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# DISTRICT 12 HUNTING PROSPECTS

King County

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## DISTRICT 12 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 12 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 hunting). Landownership in the district is a checkerboard of private, state, and federal holdings. The densest private (urban and suburban) developments are found in the Issaquah Unit (GMU 454), while private agricultural holdings 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 at King County IMAP. It is a mapping tool provided by the county [GIS Center](#).

The cities of Tacoma and Seattle each own and operate municipal watersheds in southeast King County, totaling about 250,532 acres that supply the drinking water for their cities. One is in the Green River drainage (GMU 485), one is in the Tolt River drainage (GMU 460), and the other is in the Cedar River drainage (GMU 490).

The largest percentage of huntable area is U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land, but industrial timber companies have large land holdings in the area. 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.

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. 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.

## ELK

Hunters should place greater emphasis on riparian forest habitats and agricultural areas throughout the district. Many of District 12's elk reside on private land, so please make sure you have permission before you hunt.

GMU 460 (Snoqualmie) provides good hunting opportunities in areas of the unit. However, hunters are advised to scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated, with restricted access. Many of the elk in the GMU are found (at least at times) on private property in valley bottoms. Hunters should network well in advance to gain access to hunt these properties. Please be mindful of residences, domestic animals (pets/livestock), and other non-target objects downrange when hunting these areas. Hunters should plan ahead 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 92 of the hunting regulations pamphlet.



Elk in GMU 454 (Issaquah) continue to be managed with liberal seasons designed to reduce road kills and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly-developed areas. Much of this unit is in private property. Preseason planning and networking may be paramount for hunters attempting to gain access in this unit. Hunters should be mindful of safety concerns and firearm restrictions (see above) in this unit as well. Bow hunters 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. Hunters should be prepared for up to a 2,500 feet elevation change and steep terrain in this unit. In addition, early snowfall in the unit has the potential to strand hunters, but also the potential to aid in success.

GMU 485 (Green River) follows the Tacoma Water administrative boundary of the Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Elk are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2018 season, eight any bull tags and eight antlerless elk tags are available for hunters through the draw system.



Elk in King County – Photo by Mike Smith



Group of elk in GMU 460 – Photo by Mike Smith

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online here: [Elk Harvest Reports](#).

### **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. While elk have long suffered from “hoof rot,” a relatively common livestock disease, the rapid spread and severity of this new affliction was something altogether different.

Scientific tests commissioned by WDFW in 2013 found that these abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause digital dermatitis in cattle, sheep and goats. Although this disease has plagued the dairy industry for decades, the treponeme bacteria had never before been documented in elk or any other wildlife species.

Since then, WDFW has continued to work with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations and others to develop management strategies for elk infected by treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD).

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:** Currently, 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.

### Counties with confirmed cases of TAHD

As of March 2016, WDFW had confirmed cases of elk afflicted with TAHD in Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skagit, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties. In the year that followed a few additional cases were also documented in Thurston, Mason and King counties.

In April 2018, state wildlife managers found elk on the east side of the Cascade Range infected with TAHD. Lab results from a deformed hoof and direct observations of elk walking with a profound limp in the Trout Lake Valley of Klickitat County provided clear evidence that the disease spread to that area.

Since 2015, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has also confirmed TAHD in elk populations in both western and eastern Oregon.

### How hunters can help

- **Leave hooves:** Scientists believe that treponeme bacteria are associated with moist soil and spread to new areas on the hooves of infected elk. For that reason, WDFW requires hunters to remove the hooves of any elk taken in affected areas and leave them onsite. During the 2017-18 hunting season, this rule applies to GMUs 407, 418, 437, 454, 501-564, 633, 636 and 642-699.
- **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 currently studying the effects of the disease on Washington elk populations and the state Legislature approved \$1.5 million to support efforts by Washington State University to monitor and research the disease.

## DEER

Population surveys have not been conducted for several years throughout District 12, but hunting prospects are believed to be quite good on private and public lands, where hunting is allowed, from anecdotal observations.

GMU 422 covers all of Vashon and Maury islands. Hunting access on Vashon and Maury islands is largely on private agricultural and hobby farm properties. Hunters must take time to network with communities and property owners for opportunity and access. Additional opportunities (incorporated in recent years) will continue in the second deer special permit category for GMU 422. Please refer to the current [Big Game](#) pamphlet for updated listings of these opportunities.

Deer in GMU 454 (Issaquah) continue to be managed with liberal seasons designed to prevent road kills and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly-developed areas. Additional opportunities have been incorporated this season 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](#) pamphlet for updated listings of these opportunities as well. This unit (and corresponding deer area) is approximately 90 percent private land and access continues to be a problem for hunters. Success in this unit may well depend on getting to know your neighbors and broaching the subject of hunting as a means of protecting their fruit trees and vegetable beds. Firearm restrictions are in place because landowners are concerned about safety. Bow hunters should have an advantage in gaining permission.





A black-tailed deer buck in GMU 454, damaging landscape plantings – Photo submitted to WDFW Image Gallery

GMU 460 (Snoqualmie) provides good hunting opportunities throughout most of the unit. However, hunters are advised to scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated, with restricted access. Forest management on these lands is largely favorable to deer and high quality opportunities are available for those willing to lace up their boots. Hunters should focus on early seral forests (less than 30 years old) adjacent to mid (40-80 years old) or late successional (greater than 80 years old) stands. Additional emphasis should be placed on riparian forest habitats that provide ample forage and cover.





Deer production on the Snoqualmie Tree Farm, GMU 460 – Photo by Mike Smith

GMU 466 (Stampede) is a patchwork of private, state and USFS lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). It consists largely of second growth timber, with some old growth on USFS lands. This unit consists of a lot of steep ground, with about 2,500 feet in elevation change. Be prepared for early winter snowfall, which has the potential of stranding hunters, but also the potential to improve success.

GMU 485 (Green River) follows the Tacoma Water administrative boundary of the Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Deer are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2018 season, five any buck tags in the Quality category and five any buck tags in the Hunters with Disabilities category (alternates annually with Youth category) are available for state hunters through the draw system.

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics based on hunter reporting can be found online here: [Deer Harvest Reports](#).

## BEAR

Bears inhabit areas of District 12, but like elk, many are on private lands. Hunters should ensure they have the proper permissions to hunt the area in which they are interested. Berry production throughout the district was good during the early part of this year. However, less than normal precipitation during June may affect soft mast production later on. Bears may be found at lower elevations early on before they move higher as the season progresses.



A bear in GMU 454 – Photo by Mike Smith

Annual harvest reports and harvest statistics can be found at [Bear Harvest Reports](#).

## COUGAR

The harvest guideline for GMU 460 is five to six cougars, while for GMU 466, the guideline is for three animals (there is no guideline for GMU 454 and GMU 485 is only open to deer or elk special permit holders). GMU 490 is closed to state hunting. The Director may close the late cougar hunting season on or after January 1 in either of these units if cougar harvest meets or exceeds the guideline. Starting January 1, hunters may hunt cougar until the hunt area harvest guideline has been reached, or April 30, whichever occurs first. It is each cougar hunter's responsibility to verify if the cougar late hunting season is open or closed in hunt areas with a harvest guideline. Cougar hunters can verify if the season is open or closed by calling the toll free cougar hunting hotline at 1-866-364-4868 or visiting the department's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar/>. The hotline and website will be updated weekly beginning January 1, 2019. A 2019 cougar license/tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2019.

## PHEASANT

Game farm produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites mapped on the [GoHunt](#) website. Nontoxic shot is required on all pheasant release sites.

Hunting hours for pheasant and quail in western Washington are from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 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 (half hour before sunrise to half hour after sunset) will apply.

## QUAIL

There are relatively few quail in District 12.

## FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forests of District 12. The weather experienced this spring combined with anecdotal observations collected this summer suggest healthy grouse populations this year.

Forest management in much of District 12 remains favorable for grouse. Hunters looking to harvest ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, early seral forests (5-25 years old) with ample berry crops present 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.





A male sooty grouse displaying on the Snoqualmie Tree Farm, GMU 460 – Photo by Chris Anderson

## EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE

While not a managed game species, Eurasian collared doves (an exotic species) are now being seen in District 12. This species can be hunted year round with a big or small game license. The best situation for hunting this species 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 in a manner compatible with existing infrastructure (buildings, farm equipment, or power lines).

## TURKEY

Wild turkeys remain relatively rare in District 12, and without predictable concentrations of birds. Accordingly, harvest prospects remain low even with considerable effort. Hunters must use #4 shot or smaller to hunt turkey.



## WATERFOWL

Favorable conditions on the breeding grounds and a mild winter here in Washington state forecast plentiful waterfowl this coming season. Opportunity for harvest is expected to be good, dependent on weather conditions through the season. The best waterfowl hunting opportunities continue to be found in the lower Snoqualmie Valley, with public access provided on WDFW's Snoqualmie Wildlife Management Area (Cherry Valley, Stillwater, and Crescent Lake units). Hunters can only enter and hunt units between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. during the pheasant season. Additional opportunities can be found in the Kent Valley. Hunters are encouraged to work with local private landowners to secure access to one of District 12's many river 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, see [Let's Go Waterfowling](#).

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

District 12 occurs within the ceded area of several Northwest Treaty Tribes and tribal hunting. Tribes set their own seasons and bag limits. Tribal Enforcement personnel ensure tribal hunting regulations, which are sometimes very different from state regulations, are followed.

More information regarding tribal hunting rights and state-tribal co-management can be found [online](#).

### **FIREARMS RESTRICTION AREAS IN KING COUNTY**

Centerfire and rimfire rifles are not legal for hunting in the area 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 additional information, see page 92 of the [2018 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). Through King County ordinances, no shooting areas have been established in many areas in the county. Please contact your local sheriff for specific locations.