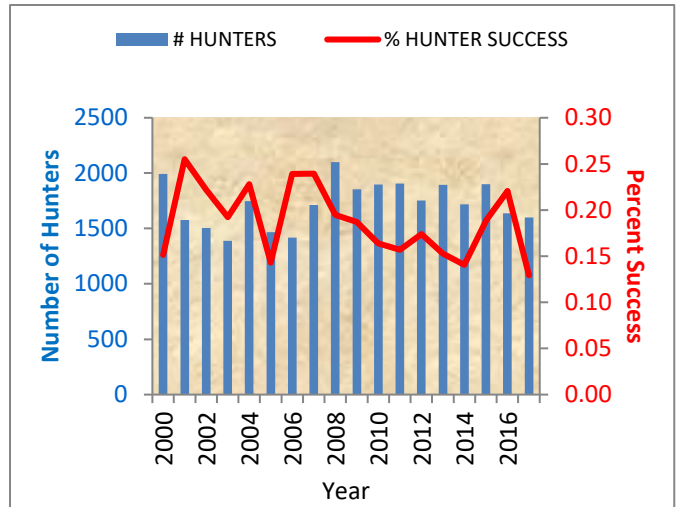
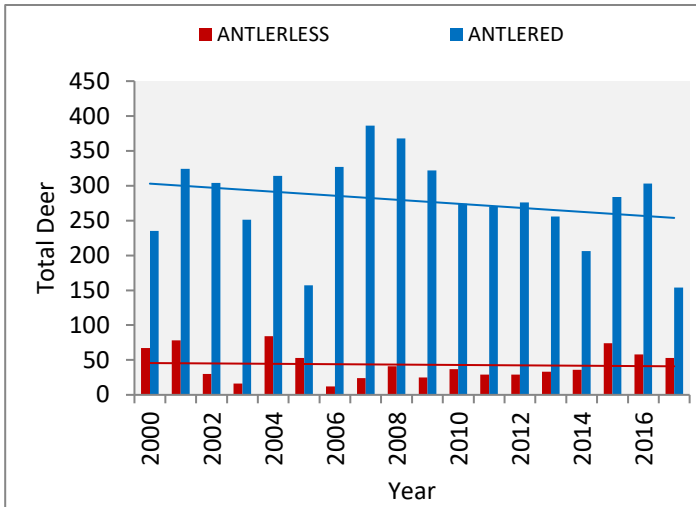




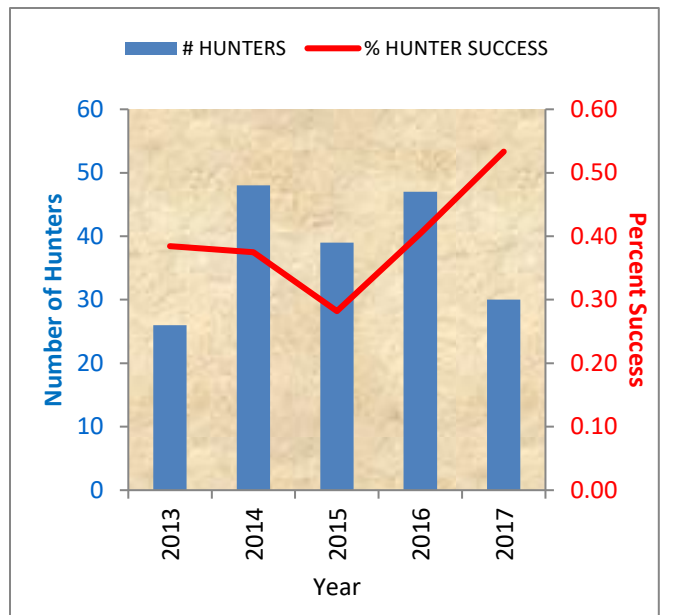
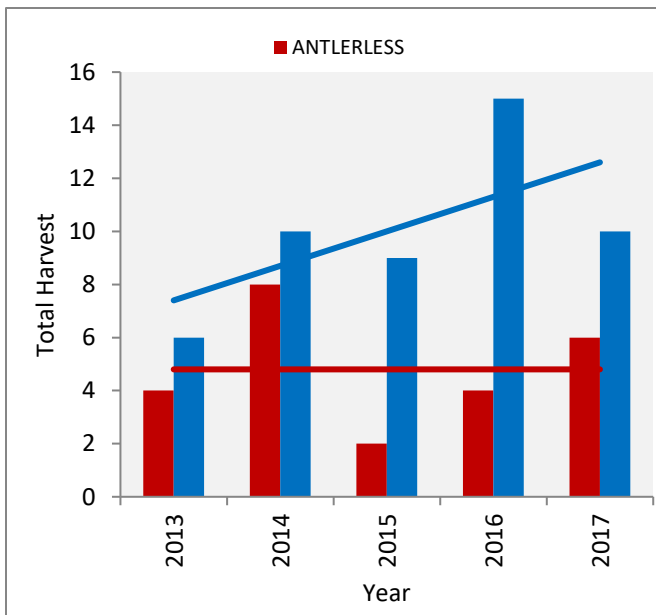
GMU 652 (Puyallup) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)



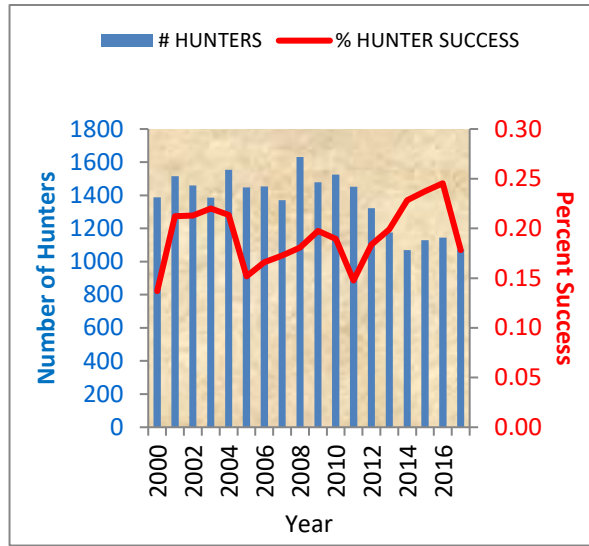
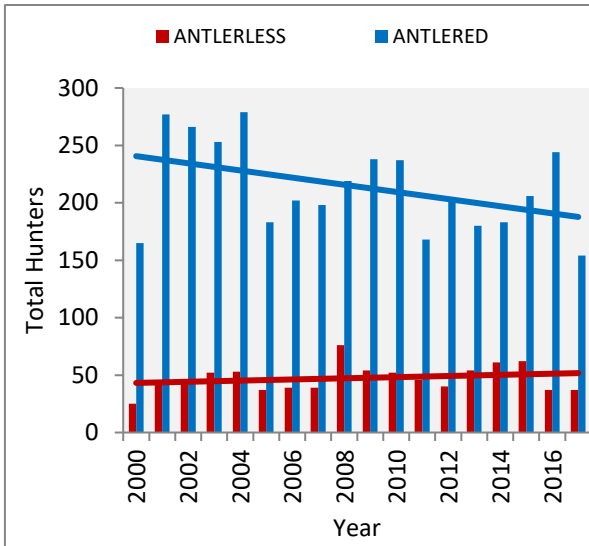
GMU 653 (White River) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)



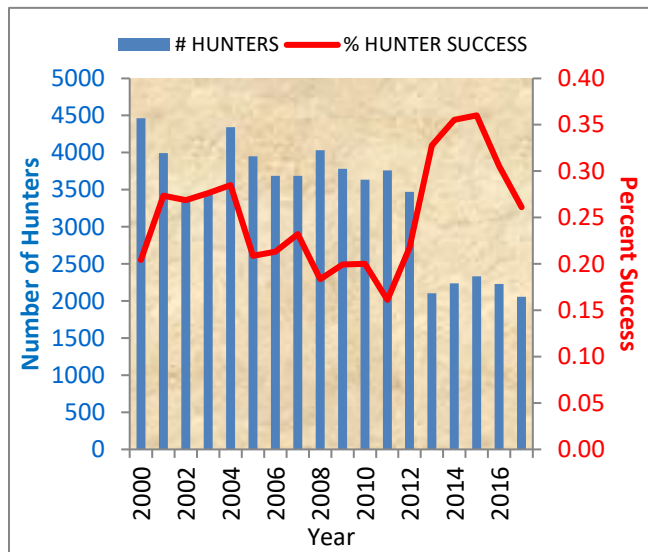
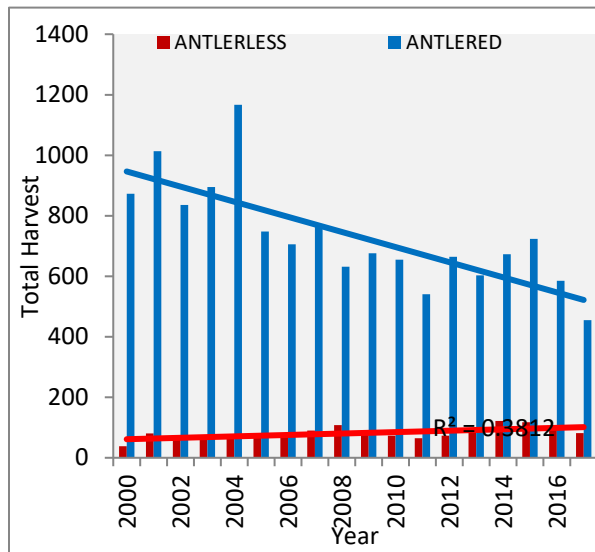
GMU 654 (Mashel) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)



GMU 655 (Anderson Island) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)



GMU 666 (Deschutes) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)



GMU 667 (Skookumchuck) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)

BEAR

District 11 comprises GMUs in two Black Bear Management Units (BBMUs): Puget Sound (GMU 652, 666, and 667) and South Cascades (GMU 653 and 654). Each of these BBMUs also contains additional GMUs outside the boundaries of District 11. A bear season is not provided in GMU 655. There is opportunity within District 11 to hunt bear both in the fall general and spring special permit hunting seasons.

Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands.

Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group-managed lands (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653), Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Parks (GMU 654), and Joint Base Lewis McChord offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district. (See comments earlier regarding access permit requirements for Weyerhaeuser and Hancock properties).

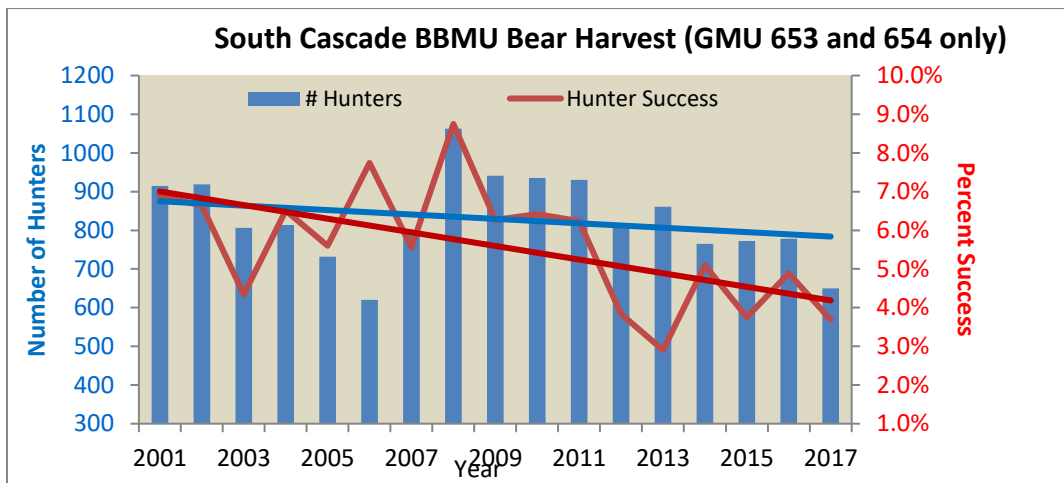
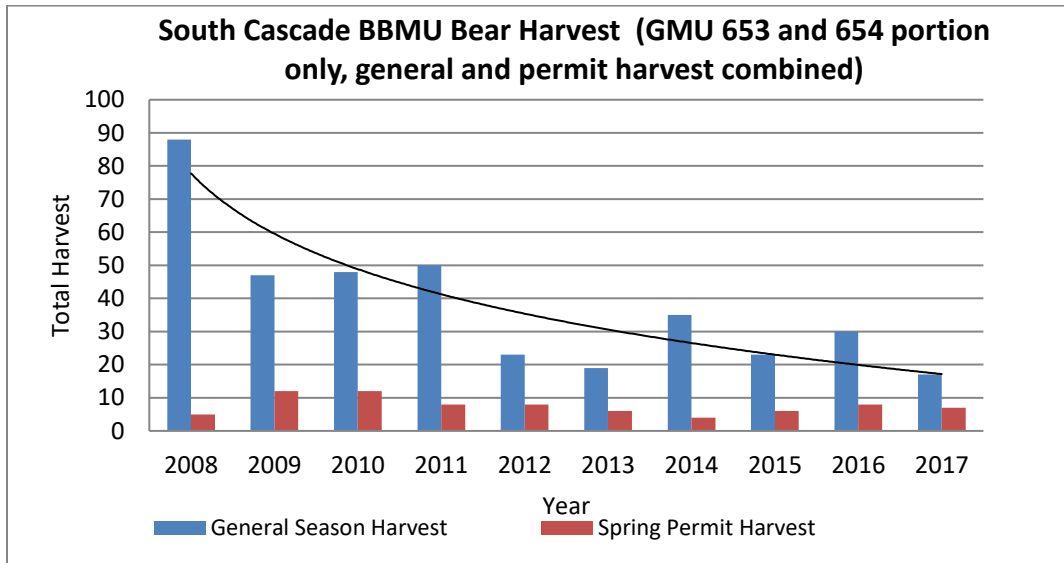


First big game harvest (S. Holznagel 2014).

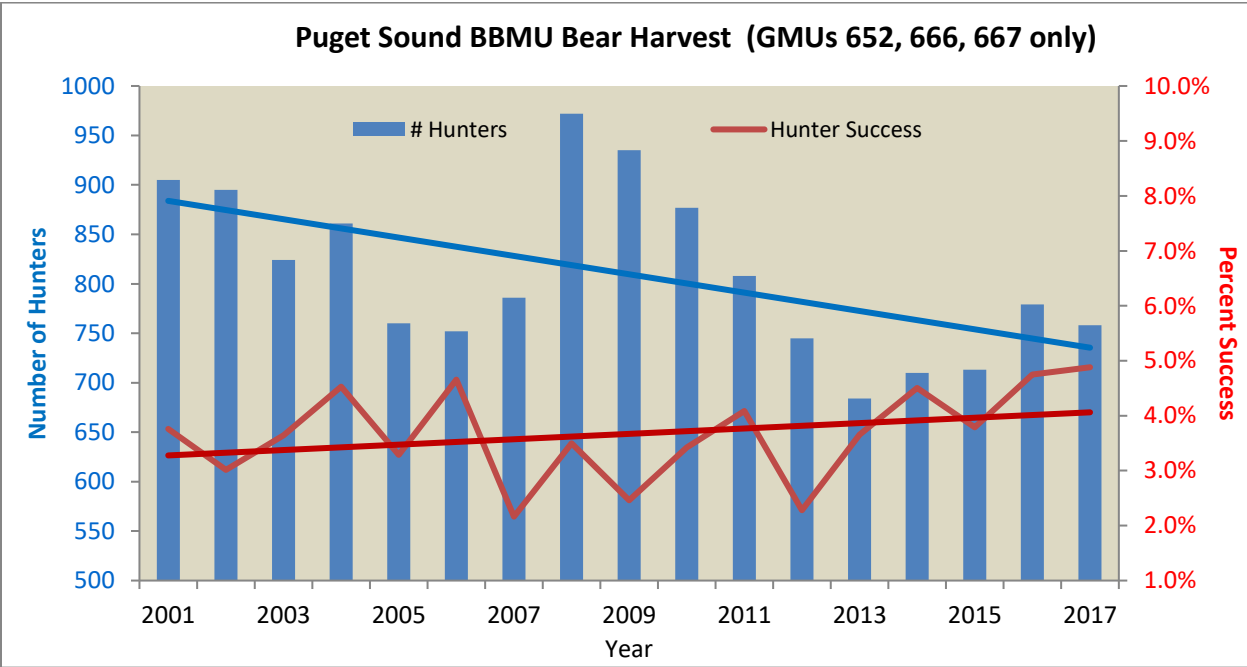
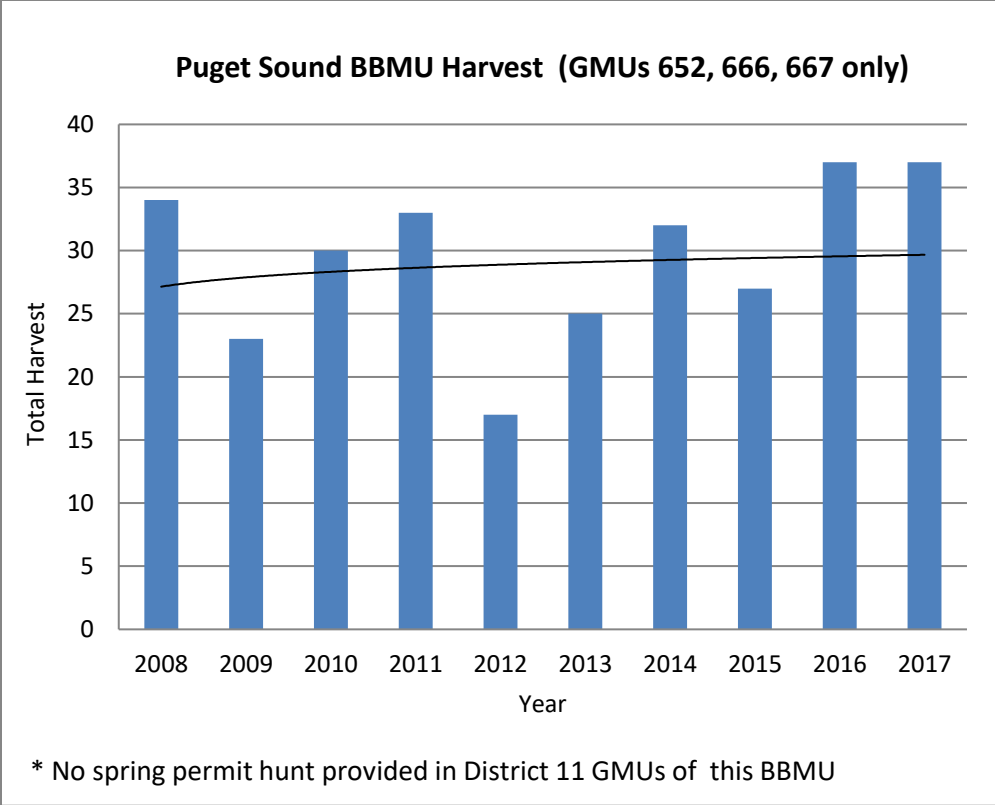
A spring black bear special permit season is provided on Hancock's Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMUs 653/654 within the South Cascades BBMU. A total of 150 permits for the April 15 to June 15 season will be available once again in 2019. Those successfully drawn for a hunt permit must also purchase a vehicle access permit from Hancock. A spring bear season only vehicle access permit is available from Hancock for all drawn permittees to hunt only the permit area at the cost of \$100 (see additional information regarding Hancock under Elk and Deer sections).

General season bear harvest trends in the District 11 portion of the South Cascades BBMU (e.g. GMUs 653 and 654) have been generally declining since 2008, but are fairly stable over the past six years. A noticeable decline in harvest took place from 2008 to 2009 (despite season lengths and permits remaining the same) and again from 2011 to 2012 (partially due to a one-month reduction in spring hunting season length). Seventeen bears were harvested in 2017 in the GMUs 653 and 654 portion of the South Cascades BBMU. The number of bear hunters in these

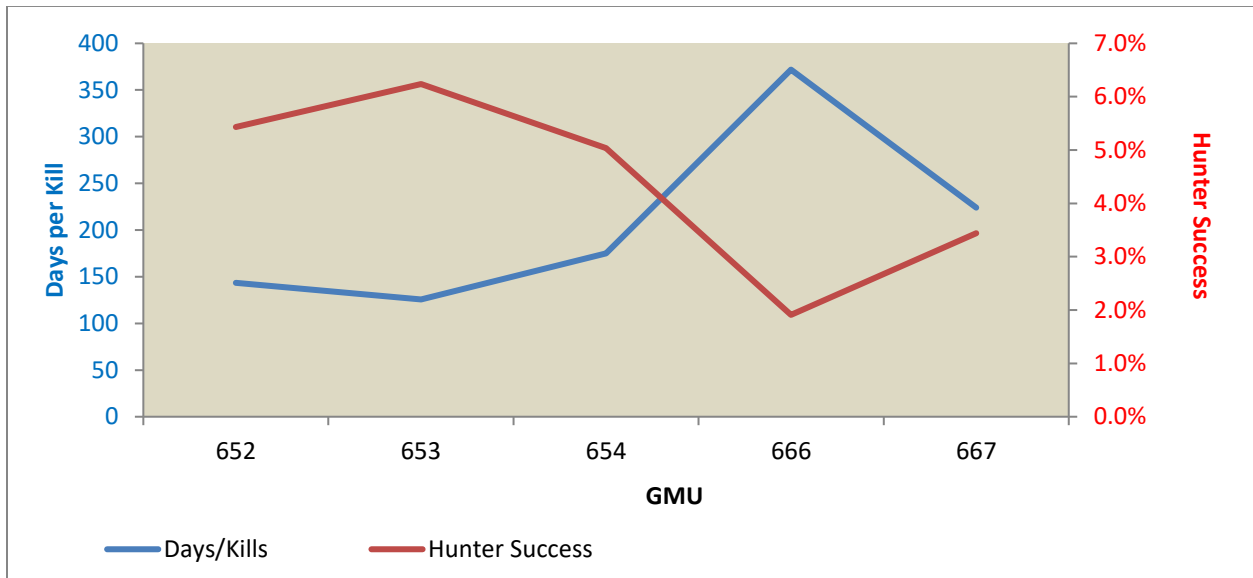
combined GMUs has generally declined since 2008, although they remained fairly stable over the past six years. Hunter success rates fluctuate year to year, but have generally declined over the last 15 years from a high of 7 percent to just over 3.5 percent. Prospects should remain the same to higher in the district due to wetter winter conditions combined with warmer spring resulting in excellent berry production for 2018.



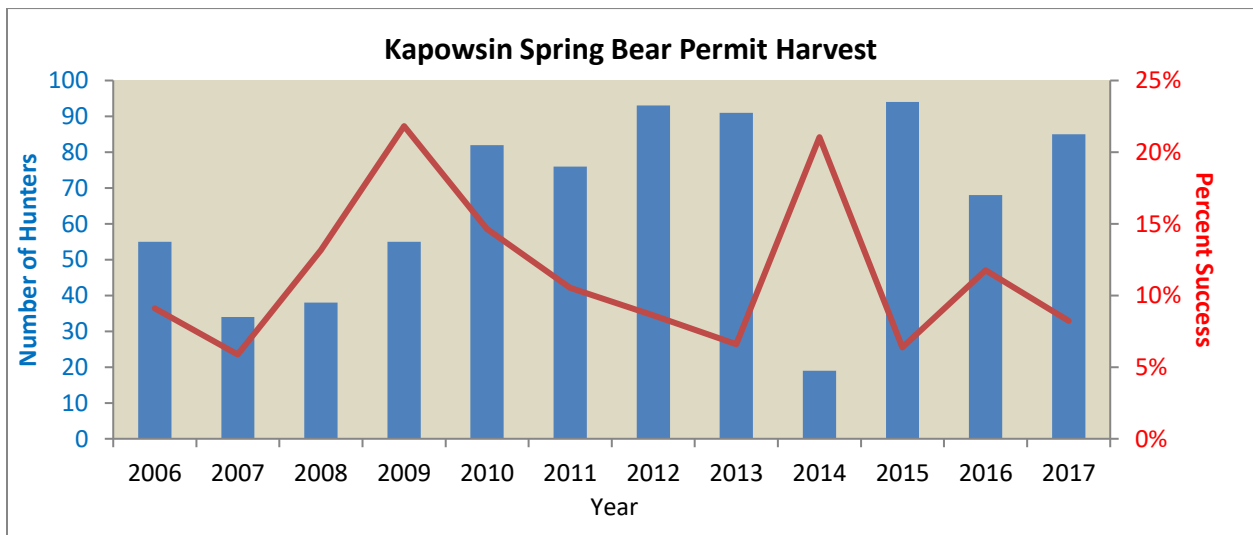
Bear harvest in the GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (GMUs 652, 666, 667) has remained fairly stable over the past several years and has shown signs of improving since a low in 2012. The number of hunters hunting this BBMU has declined over the past 17 years but stabilized over the past six. Success rates continue to increase slowly for those hunters that continue to hunt this BBMA and are currently around 5 percent.



Comparing success rates of each GMU in District 11 for the fall general bear season over the past 17 years, GMU 653 and 652 have the highest success and thus the best chance of harvesting black bear in the district.



Eighty-five hunters (out of the 150 permits issued) participated in the 2017 Kapowsin spring permit hunt and successfully harvested seven black bears for a hunter success rate of 8.2 percent. This is down from the 11.8 percent success rate in 2016 and much lower than the cumulative statewide spring bear success rate of 27.5 percent. The 10-year average success rate for this hunt is 12 percent. This is in the lower half in terms of success of the 18 spring bear permits offered statewide.



COUGAR

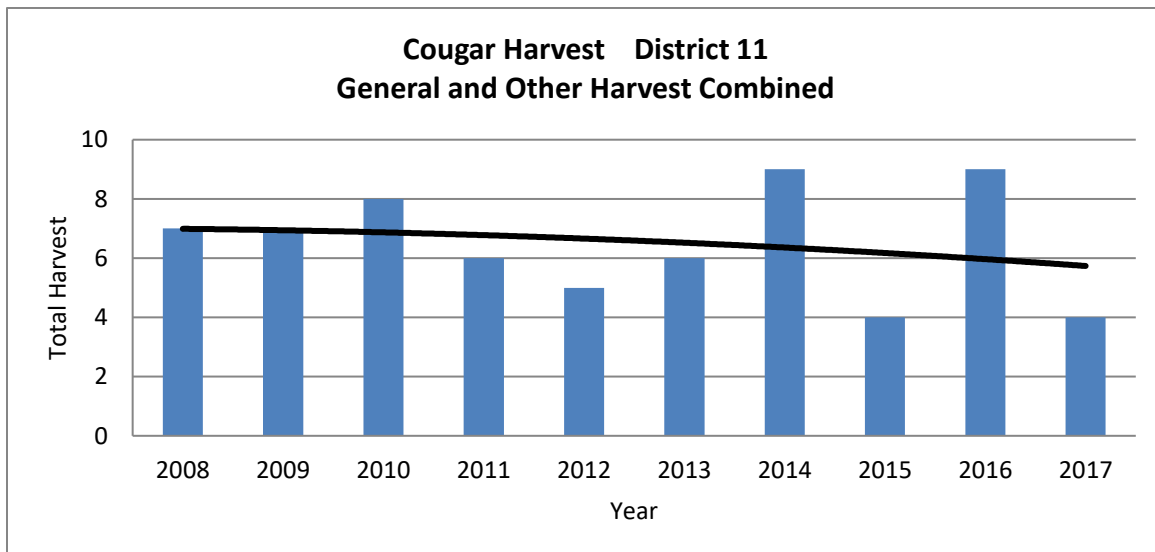
Cougar are widespread in the forest lands of District 11. Areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for cougar. District 11 comprises three cougar population management units (CPMUs) made up of GMUs containing similar habitats and having similar cougar population objectives: 1) GMUs 652/666, 2) GMUs 653/654, and 3) GMU 667 (note: cougar hunting is not provided in GMU 655).

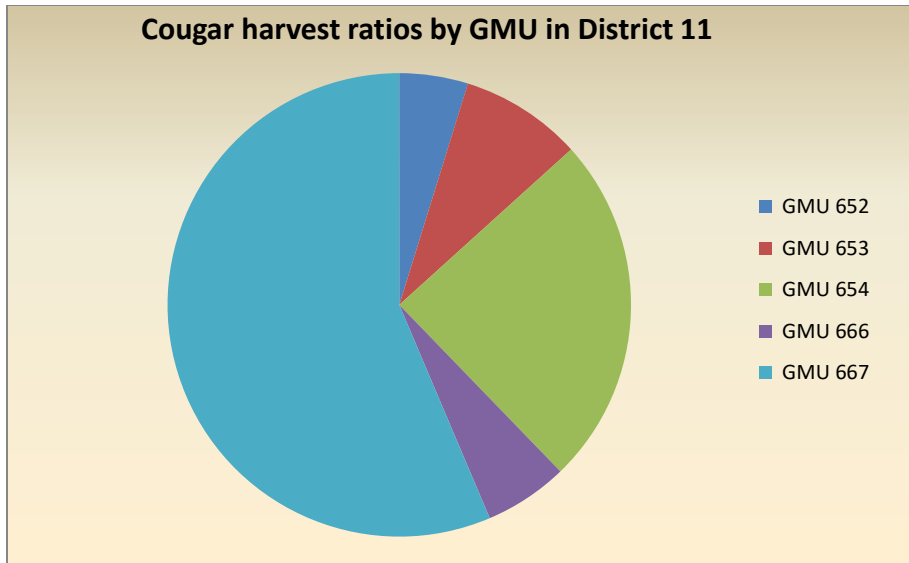
WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012 with a liberalized season coupled with harvest guidelines (see wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar). Two general cougar seasons area offered:

- Early: Sept. 1 - Dec. 31, 2018
- Late: Jan. 1 - Apr. 30, 2019 OR when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever occurs first.

Be aware that a 2019 cougar license/tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2019. GMUs 652 and 666 have no cougar harvest quota limit, GMUs 653 and 654 have a quota of five cougars (combined), and GMU 667 has a quota of three to four cougars--meaning at a harvest of three WDFW determines if other non-hunting forms of mortality have occurred and whether the GMU should be closed.

Cougar harvest in District 11 has been fluctuating over the past five years. A total of four cougar were reported harvested in the district in 2017 (not including tribal). The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the district. Thus, prospects for hunting cougar in the district are very good.





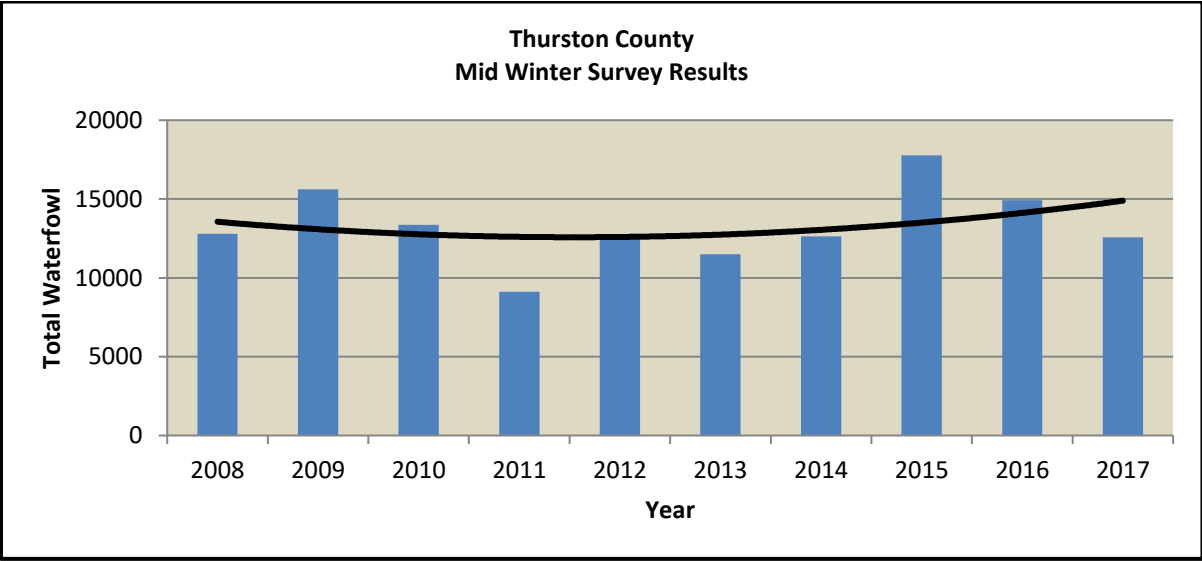
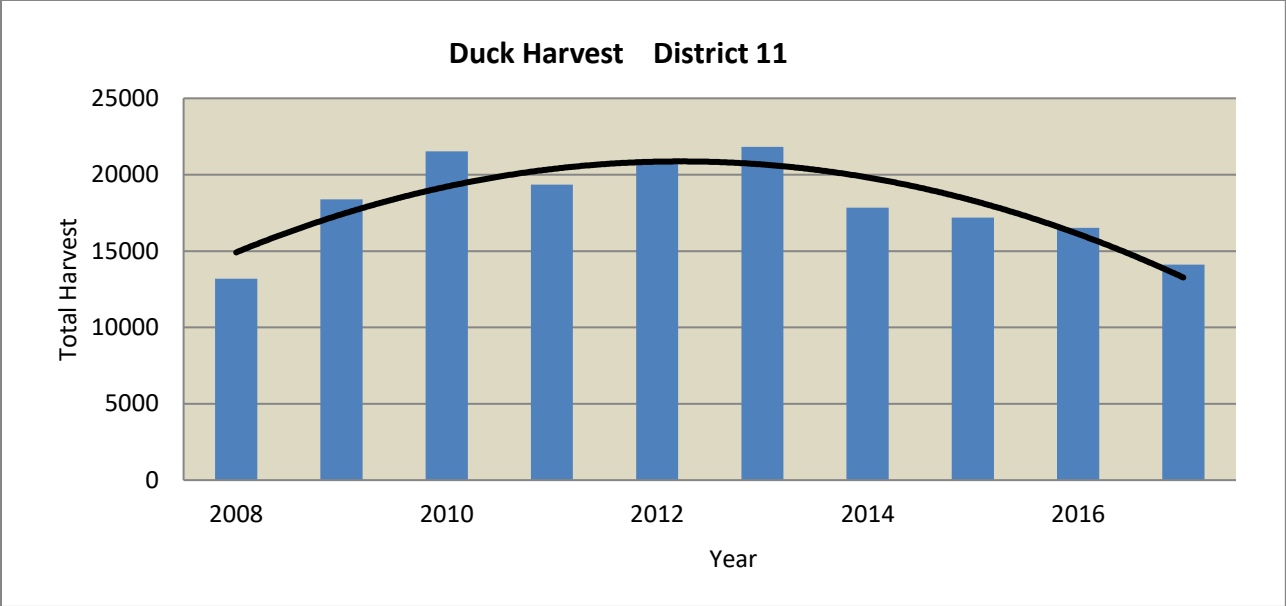
WATERFOWL

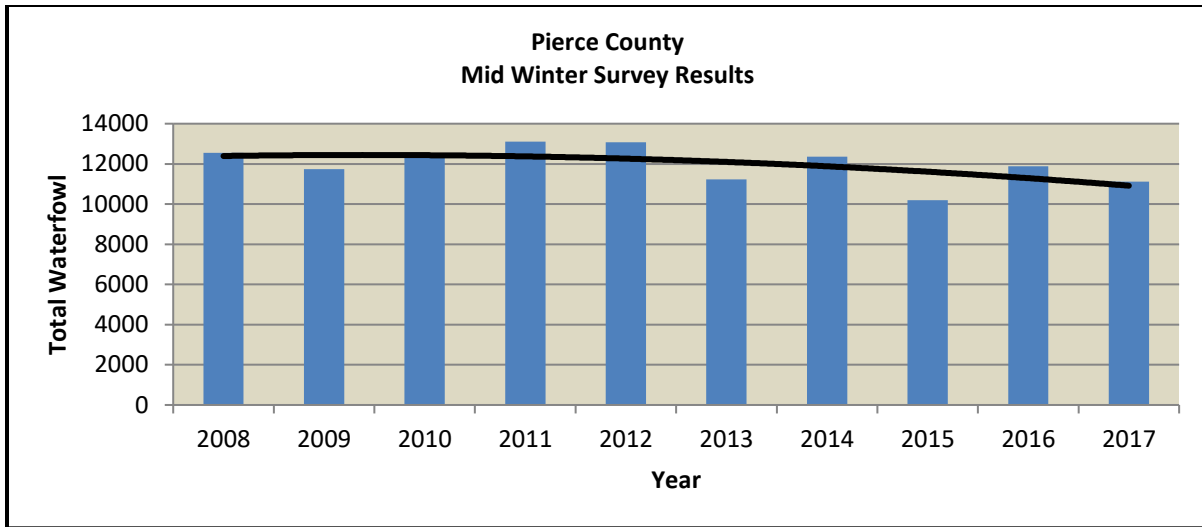
The majority of [Pacific Flyway](#) waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, primarily Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. According to the USFWS Waterfowl Population Status report for 2017, the western North American survey area habitat conditions were similar to or improved relative to 2016. The combination of normal spring phenology, wet conditions, and no major flooding should lead to good-to-excellent waterfowl production across the region for 2018. However, although total duck population estimates declined across much of North America in 2017 compared to 2016, Washington’s estimate actually doubled. This is compared to a 37 percent decline in duck population estimate in Washington from 2015 to 2016, which demonstrates the significant fluctuation in duck population estimates year to year. In general, prospects for successfully hunting waterfowl in Washington as compared to much of western North America and the remainder of the U.S. is good for 2018.

The total duck population (includes freshwater and saltwater species) as counted on traditional survey areas was 47.3 million breeding ducks, as compared to 48.4 million in 2017. Waterfowl breeding population estimates are not released until after the release of this publication (mid-late August annually), so are not available for 2018. Breeding population trends are available only through 2016 from USFWS (<http://flyways.us/content>) for several species commonly found in District 11. For mallards only, Washington specific data is available. Those trends per species are as follows:

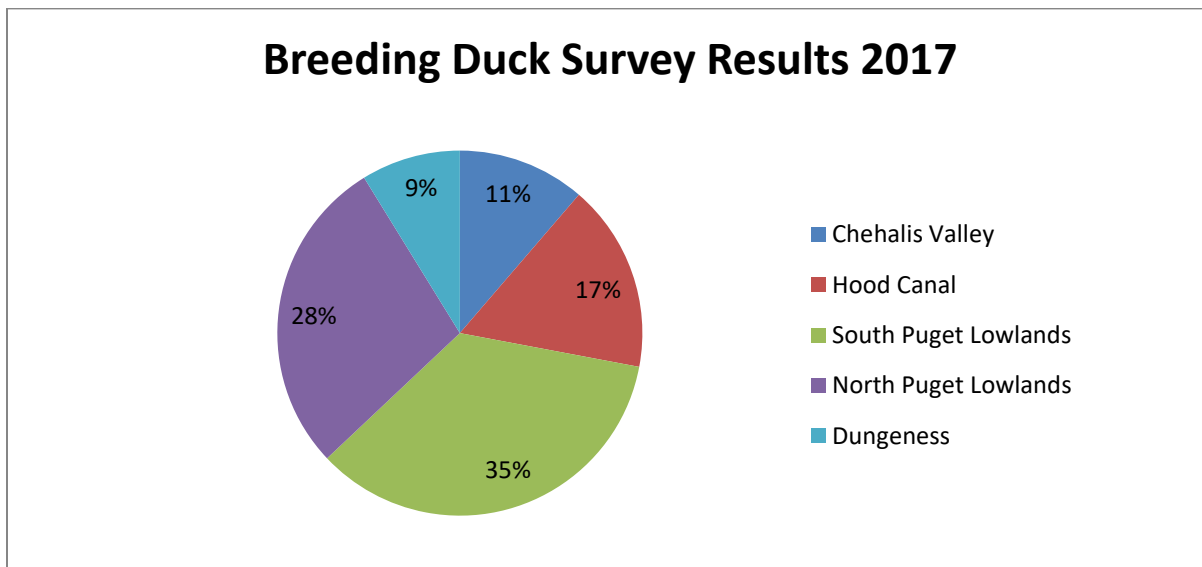
Species	Breeding Population Estimate Trend North America
Mallard	2016 abundance was 11.8 ± 0.4 million, which was similar to the 2015 estimate, and 51% above the long-term average of 7.8 ± 0.04 million.
Green-winged teal	2016 abundance was 4.3 ± 0.3 million, which was similar to the 2015 estimate of 4.1 ± 0.2 million, and 104% above the long-term average (2.1 ± 0.02 million). This year again marks the highest estimate in the time series for green-winged teal.
Gadwall	2016 abundance was similar to the 2015 estimate and 90% above the long-term average (2.0 ± 0.02 million).
American widgeon	2016 abundance similar to 2015 estimate and 31% above the long-term average of 2.6 ± 0.02 million
Northern shovelers	2016 estimate was similar to the 2015 estimate, but 56% above the long-term average of 2.5 ± 0.02 million
Northern pintails	2016 estimate was similar to the 2015 estimate and 34% below the long-term average of 4.0 ± 0.04 million.
Scaup (combined)	2016 abundance was 12% below the 2015 estimate and 13% below the long-term average of 5.0 ± 0.04 million
Canvasbacks	2016 abundance similar to the 2015 estimate, 26% above the long-term average of 0.6 ± 0.01 million

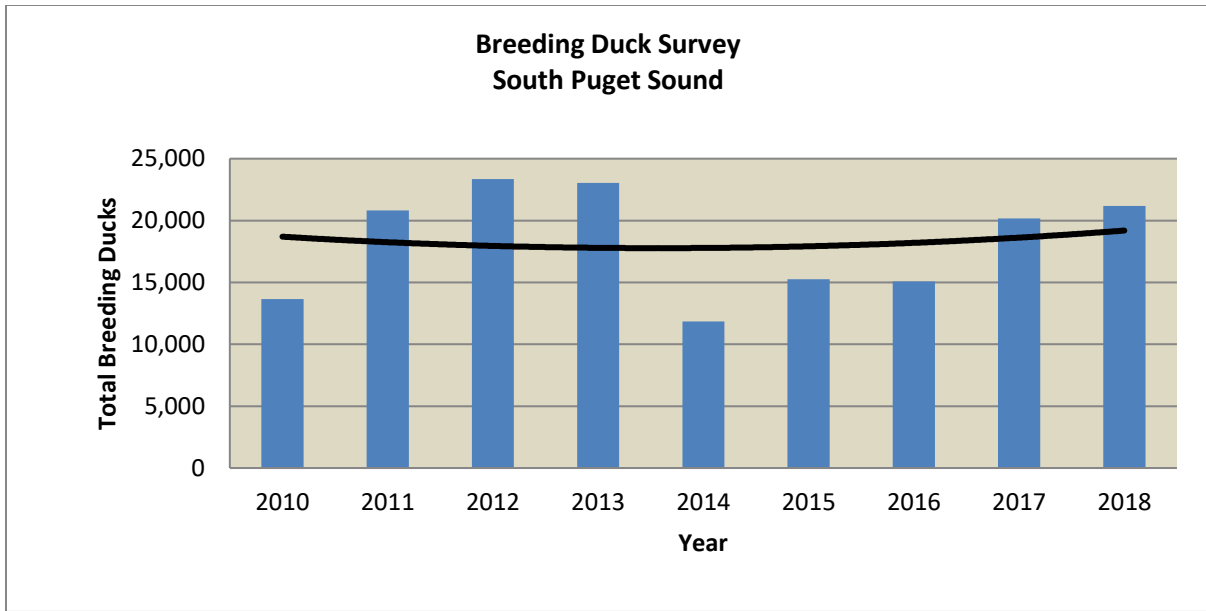
Duck harvest in District 11 has been declining slightly over the past four years. Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily as a result of Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. Mid-winter waterfowl counts declined slightly in Pierce County and increased slightly in Thurston County over the last 10 years (2018 data not yet complete). Note that Thurston County surveys were affected by heavy fog in 2015 and counts are likely higher than reported here, perhaps continuing that increasing trend. The best prospects for waterfowl hunters in District 11 are in Thurston County.



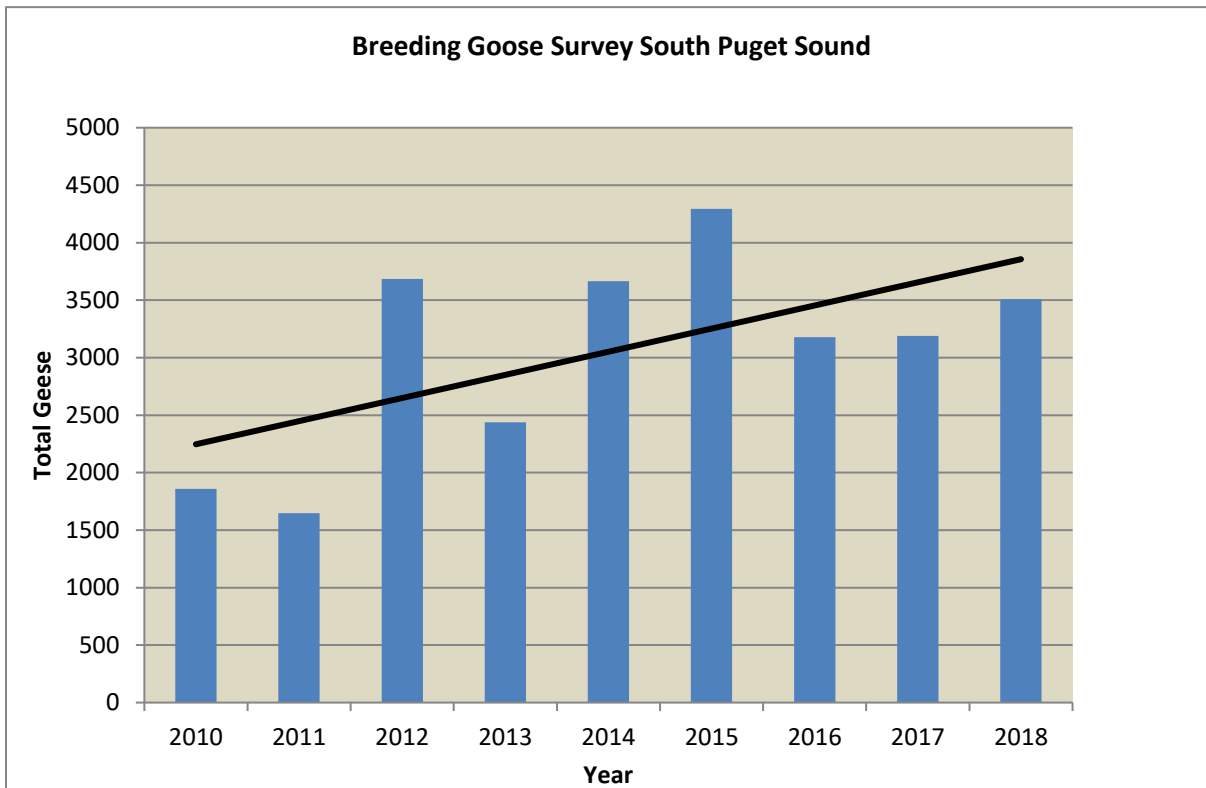


The South Puget Sound lowlands supported the highest percent of breeding ducks in western Washington according to WDFW’s 2018 breeding duck surveys. Breeding season duck estimates increased in Hood Canal, South Puget Lowlands, and the Dungeness area of western Washington in 2018 compared to 2017 but decreased in the Chehalis Valley and North Puget Lowlands. Overall there was a 13,000 decline in number of ducks counted in western Washington, primarily driven by large declines in North Puget Sound. Regardless of decline, according to the WDFW Waterfowl Section Manager, waterfowl availability should be similar to 2017 in western Washington and very good in eastern Washington due to significant increases on the eastside in 2018.





Goose breeding survey results continue to increase across the South Puget Sound since 2012 and rose slightly over 2017 estimates. Prospects for goose hunting in District 11 should remain good.





Young hunter with her collections in the blind
(Photo by T. Frank, West Richland, WA)

Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies in the district that are surrounded by housing. Hunters are urged to obey all hunting 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 (see introduction). Rapjohn Lake in Pierce County has a Register to Hunt program and requires hunters to hunt 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.

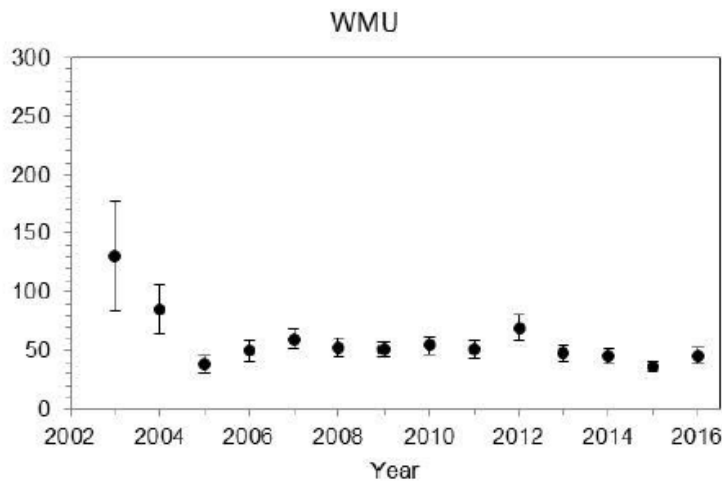
The best waterfowl hunting areas in District 11 include [Nisqually Wildlife Refuge](#); Puget Sound marine inlets associated with western islands of Pierce County and Henderson, Budd, and Eld Inlets of Thurston County; and Centralia Mine in Lewis County. Flooded

agricultural fields in the western half of the district can be good prospects for waterfowl hunting, but hunters must seek landowner access permission prior to hunting these sites. Note that a majority of the water bodies on Key Peninsula, Pierce County, are within a firearm restriction zone, thus prohibiting waterfowl hunting. The Centralia Coal Mine has a limited, high quality hunt. Hunters are urged to contact TransAlta directly with questions regarding participation (360-736-9901). For information on hunting Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, go to https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Billy_Frank_Jr_Nisqually/visit/visitor_activities/hunting.html or call (360) 753-9467.

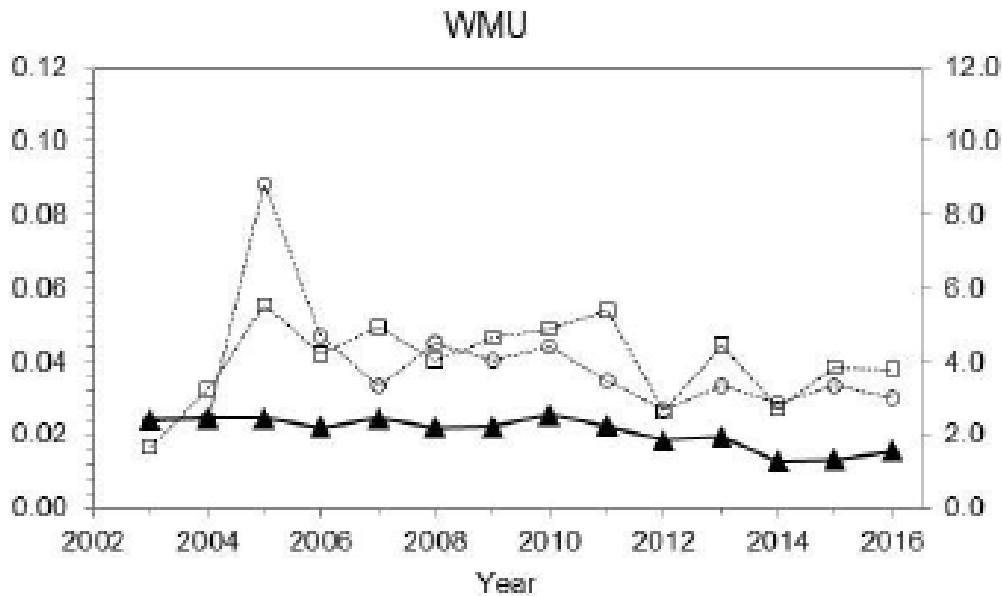
MOURNING DOVE

The department 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-bird 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). BBS data suggested that the abundance of mourning doves over the last 51 years decreased in the western management units, which is composed of the seven western states, including Washington.

Estimates of absolute abundance rose slightly, but generally remain low in the western management unit in 2016 (2017 and 2018 data not yet available).



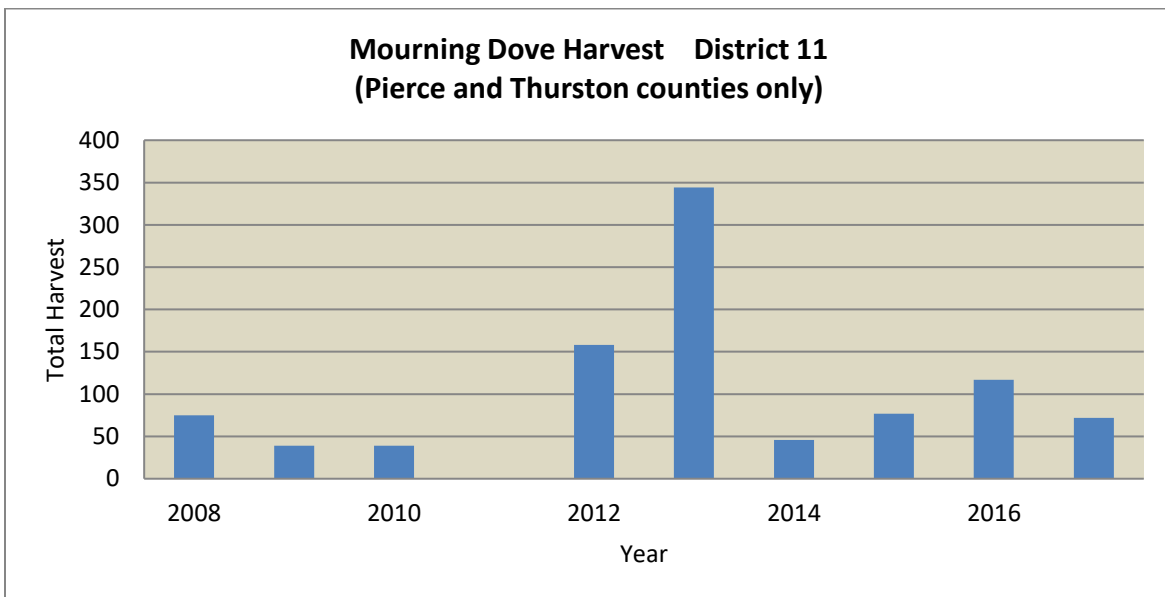
Estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the western management units combined, 2002–2016. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data.



Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove in the western management units combined, 2003–2016. Harvest rates presented separately for hatch-year (□) and after-hatch-year (○; USFWS 2016).

Approximately 61,100 ± 30 percent mourning doves were harvested by 4,600 ± 23 percent active hunters in the 2016-17 season in Washington, for an average of 13.4 ± 38 percent doves per hunter (2017-18 data not yet available). This is an increase over 2015-16 estimates.

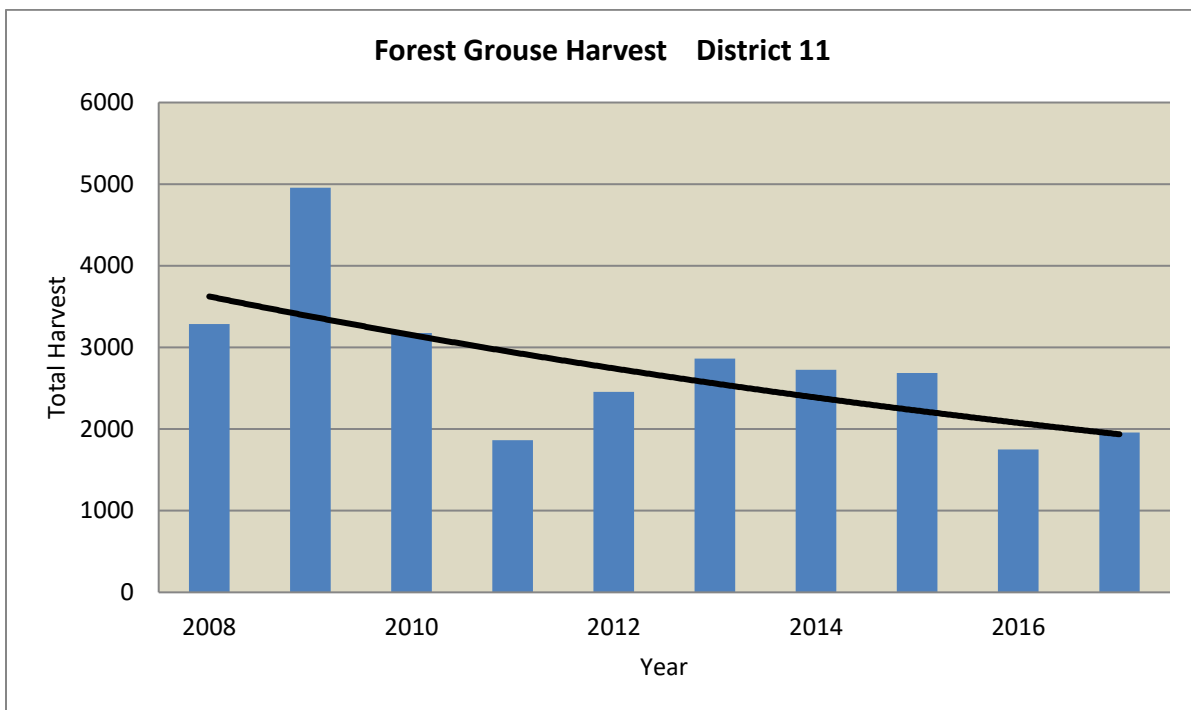
District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area in Washington and averages approximately 100 doves harvested per year. A significant increase in dove hunting was reported by hunters in the district in 2013, but hunting has declined since. Lewis County traditionally provides higher harvest numbers in the district, with Thurston and Pierce counties providing far less. However, this depends on hunter participation, which fluctuates year to year. As an example, in 2017, the harvest was 0, 34, and 38 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties, respectively, compared to the 2016 harvest of 80, 90, and 27. Our WDFW small game hunter survey may also underestimate harvest when participation is low, as it was in 2017.



FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting 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 will be near fruiting shrublands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Logging roads are particularly good locations since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. In particular, 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', particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (5-25 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 continues to trend downward in District 11 over the past 10 years. Removing the 2009 spike in harvest, an average of 2,500 grouse are harvested annually in the district. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and Thurston counties. In 2017, harvest in Lewis County was 1,914, in Pierce County 1,573, and in Thurston County 386 (compared to 2,797; 1,095; and 654 in 2016).



A hunter must purchase either a big game license or a small game license to hunt grouse. Grouse hunting is included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs Sept. 1 through Dec. 31, with a daily bag limit of four of any species (to include not more than three of each species) and a possession limit of 12 (to include not more than nine of any one species).

PHEASANT

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining populations of pheasants primarily due to the wet climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting pheasant on the west side of the state is dependent upon releases of pheasants in the fall. District 11 is fortunate to contain three of the 24 pheasant release sites in western Washington. For that reason, pheasant 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 our pheasant production manager, this equates to more consistency and stronger birds at release, which should improve hunting opportunity for District 11 hunters.



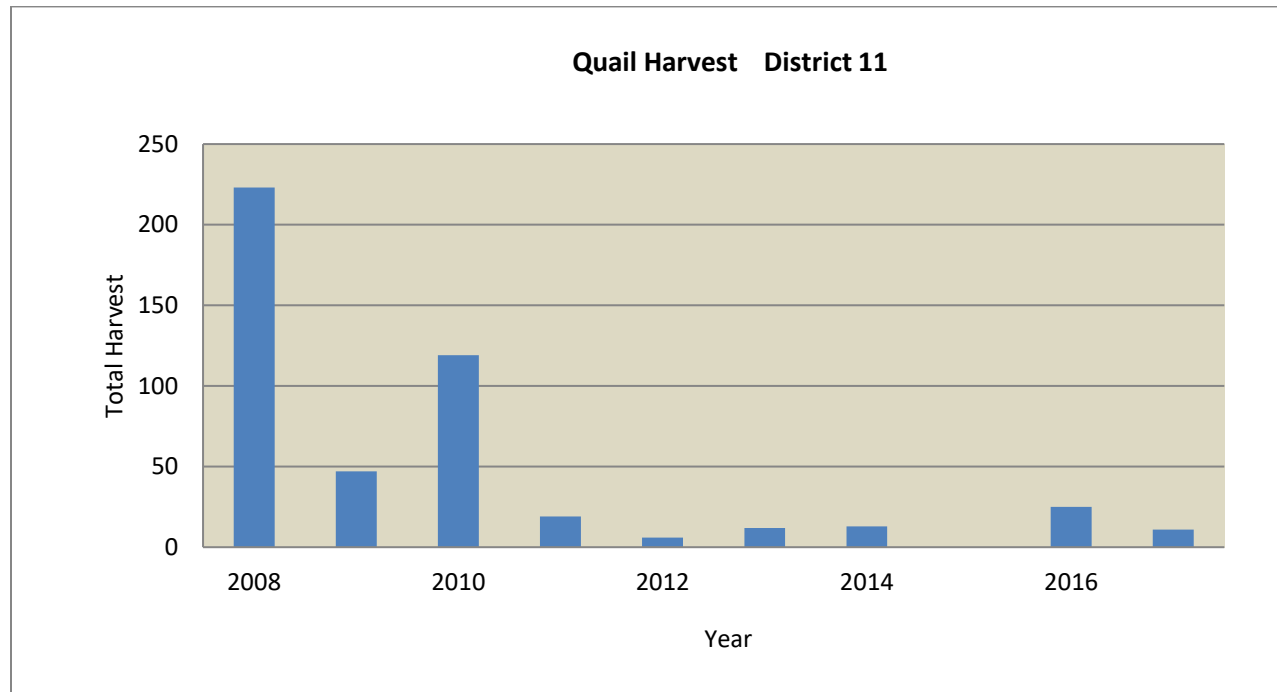
Game farm produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites which are mapped on the [Go Hunt](#) website and in the [Western Washington pheasant program booklet](#). The release program utilizes state (Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federal (JBLM) managed lands. There are special access processes in place for [JBLM](#), so please visit their web site. Note that [nontoxic shot](#) is required on all pheasant release sites statewide. Pheasant hunting season dates for 2018 are as follows: Youth = Sept. 22-23; Senior (65+) = Sept. 24-28; General = Sept. 29 - Nov. 30. The general pheasant season is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with a daily bag limit of two (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). 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. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. An overview of the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program, including a description and maps of all release sites, can be found on the [WDFW website](#).

Pheasant release in western Washington will be similar to last year, with an estimated 39,000 pheasants to be released at 24 pheasant release areas in 2018, as compared to 36,000 in 2017. Be aware that total production could still be affected by seasonal temperature fluctuations and other mortalities in 2018 and these are estimates only. Approximately 2,000 pheasants (5 percent of total production compared to 1,800 released in 2017) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays beginning Sept. 29 through Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 3,900 pheasants (10 percent of total production compared to 3,700 in 2017) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 120-135 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays. Some areas of Scatter Creek are off limits to hunters due to endangered species recovery work so please *OBEY ALL POSTED SIGNS*. Approximately 4,000 pheasants (10 percent of total production compared to 4,700 in 2017) will be released on JBLM. Military training and listed species management dictates which fields will be open in any given week for

both release and hunting access on JBLM. Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744), at which time they will be informed about the pheasant hunting process, including which fields are open for hunting.

QUAIL

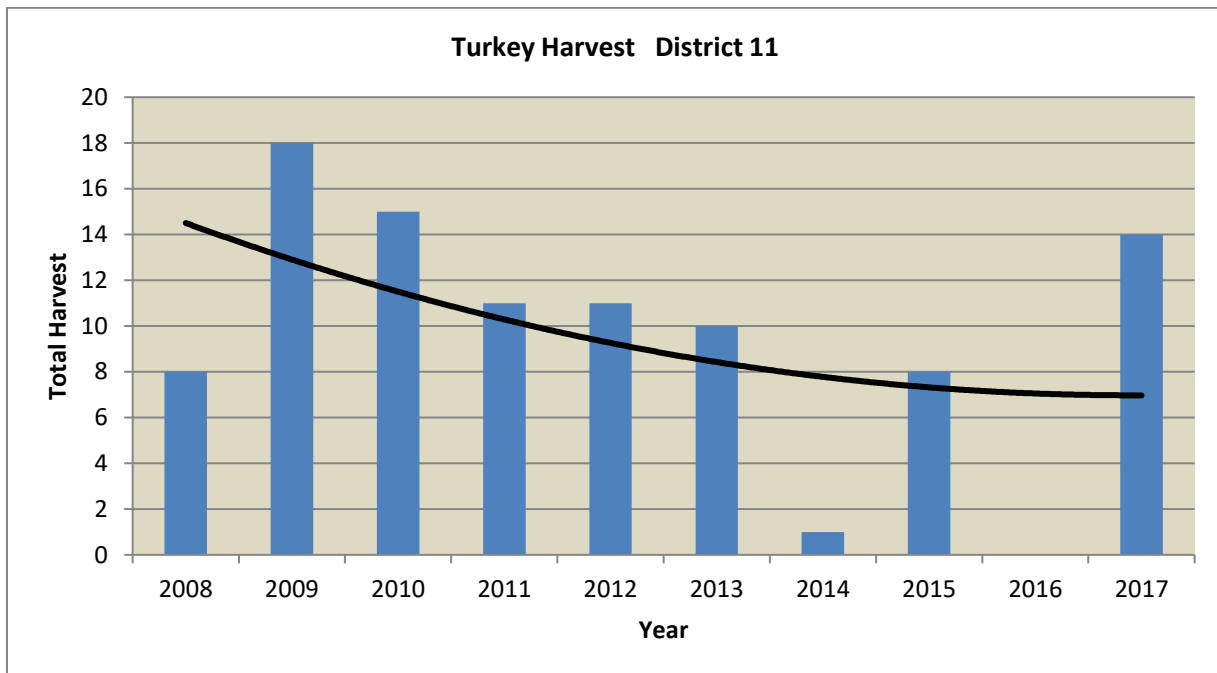
Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 has been trending downwards since a seven year high in 2008. Harvest picked up slightly in 2016, but declined again in 2017. Much of this represents lack of hunter participation, as only eight hunters hunted quail in the district in 2017. Regardless of this downward trend, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in western Washington in which hunters 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 (WDNR) and county forestland. The western Washington California (valley) quail season runs Sept. 29 through Nov. 30, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs Sept. 29 through Nov. 30, with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four.



TURKEY

District 11 is not managed for wild turkeys and the species remains relatively rare. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern sub-species of wild turkey in the district and harvest reflects hunter participation year to year. In 2016, no turkeys were reported harvested in District 11. However, in 2017, 14 turkeys were harvested. The average turkey harvest in District 11 for the past 10 years is 10 turkeys per year.

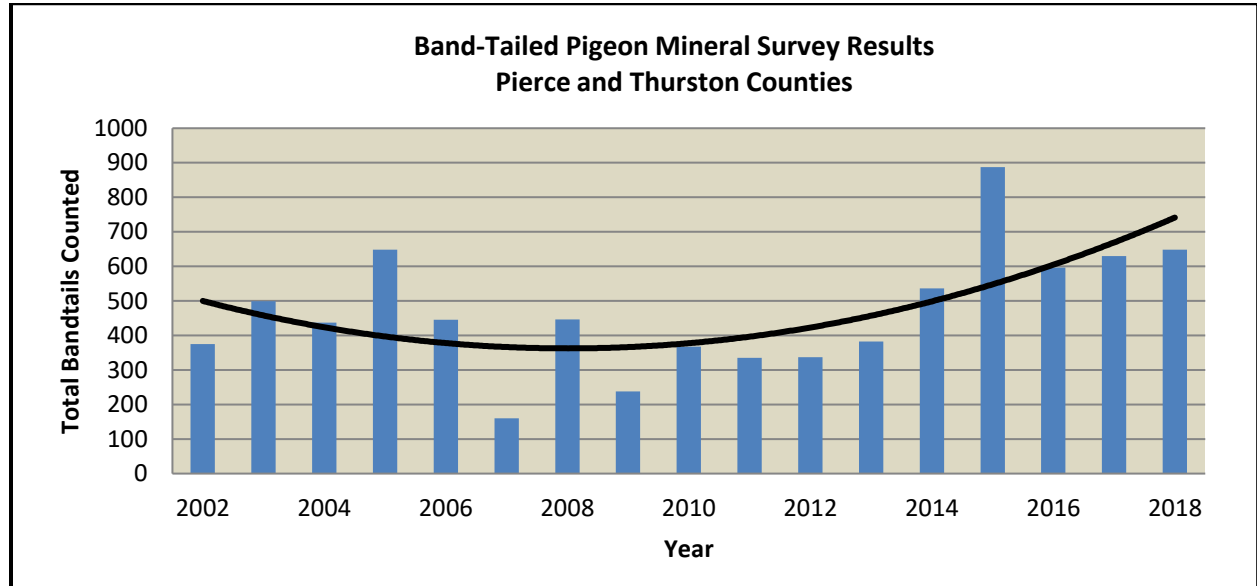
WDFW receives occasional reports of individual or small groups of turkeys in Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula, Pierce County; Rochester, Grand Mound, and Tenino, Thurston County; and along the Johnson Creek Corridor, Lewis County. However, the overall scarcity of turkeys in District 11 equates to extremely poor prospects for harvest. Annually, the majority of turkey harvest occurs in the Skookumchuck Unit (GMU 667), followed by a few in Deschutes (GMU 666) and Puyallup (GMU 652). The statewide spring turkey season runs April 15 through May 31 in any given year, with a youth-only hunt the first weekend of April. Only male turkeys and turkeys with visible beards are legal in western Washington, with a season limit of one turkey (except a two turkey limit in Klickitat County).



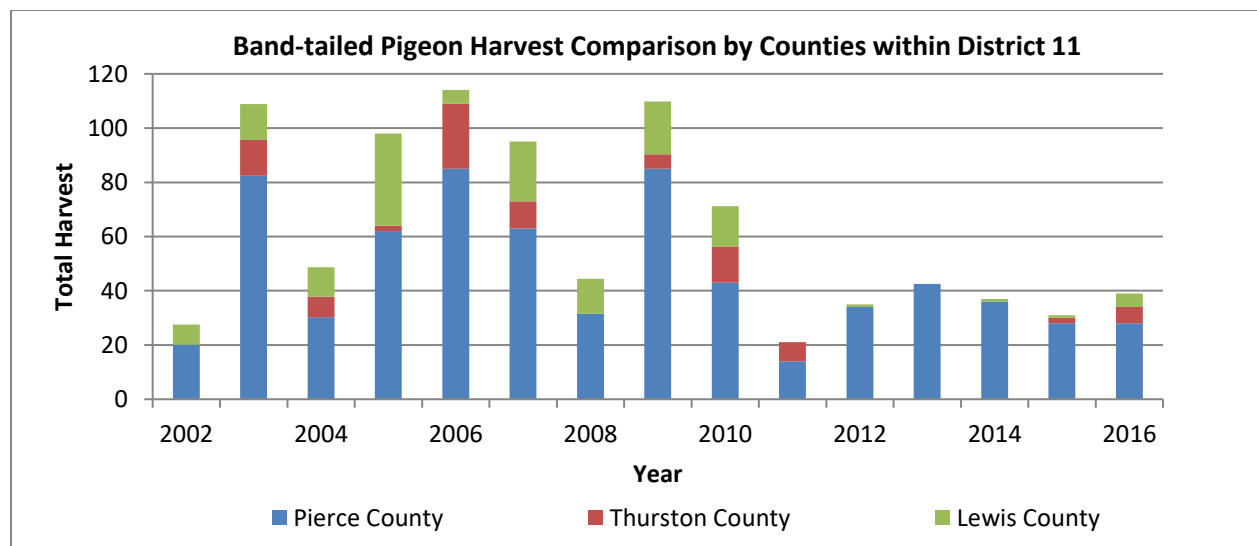
BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

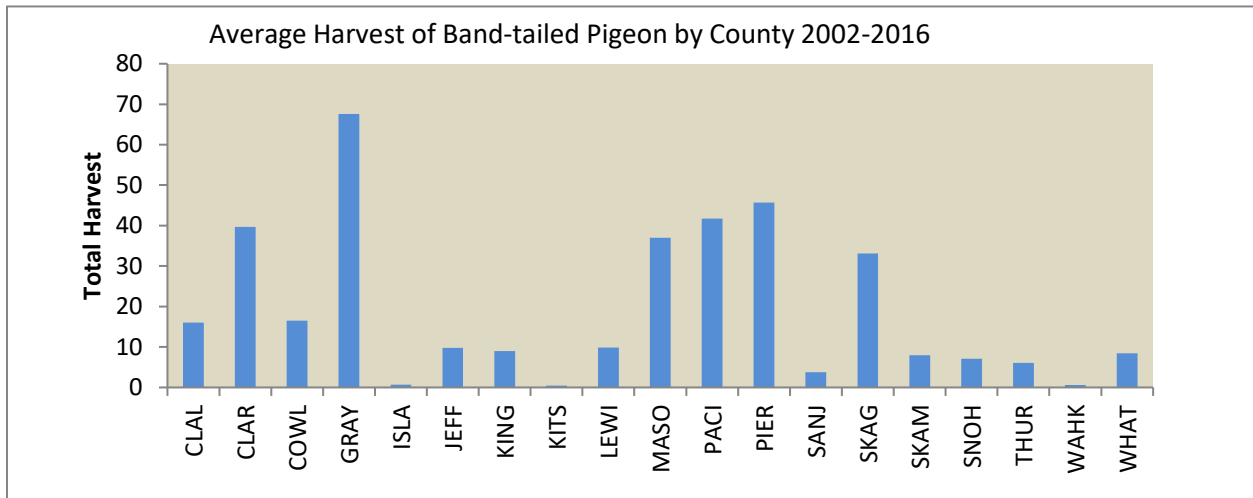
Band-tailed pigeon estimates based on mineral site surveys have been trending upwards in the district since 2014 and rose sharply in 2015 due to a significant increase in band-tailed pigeons counted at the Mud Bay, Thurston County location. Band-tailed pigeons have remained steady

since 2016 at the three survey sites counted in the district in 2018. A fourth site has access issues and was not counted in 2017 or 2018. Pierce County in District 11 has the second highest average harvest in Washington (average harvest of 47 per year) and thus prospects for hunting band-tailed pigeons in the district are good.



Total harvest in Pierce County in 2015 and 2016 was 28 pigeons, down slightly from 2013 and 2014. Six pigeons were harvested in Thurston and five in Lewis, and they both rank low compared to other western counties. The best hunting locations for band-tailed pigeons in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston county boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines of District 11.





COTTONTAIL RABBIT

District 11 provides some of the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce and Thurston counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the district fluctuates depending on hunter annual participation. The average harvest since 2008 has been 276 annually (Pierce and Thurston counties only). Pierce County has often had one of the highest harvests of all western Washington counties. It declined significantly in 2016, but it bounced back in 2017 to an all-time high. Thus, prospects for cottontail hunting in District 11, and Pierce County specifically, are good for 2018.



Falconer J. Knudson with his newly banded peregrine falcon, Pierce County

Cottontail Rabbit Harvest District 11

