

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

May 16 to May 31, 2020

## **DIVERSITY DIVISION**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Red Knot:** Natural Resource Scientist Buchanan participated in a conference call with partners to discuss recent activities involving research or conservation of Red Knots. Partners on the call were from several organizations in the United States and Mexico (USFWS – Portland, USFWS – Anchorage, USFWS – Colorado, USFS – Alaska, USFS – Washington, USGS – Patuxent, Oasis Bird Observatory – California, University of South Carolina [Ph.D. candidate], and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife). Many on the call expressed interest in establishing a working group. There was a discussion about having a special session at the Western Hemisphere Shorebird meeting scheduled for 2021. Several other partners, many of them from Mexico, were unable to participate in the call, and their absence highlighted the need for a forum where partners can communicate easily using Zoom, Teams, or some other virtual process.

**Short-eared Owl surveys:** Buchanan continued to coordinate with volunteers who conducted surveys for Short-eared Owls up until the time the project was suspended due to health and safety concerns related to COVID-19. Some of the volunteers had not yet submitted their data online and the follow-up communication was needed to remind them to submit data. Data for forty survey locations have been entered so far and data for four additional sites should be entered soon.

#### 2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

#### 3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

#### 4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

**Spotted Owl:** Natural Resource Scientist Buchanan gave a presentation to the Forest Practices Board in mid- May 2020. The title of the presentation was “The Spotted Owl in Washington: Status, distribution, forest practices rules, and limiting factors.”

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

**GAME DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

**HUNTER EDUCATION**

Nothing for this installment.

**LANDS DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

**SCIENCE DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

**REGION 1**

*HERES WHAT WE’VE BEEN UP TO:*

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Population Monitoring:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill checked two trail cameras throughout the week for wolf population monitoring and surveillance. Neither trail camera captured any wolf pictures.

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Sportsman Contacts:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spoke with a hunter who had previously had hunting success in the Cloverland area and was looking at trying to hunt the Pasayten game management unit (GMU). Wade gave him contact information for the District Biologist for the Pasayten area.

Private Lands Biologist Gaston received emails and phone calls from hunters interested in hunting Spokane and Whitman counties this year. Private Lands Biologist Gaston provided resources for each hunter and recommendations for focused hunting pressures.

**Private Lands Access and Hunter Programs:** Natural Resource Technician Fish contacted landowners about WDFW's hunting access programs. Fish has been working on his electronic records and using ArcGIS to map properties enrolled in these hunting access programs. Biologist Baarstad checked properties and posted signs on lands in Lincoln County enrolled in hunting access programs.

Private Lands Biologist Gaston checked on properties enrolled in the Private Lands Access Programs. Private Lands Biologist Gaston replaced signs and checked on areas with heavy pressure from the spring turkey season. Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley replaced a vandalized sign on an access site and replaced numerous old signs on a back boundary on a WDFW private lands access sites in Walla Walla County as well as remove back boundary access signs on a property taken out of a WDFW access program.

Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley contacted a landowner to collect a previously sent out A-19 form to collect signatures to be able to process for access payment to those landowners enrolled in WDFW's Voluntary Public Access (VPA) program. Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley received an approved contract from Contracts Officer Mielke to obtain a landowner signature.

## 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Range Rider Contacts:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill contacted several WDFW contracted range riders (CRR) during the week via phone calls, emails, and site visits. Samsill spoke to CRR's Shockey and Grumbach.

Samsill also spoke with producers: Nelson, Singer, Hill, Tracy, and others. Samsill met Producer Tracy at his residence and provided cowbells and the updated range rider activity log form. Also, Samsill provided the producer with information regarding his contract and range riding requirements.

**Conflict Prevention:** Samsill and District 1 Wolf Team Administrator Pozzanghera responded to a report of a dead calf, owned by Diamond M Ranch, up Lambert Creek. WDFW staff members, Special Deputy Flood, and two range riders were at the scene. A thorough depredation

investigation was performed, and the determination was that the calf died from non-depredation related causes. The carcass was removed and disposed of for sanitation purposes.

Samsill also responded to a report of a nuisance bear in Kettle Falls that had been getting into garbage and deer feeders. The responding party (RP) said that he had seen the bear several times and that his dog had treed the bear the previous night on his property. On top of providing guidance and education to the RP, Samsill issued the RP electric fencing materials to put around any attractants that could not be secured in a building or shed. Also, Samsill provided the RP with pyrotechnics and rubber buckshot to haze the bear out of the area if he sees it again.

Samsill created a list of all the range riders that fall under his purview. Samsill included the range riders contact information, the assigned producer they ride for, the assigned allotment(s) they ride in, and the associated wolf pack in their given area. Samsill sent the list to WDFW Sergeant Leonetti and Range Program Manager Weinmann of the USFS Colville National Forest.

Samsill and Wolf Biologist Roussin responded to reported wolf depredation in Rice where the producer reportedly saw a wolf attack one of his calves. WDFW staff members, Special Deputy Flood, and Sheriff Manke were on scene and a thorough depredation investigation was conducted. The determination of the investigation was inclusive due to a lack of sufficient evidence to classify what injured the calf. Therefore, the cause of injury was ruled as unconfirmed depredation. The calf was doctored, and the wounds were treated to stop bleeding and to prevent infection. Samsill deployed a Fox-Light in the pasture where the attack reportedly occurred to deter a repeat attack.

**City Moose:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman assisted WDFW Enforcement with the capture and relocation of a young cow moose that was in an industrial area next to the interstate.

**Cougar Concerns:** Westerman also spoke with a resident who found a cached porcupine and was concerned as to what animal did that. After getting all the details, Westerman explained that it was likely feline that made the cache and gave advice about protecting goats and other livestock.

**Suspected Wolf or other Predator Activity:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman received a call from a producer who was having issues with his cows getting out of several pastures that were possibly related to a similar issue with his landlord's buffalo getting out last week. Westerman met with the producer and scoured the landscape for evidence of anything unusual. Westerman spent two afternoons looking around and placed a camera in a travel corridor to see if anything shows up. No evidence was found thus far.

**Elk Damage:** Westerman spoke with a producer who has had issues with elk damaging fence over the years and wanted a damage tag. Westerman discussed the requirements and the options available and the producer was not keen on meeting those requirements.



*Calves grazing on the 4-O Wildlife Area*

**Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for Livestock:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade worked with two producers to get their Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for Livestock (DPCA) paperwork turned in for processing. Wade also answered questions from another producer regarding his new DPCA.

**4-O Wildlife Area Grazing Weekly Check-ins:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade continued weekly check-ins with producers. Wade discussed issues with some smaller calves that appear to be under 200 pounds on a grazing allotment. The producer agreed to be more vigilant when bringing cattle into the area. All producers reported no wolf or livestock issues so far.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spent one day checking the Grouse Flats area for signs of wolf activity and monitoring grazing progress. Wade did not see any signs of wolf activity near cattle and all observed cattle appeared to be calm and healthy.

**Peola Elk Fence:** Wade was contacted by Wildlife Area Manager Dice regarding timber harvesting work near the elk fence and the logging company wanting to leave a gate open for ease of access while harvesting timber. Wade and Dice both agreed that leaving gates open in the elk fence was a bad practice and ran a substantial risk of allowing large numbers of elk out that could potentially cause substantial damage to crop.

**Clarkston Skunk:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade was contacted by a Clarkston homeowner who had skunks digging in her yard. Wade recommended setting a live trap to attempt to remove the problem skunk.

**Garfield County Mystery Animal:** Wade was contacted by a fisherman who picked up a dead creature that he believed to be an alligator hatchling. Wade retrieved the carcass from the fisherman. Due to the level of decomposition Wade could not make an identification, other than it may be a salamander. Wade will be having other biologists look at the carcass to determine its identity.



*Retrieved carcass*

**Walla Walla Deer:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade continued to work with vineyard employees regarding a deer issue. Wade traveled to Walla Walla to deliver a paintball gun that will be used to assist with ongoing deer hazing issues.

Wade also contacted a Walla Walla homeowner who had two small bucks that both had healed rear leg injuries frequenting his property and damaging landscaping plants. Wade explained that that type of injury generally comes from vehicle collisions. Wade also offered advice on how to keep deer from damaging landscaping plants.

**Nuisance Wildlife:** Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley received a message from an individual that was having issues with two bucks eating his wife's flowers and wanted them to be relocated. Hadley forwarded the information to Region 1's Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade of the landowner and their situation and he will follow up with a call.

Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley spoke to a local farmer who stated they were dealing with 150 elk in their fields. Hadley shared with the landowner when the new wildlife conflict specialist would be starting in Walla Walla County but in the meantime, information was shared with WDFW's Region 1 office.

#### 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

**Farm Bill:** Biologist Baarstad worked on the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract files in preparation for field visits with landowners in Lincoln County.

**Habitat Watering and Weed Control:** Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley filled up a water tank trailer and took to site on a habitat planting of shrubs that were put in the ground at the end of March for supplemental watering.

Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley contacted a local farmer to discuss a habitat project on his property as well as plans on weed control. The property is being re-enrolled into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the farmer will work with Hadley on a habitat plan for affected acres.

Private Lands Supervisor Earl continued to complete A-19 forms for habitat incentive payments to private landowners in Asotin and Garfield Counties.

#### 5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

#### 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

**ArcGIS Mapping:** Private Lands Biologist Gaston worked on his ArcGIS database of the properties under contract. He will work to create a booklet for law enforcement of all the properties enrolled in the private lands access programs.

**Meetings:** Samsill attended and participated in a fall turkey hunting planning meeting with WDFW Wildlife Program staff members to brainstorm about turkey hunting options.

Additionally, Samsill participated in a Wedge Pack Evaluation meeting after three depredation events in eight days had occurred. WDFW staff members provided updates on some of the action items that were completed as well as some of the outstanding items that still needed to be addressed.

**Three Year Hunting Package Input:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade offered input to District Biologist Wik regarding the three-year hunting package.

**Hiring Freeze Paperwork:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna offered the career seasonal wildlife conflict specialist position to the top candidate who did not accept. McCanna then started the process over and completed the hiring freeze paperwork which was approved. The new recruitment should be out this week.

**Wolf/Livestock Interaction Protocol:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna along with other WDFW staff members and three members of the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) edited two

sections of the protocol. The edits were then sent to the entire WAG for review before the next meeting.

## 7) Other

**Local Working Group Meeting:** Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley took part in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Lower Snake River Local Working Group webinar meeting to discuss Farm Bill updates from 2019, review Washington Local Working Groups 2020 survey results including natural resource concern priorities, land uses, and priority geographic areas and to discuss resource concern projects and practices. Participants with the Local Working Group covers counties from Asotin, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield, and Walla Walla Counties.

## **REGION 2**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Pygmy Reintroduction Effort:** Reintroduction efforts continue with 46 kits released into the two primary Recovery Areas in Beezley Hills (23 kits) and Burton Draw (23) so far this spring. The breeding enclosures are looking to more than double our kit production output over the past couple of years.



*Science Technician Katie Soltysiak photobombs a pygmy rabbit kit being released*

**Semi-Wild Breeding Population:** While we are seeing instant dividends from our recent translocation effort, bringing in 26 wild pygmy rabbits from Idaho and Nevada for the semi-wild breeding program, the success has not been evenly distributed within our four breeding enclosures. Ph.D. Candidate Stacey Nerkowski with the University of Idaho completed the genetic analysis of the first 36 kits captured this spring. Nearly all the Washington pygmy rabbits retained for breeding last year survived (10 of 11), which is the highest rate of return we have yet observed. Less encouraging however is the fact that only 12 of 26 adults translocated from Idaho and Nevada have bred so far. This is far lower than what we have observed in previous translocation efforts.

These proportions however are not distributed equally. Nearly all the kit production is coming from only two of the four breeding enclosures, which reflect high rates of establishment from the translocated rabbits. Now, we are not certain as to why there is a lack of survival or production in the other enclosures. Even if patterns remain the same, we are still looking at the most productive breeding season since 2016 which will allow for sufficient release efforts and retaining kits for next year's breeding enclosure efforts.

**Washington Ground Squirrels:** Biologist Comstock completed three grids transect surveys to determine the presence of Washington ground squirrels in Douglas County. The surveys rely heavily on aural detections of Washington ground squirrels to locate active burrows. Biologist Comstock was unable to confirm any active ground burrows but found some potential historic burrows, which suggests it may be worth revisiting this area in 2021, earlier in the spring.



*Possible historic Washington ground squirrel burrow in Douglas County* – Photo by Devon Comstock

**Chelan County Bats:** Biologists Abby Tobin and Emily Jeffreys visited a bat colony in staff housing at Lake Chelan State Park as part of a statewide effort to identify bat colonies and perform surveillance for White-nose Syndrome (WNS), a devastating disease caused by the fungus *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (*Pd*) that has killed millions of bats in North America since it was first detected in the United States in 2007. WNS arrived in Washington in 2016 and made its way east of the Cascades by 2019 when it was first detected in Kittitas County. This proximity makes bats in bordering Chelan County particularly vulnerable to encountering and contracting WNS. Biologists donned protective gear and entered the attic in which a colony of little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*) roosts each spring and summer before migrating to unknown hibernacula in the fall. Biologists Jeffreys and Tobin estimated 75-100 bats were present, although more could be roosting out of sight. Biologists swabbed attic surfaces and collected guano samples to test for the presence of WNS. Additionally, biologists laid down plastic sheets to collect fresh guano samples, which can be more reliably tested for the fungus than older guano. Biologists Tobin and Jeffreys will return to the colony in approximately one month to sample the fresh guano and perform an emergence count at sunset to gain a more accurate estimate of the number of bats roosting there.



*(Left) Biologist Emily Jeffreys lays down tarps to collect fresh guano samples in an attic occupied by little brown bats at Lake Chelan State Park. (Right) A group of little brown bats roosts in the rafters* - Photos by Abby Tobin

**Common Loon:** Common loons are again nesting within District 6. Surveys by Biologist Heinlen and other observers have found six nesting pairs all on traditional nesting lakes within the district.

**Wolf Pack Monitoring:** Checking remote cameras and getting reports from the public, Biologist Heinlen documented the Beaver Creek pack using traditional areas within their territory over the winter and this spring.



*Beaver Creek pack animals in traditional areas this winter and spring* – Photo by WDFW

**Predator-Prey Research Project:** Biologist Fitkin followed up on two radio-collared mule deer mortalities. Both turned out to be fresh cougar kills. In one case, the cat was still on the kill when approached and quickly left the area, but not before it was apparent that it was a radio-collared cougar. The adult female cougar turned out to be a cat that is not only a part of the current research effort but was also a study animal from an earlier cougar project and is believed to be around twelve years old. This is noteworthy longevity for a wild cat, particularly in a hunted population.



*Cougar kill of a radio-collared mule deer* – Photo by Fitkin

**Sharp-tailed Grouse:** Annual population surveys for the state-endangered Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*) are drawing to a close as the end of peak breeding season approaches. Each spring, male sharp-tailed grouse congregate at leks where they display to attract females, allowing biologists to count these males and approximate Washington's sharp-tailed grouse population. Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock surveyed a lek site in northern Douglas County and observed 18 male sharp-tailed grouse.

This year's effort to augment low Sharp-tailed grouse populations in District 6 with birds from healthy populations from British Columbia, Canada was canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, radio-collared birds from the 2018 and 2019 augmentation efforts are still in need of monitoring. Biologist Heinlen found one male released in April 2018 on a lek in Tunk Valley. This bird has successfully gone through two breeding seasons in the District. Getting new genetics into the district's populations was one of the main goals of this augmentation.



*Biologist Devon Comstock observes a sharp-tailed grouse lek in Douglas County* – Photo by Emily Jeffreys

**Snake Survey and Monitoring:** Biologist Fitkin and United States Forest Service (USFS) Biologist Rohrer surveyed a new Northern Pacific rattlesnake hibernaculum in the upper Methow Watershed beyond Lost River, discovered with the help of a radio-marked snake that captured by Biologist Fitkin in the general area last summer. This is the furthest west site we have documented a den site and adds to our knowledge of the distribution and ecology of this species.



*Northern Pacific Rattlesnake at a winter hibernaculum* – Photo by Fitkin

**Northern Leopard Frogs:** Biologists Grabowsky and Rowan performed numerous surveys for tadpoles and old egg masses in the Potholes Northern Leopard Frog Management Area. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these surveys were postponed during the critical two-month window for locating egg masses. We are in the second year of a two-year project aiming to re-establish this state-endangered species to former range on the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge through specialized translocations. These translocations take years of research and planning, including disease testing and genetic evaluations. If anyone in the public ever sees a Northern Leopard Frog, please contact WDFW with the location information. Also, please never release frogs or other wildlife species anywhere since they often bring diseases and other problems that can lead to native wildlife declines or extinctions.

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Wildflower Watching:** While birdwatching has become all the rage during the COVID-19 pandemic, Biologist Comstock has turned to improve her plant identification skills. 2020 appears to be an excellent year for an endemic plant, *Lewisiopsis tweedyi*. *L. tweedyi* which occurs only in the eastern Cascades from British Columbia to north-central Washington, south into Kittitas County. Look for these beauties, where they occur, on well-drained sandy or rocky soils in the ponderosa pine to grand fir zone. Often growing in rock outcrops.



*L. tweedyi*, Derby Canyon in Chelan County - Photo by Devon Comstock

Wildflowers are starting to fade at lower elevations in the Wenatchee Foothills as summer approaches and temperatures rise, but an array of beautiful native plant species are in bloom throughout higher elevations in the eastern Cascades. Biologist Jeffrey has encountered many wildflowers while hiking through the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, including those pictured below.



*(Left) Spotted coralroot (Corallorhiza maculata), a saprophytic orchid that lacks the chlorophyll necessary to produce its food through photosynthesis (note the absence of green pigment), and instead feeds on decaying organic matter. (Center) Yellow avalanche lily (Erythronium grandiflorum). (Right) Lyall's mariposa-lily (Calochortus lyalli) - Photos by Heather Jeffrey*s



*Balsome Root* – Photo by Fitkin



*Yellow fleabane, aka Desert yellow daisy (Erigeron linearis) is a common wildflower throughout the sagebrush – steppe country of the Methow Valley. This wildflower can commonly be found in rather dry and rocky soils ranging from the valley foothills to midmountain altitudes – Photo by Troyer*



*Bitterroot in bloom*



*Springtime sagebrush-steppe in the Okanogan, East of Tonasket* - Photo by Haug

### 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Methow Temporary Pastures:** The Methow Wildlife Area has been working towards improving the temporary grazing program for the last few years. This year, Methow staff members have placed an emphasis on re-fencing the Big Valley Temporary Grazing pastures. These pastures were historically part of a ranch and are mostly comprised of rhizomatous sod-forming grasses, which make them very tolerable to grazing disturbance. All of last week, staff members worked on GPS, mapping, creating fence specifications, and soliciting quotes for roughly four miles of fence maintenance and rebuilds. Once completed, the Big Valley will serve as a premier grazing pasture alternative. These pastures will be provided to operators in an attempt to reduce negative interactions between livestock and wildlife, predominantly wolves who may den on more rugged mountain grazing allotments. These pastures can also provide relief to displaced livestock producers in the event of wildfires.

**Preparing for Livestock Turn Out:** Specialist Heilhecker updated United States Forest Service (USFS) personnel and livestock producers with wolf denning information in preparation for livestock turnout onto public grazing lands. She also assigned contracted range riders' areas to begin monitoring livestock.

**Bear Damage to Beehives:** Heilhecker received a call regarding a bear damaging beehives. The orchardist inquired whether WDFW paid financial compensation for the hives. He was concerned the owner of the hives would hold him liable for the bear damage. Heilhecker informed him there was no compensation program to cover bear damage and the best deterrent is electric fencing around each hive.

**Missing Calf:** Specialist Heilhecker received a report of wolf depredation. After contacting the producer, she learned a calf was missing. The producer requested assistance from the contracted range rider to help locate the calf. The range rider found no sign of the calf or any signs of disturbance. The next day the calf was located with its mother.

**Raptor Rescue:** On May 17, Biologist Comstock received a message from a USFS biologist seeking advice on rehabilitation for a nestling red-tailed hawk. This young hawk somehow became ejected from its nest, where it was seen near a popular canal hiking path in Leavenworth for three consecutive days. Given the poor weather and the continuing declining condition of the bird, the USFS biologist decided to intervene. Due to the lack of rehab facilities in the area and current low operational capacity at many facilities, it was difficult to find placement for it. It was reported that after a few days of hand feeding, the bird's health had greatly improved and Biologist Comstock suggested attempting to relocate the nest and place the nestling either back in its nest or at least in the nest tree, to hopefully encourage the parents to continue feeding it, and keep the bird out of harm's way. Biologist Comstock helped in relocating the hawk nest and fortunately, it was easily detected as the adults were flying and calling nearby and the other sibling was making begging calls from the nest site. After locating the nest, another USFS

Biologist, Aja Woodrow, was called in for his tree climbing skills, and the nestling hawk was returned to its nest tree.



*Red-tailed hawk nestling estimated at 33-35 days old, red-tailed hawks typically fledge at approximately 40 days old* - Photo by Devon Comstock



*USFS Biologist Aja Woodrow attempts to reunite hawk nestling with parents, by creating an artificial nest. The bird has other ideas and jumps out on this branch. Good enough!* - Photo by Janet Millard

**Red Fox Den:** Biologist Rowan responded to a resident who wanted to report a fox den on his property. The fox vixen has pups, which he and his wife were happy to see on the property, but he was concerned his neighbors may complain. They were advised to try and establish a new den on his large property further away from his neighbor and other development by creating a good shrub or brush pile in a more remote location. It will offer an alternative, should the current den site require removal.

#### 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

**Douglas County Conservation Easement:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten reviewed the proposed Breiler Property Conservation Easement in Douglas County at the request of Region 2's Habitat Program. Braaten knew of several Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts held by the Breiler Family which the easement boundary included. Braaten contacted Douglas County Farm Service Agency (FSA) to discuss details and was informed that the SAFE CRP contracts will be canceled when the Conservation Easement is finalized. Braaten forwarded information and provided additional background on the conservation benefits to Sage Grouse in that area of Douglas County. The Habitat Program will be developing a letter of support to the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust for this Conservation Easement and appreciated additional information.

**Safe Harbor Program:** Coordinator Gallie, Technician Smith, and Intern Valentine completed presence and absence surveys for pygmy rabbits within the transmission line corridor crossing both Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area (WLA) and Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) lands, all of which are occupied habitat. The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) will be conducting road mowing maintenance for access and fire risk reduction. Sagebrush has overgrown most of this area and could be inhabited by pygmy rabbits. We did not find any conclusive active burrows but did collect eight samples that were potentially pygmy rabbits. Genetic testing from the University of Idaho confirmed these samples were juvenile cottontail.

Biologist Hughes met with a landowner interested in enrolling a new property into the Safe Harbor Program. Hughes explained the enrollment process and provided maps showing active burrow locations and where relocation efforts are being made concerning the landowner's property. The landowner is interested in enrolling 2,080 acres within the Dormaier Recovery Emphasis Area. The property has dense sagebrush patches that would provide suitable pygmy rabbit habitat. Hughes began baseline surveys on the new landowner's property. Assistance from Supervisor Rickel, Technician Smith, and Technician Soltysiak on the survey effort was greatly appreciated. Hughes will finish up the remaining sections needed to be surveyed next week. So far, no active burrows have been detected during the baseline surveys.

**Silver Side Channel Beaver Activity Update:** Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug and Methow WLA Manager Troyer continued working with District Habitat Biologist Hofmann on the proposed mitigation of beaver dam activity at the head of Silver Side channel, a recently completed salmon habitat restoration project. Following a site visit with WDFW staff members, Cascade Fisheries, the Methow Beaver Project, and the Colville Confederated Tribe, a compromise was reached and steps to move forward made clear to those before breaking away.

Conversations are ongoing with divergent ideas persisting on how to move forward. A discussion is planned towards the end of this week and response to interested parties sent out next week.

**Pre-applications for State Lands Development Grants:** Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug submitted three Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) State Lands Development (SLD) grants to improve access sites in Okanogan County. The grant applications included improvements to the Lewis Butte and Riser Lake access areas near Winthrop, improvements to the Buzzard Lake Access site west of Okanogan, and improvements to three water access sites along the Similkameen River west of Oroville and Tonasket. Projects improve parking, provide ADA improvement, and give users better/safer access to water. The Buzzard Lake and Riser Lake projects include new vault toilet facilities. Each project will be reviewed by an RCO-selected panel and sponsors provided feedback to improve applications for the final submission in July.

**Scotch Creek WLA Noxious Weed Control Update:** Natural Resource Tech Medina sprayed for houndstongue, and common tansy at the Chopaka and Eder units and used a weed eater to manually treat parking areas at both units. Staff members are keeping an eye out for treating Leafy spurge on the Chopaka unit, but at present, the river levels are near flood stage. Personnel are required to cross the Similkameen River to access the Spurge site. Medina also inspected the recent native bunchgrass planting at the Eder unit; which has cheatgrass but also has significant restoration of native grasses in places. We will plan to mow the field soon to reduce the competition on our seeded perennials. Natural Resource Technician Sklaney sprayed various weeds covering several parking lots on the Scotch Creek and Tunk Valley units.

He also sprayed Scotch thistle on the Scotch Creek Unit and mowed the native shrub rows. Technician Sklaney also sprayed Dalmatian toadflax and Hoary alyssum on the Pogue Mountain and Tunk Valley units and treated some houndstounge, Hoary alyssum, and Saint John's wort on the Chopaka unit. They did great work catching up on critical weed control across all units. Manager Olson participated in a Teams meeting that included Region 2 and Olympia Real Estate and Lands Operations Manager Haug to discuss the proposed trade on the Scotch Creek unit. Multiple obstacles have kept this project stalled. The goal is to protect a critical 200 acres of Shrub-steppe that is highly developable, quality shrub-steppe habitat, and in the heart of the Scotch Creek unit. Another meeting is scheduled for next week.

**Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Noxious Weed Control:** Sinlahekin WLA staff members have been busy controlling noxious weeds on the different WDFW wildlife area units. They spent a great deal of time treating Scotch thistle on the Chiliwist unit. They will be continuing treatment on the unit for the next few weeks. They were also able to treat parking areas and roads sides on some of the other units as well. Staff members were also able to release some biological controls at a variety of sites that have Russian Knapweed infestations. One of those sites was the Swanson Mill area that burned in 2019. The burned area has come back nicely since the fire, with a few patches of Russian knapweed along the road.



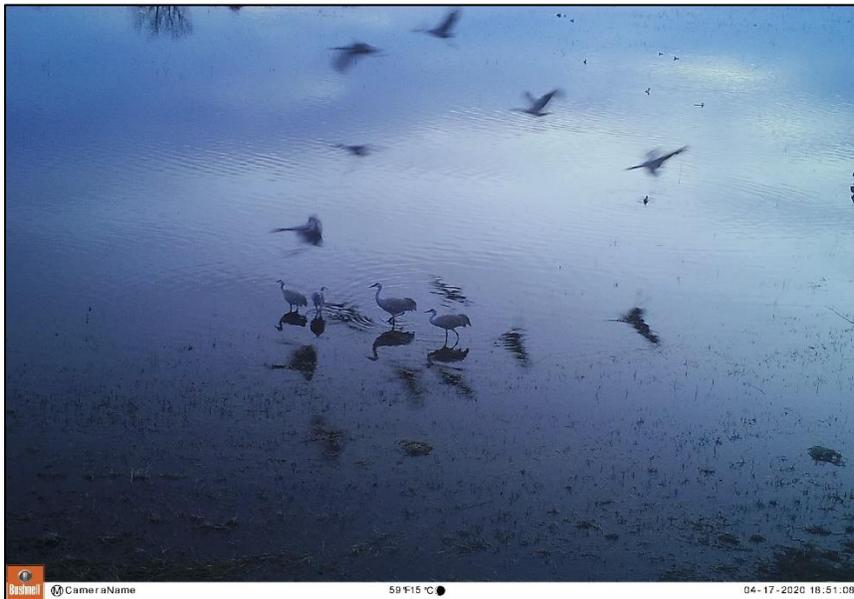
*Post-fire regrowth at the Swanson Mill parcel* – Photo by Wehmeyer



**Frenchman Regulated Access Area Remote Camera Survey:** Specialist McPherson collected cameras that were deployed in March to census the abundance of waterfowl using wetland basins during the spring in the Frenchman Regulated Access Area. This is the third consecutive year this survey has occurred; it will be interesting to see if waterfowl use increased in the project due to most of the survey took place during lands being closed and our stay at home order. Waterfowl might have used the project at high numbers and for longer periods with less disturbance so comparing numbers with previous years will be very interesting.



*Pintail taking off from cell 3 at Frenchman RAA March 2020 - Photo by McPherson*



*Sandhill cranes taking advantage of receding waterline as it concentrates food sources - Photo by McPherson*

**Moist Soil Management at Regulated Access Areas:** Wetland basins at the Frenchman and Winchester areas are dry enough to start working. Specialist McPherson was eager to get back to normal fieldwork and get the wetlands ready for moist soil management activities. At the Winchester Regulated Access area Russian thistle was cleared around wetland basins during the winter to improve loafing areas for waterfowl. McPherson recently treated these cleared areas to set back the newly establishing Russian thistle and Kochia. The Frenchman Regulated Access Area basins are ready for harrowing, so to prepare them, Specialist McPherson spot sprayed areas that had Phragmites popping up before harrowing occur in basins.



*Mule deer buck enjoying cattail cover during the mid-day at Frenchman Regulated Access Area* - Photo by McPherson

**Biological Control of Russian Knapweed:** Of their many duties, four WDFW staff members of the near 200,000-acre Columbia Basin Wildlife Area devote much of their time to managing invasive weeds. If this sounds like a daunting and nearly impossible task, you heard right. Weeds can be treated in any number of ways, from hand pulling to aerial herbicide treatment, but the “correct” method depends upon factors such as the species in question, the extent of the infestation, the time of year, the effectiveness of the treatment, and so on. They all take time, which is of the essence when there are just four people to cover over 300 square miles. Where does one turn when time is limited, the weed infestation is overwhelming and 100 percent control is not feasible, the answer is bio-controls. Unlike other treatment methods, bio-controls work 24 hours a day and do not require direction or supervision. On May 14, Assistant Manager Bechtold released *Aulacidea acroptilonica*, a 2-millimeter-long gall-forming wasp that only utilizes the noxious weed Russian knapweed, in eight locations in the Banks Lake, Gloyd Seeps and Potholes Units. To be clear this insect will not kill the plant, but the galls will stress the plant and ultimately reduce flower and seed production.



Photo by Invasive.org

**Private Lands Habitat Restoration Projects:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten spent several hours in the field planting replacement trees and shrubs in ten-year-old project sites. These stands were planted by Braaten on private land with a focus on the Sharp-tailed grouse winter habitat.



*Native vegetation post-fire regrowth at the Swanson Mill parcel* – Photo by Wehmeyer

**North Central, West Palouse, and Big Bend Local Working Group Meetings:** The Region 2 Private Lands Team members participated in several working groups this past week. Biologist Hughes participated in the North Central (along with Braaten) and Big Bend Working Group (along with Rickel and Cook). Biologist Cook and Supervisor Rickel participated in the West Palouse Local Working Group (LWG) meeting. Earlier this month a survey was sent to all stakeholders for each working group asking members to prioritize their top ten resource

concerns. The group’s top resource concerns for each area were discussed. Each working group has an opportunity to create a local funding pool for two resource concerns that are not already identified in the state fund pools. Wildlife Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species and Sage Grouse initiative funds are available at a statewide level. The Big Bend and West Palouse LWG suggested to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that the state wildlife fund not be limited to only threatened and endangered species. This would then allow the funding to be used for pollinator species and more.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service - North Central Washington Local Working Group:** Private Lands Biologists Braaten and Hughes participated in the online local working group meeting to discuss funding priorities for 2021. North Central Washington LWG was able to identify a new funding priority for 2021 a wildfire hazard resource concern on rangeland and cropland (CRP). This will allow funding for brush management and roadway buffers, seeding, etc. to prevent wildfire in rangeland and cropland (CRP is identified as crop under federal definition). Other resource concerns, such as wildlife habitat were already accounted for under statewide pools. Below is a snapshot of funds available specifically for wildlife-focused practices in north-central Washington, mainly through NRCS practice standard 645, to retain expiring CRP benefits for three years. WDFW Private Lands Biologists assisted NRCS to focus the contracts with the greatest benefit to Sage Grouse and another CRP/Shrub steppe obligation in Douglas County. Wildlife funded applications accounted for more than half of the funds last year.



**Habitat Restoration:** Biologist Hughes conducted a visit to a potential fall habitat restoration project site that is enrolled in the Hunt by Written Permission program run by WDFW. After reviewing the area and discussing practices with the landowner, Hughes decided to push the project to Fall, 2021. This was based on poor field prep resulting from the COVID-19 situation. The field has very thick cheatgrass currently going to seed. The landowner is working on fencing out his cattle from the area. Once the fence is up, in the spring of 2021, the landowner will work with Hughes on-site preparation. Hughes will seed the area in fall 2021 into a native upland mix and another section into great basin wildrye. Hughes will put in approximately 500 shrubs along a canyon wall. The landowner put in 40 shrubs this spring along the canyon wall and they are doing very well right now.



*Habitat Restoration Site for Fall 2021* - Photo by Hughes

## 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

**Target Shooting Draft Rule:** Lands Operations Manager Finger reviewed public comments and developed a map slide showing four categories (with current shooting amenities, under development for amenities, has potential for amenities, and unsafe site(s) that cannot be modified to meet standards) of target shooting areas across Washington State for the Commission meeting

**Recreation and Conservation Office:** Lands Operations Manager Finger submitted a Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) State Lands Development grant for a reduced scope, hand launch facility with restroom and parking, to be developed at Hopkins Ferry. The scope of the original proposal was significantly reduced due to cultural resource impacts concerns associated with increased motorboat traffic and the potential for cultural resource looting

activities within this reach of the Columbia River. The new scope would require users to hand launch over a packed surface with an elevation differential of 45 feet (5 percent slope). This is certainly not ideal but given the circumstances, it appears to be the only viable solution to provide a boat launch within this remote section of Rufus Wood Reservoir.

**Mosquito Control District:** Lands Operations Manager Finger approved the first aduicide treatment of the year by Grant County Mosquito Control District No. 1. WDFW has the authority to approve aduicide applications under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) due to the presence of State Endangered Northern Leopard Frogs. Trap count thresholds have been developed in an Integrated Pest Management Plan which guides when approvals will be considered. This request was for a zone in which Northern Leopard frogs have a moderate density and require  $\geq 500$  mosquitoes and trap before considering approval. The trap count was 5,542.

## 7) Other

**Methow Road Maintenance:** Maintenance Mechanic Wottlin has been working diligently to get the Methow WLA's road grader up and running. This road grader is crucial to keeping our wildlife area access roads in tip-top driving conditions. Wottlin has been troubleshooting wiring issues, replaced several worn tires, and made needed repairs to a gearbox and wheel bearings. With the recent rains, these repairs came just in time, as it's currently prime conditions to grade and maintain roads throughout the Methow WLA. Recently, road maintenance has been a high priority as it directly supports our WDFW mission by providing access to a plethora of recreational and commercial fish and wildlife-related experiences.



*Brewer's sparrow nest in Douglas County* - Photo by Devon Comstock



*Bighorn Sheep near Blue Lake on the Sinlahekin WLA* – Photo by Wehmeyer



*Bighorn Sheep near Blue Lake on the Sinlahekin WLA* – Photo by Wehmeyer



*Wood duck drakes (Aix Sponsa) has been a common site around the Methow Valley this year. This eye-catching duck has been found in a variety of habitats including wooded beaver ponds, side channels, as well as slower-moving waters of the Methow that are surrounded by green vegetation, standing trees, and woody debris* – Photo by Troyer







*From top: Moose, snowshoe hare, and pileated woodpecker, and rescuing a friend (gopher snake) from potential roadkill – Photo by S. Fitkin*

## **REGION 3**

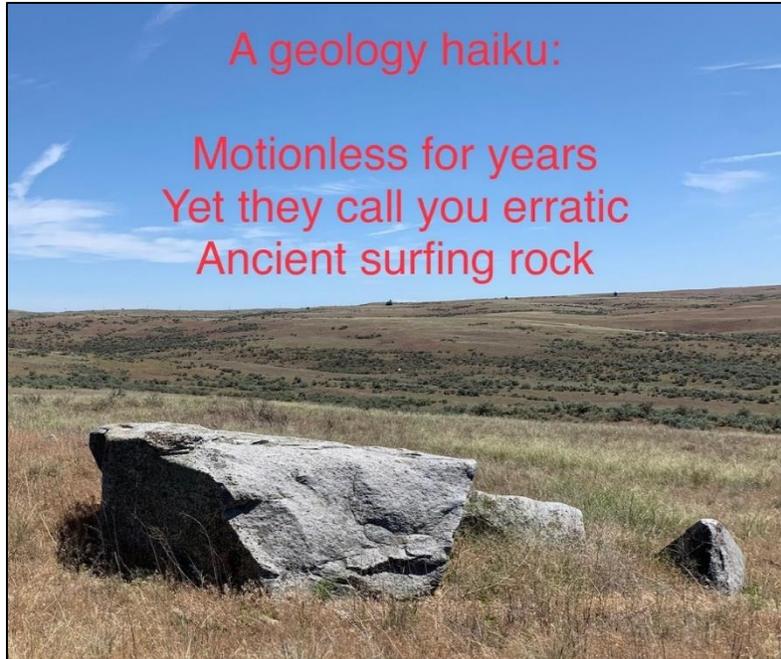
### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**



*Black bear at Quilomene Bay (brown phase)*

District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra was finally cleared for field duty following COVID-19 restrictions using safe work practices. The tail end of the 2020 ground squirrel survey window found no squirrels, but conditions were dry, and some colonies might have been less active and undetected. However, the few areas surveyed did not appear to have any sign of squirrels which still helped fill a gap in local knowledge. The lack of squirrels and long distances covered did lead to some field time thought exercises.



*A massive granite erratic left by the Missoula Floods found and contemplated near Juniper Dunes during a squirrel survey*

District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra checked on seven of the eight nest platforms installed last fall in District 4. One was occupied by Red-tailed hawks, but the others were vacant. As hawks are rare in the area and often faithful to past territories, this was no surprise, but they may still make nest sites for future ferruginous hawks once discovered. Fidorra did find a pair nesting at a historic site which was welcomed information.



*A historic Ferruginous Hawk territory unoccupied this year but offering commanding views*

District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz reported on two collared deer from the East Slope Cascade Study that had gone on mortality mode. One was an obvious cougar kill, the second was too scavenged to determine the cause of death.



*Scavenged Deer Carcass*

Biologist Bernatowicz surveyed for Townsend Ground Squirrels (SPTO) once there was approval for fieldwork. Non-agriculture areas are very dry this year, causing SPTO activity to be much lower than normal for this time of year. Efforts were directed at documenting known SPTO colonies in agricultural areas. Approximately 25 colonies were documented, which was much lower than would have been found five years ago. There appeared to be several reasons for the decline. Irrigation district personnel noticed a significant decline in post-2015 drought and subsequent hard winters. Older, standard orchard blocks are being pulled out in mass. The ground is being re-graded, likely collapsing the burrows. No colonies were seen in the new high-density orchards. Finally, current surveys were being conducted later than optimal. SPTO activity is decreasing while ground vegetation is increasing. Low numbers of inactive animals in thick vegetation greatly decreases detectability.



*SPTO Burrow that was active a few weeks ago*



*Recently cleared Standard Orchard*

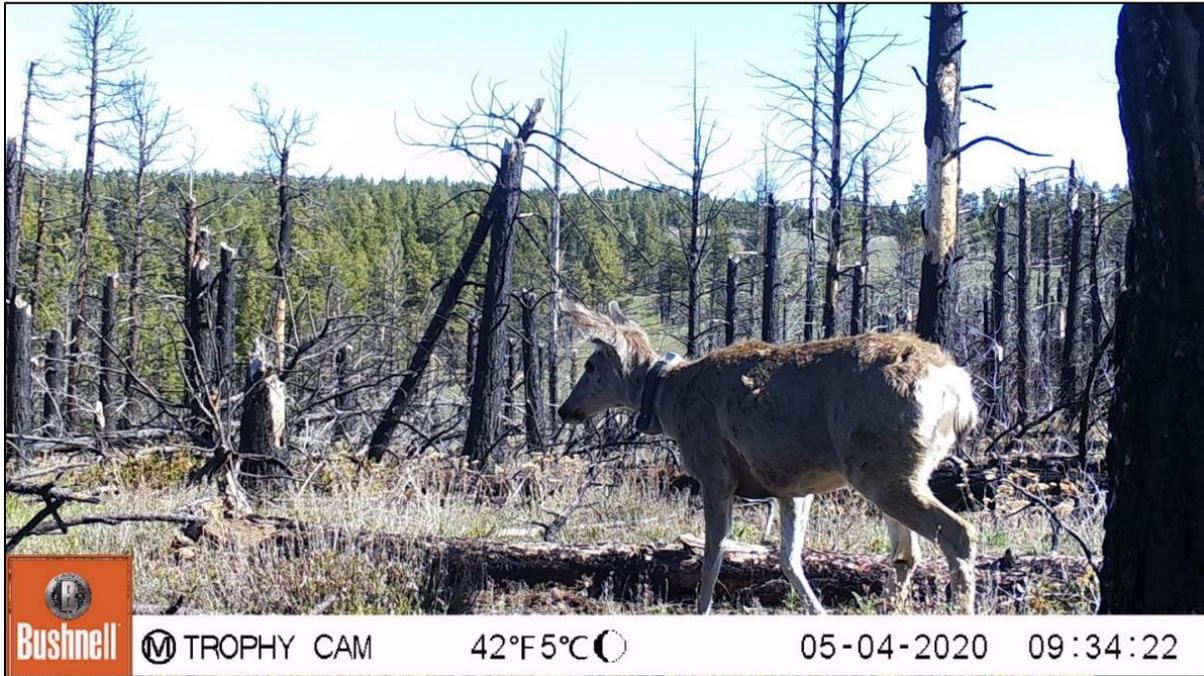


*New High-Density Orchard*



*Very Tall Vegetation in Orchard*

The GPS units are not working on either of the two Teanaway Pack wolf collars. Ground tracking has found the ousted Teanaway alpha male is wandering, but he was back within his old home range, apparently alone. The dispersed Teanaway juvenile male is in the Naneum pack area. Cameras placed to monitor wolves in the Naneum area were checked this week. No wolves were on the cameras, but elk, deer, and coyotes were commonly captured at the camera locations.



## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

L.T. Murray Natural Resource Technician Blore continued to check “No Camping” signs before Memorial Day weekend. Unfortunately, they were largely disregarded. While recreating in the Taneum, Manager Babik observed every pull out in Taneum packed with campers. Babik called in several cases of habitat destruction in the meadows and found numerous gates had been vandalized. Officer Peterson issued several habitat destruction citations. Both agreed the use and abuse of state lands are unprecedented.



*One of several gates that had their locks cut*



*Two areas of motorcycles tearing up meadow habitat*





*Examples of “No Camping” on State Land*



*A 4-year-old fills two bags full of garbage collected from state land*

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik and Lands Headquarters Planner Jatczak hosted a recreation planning meeting for staff to guide the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Plan. We have received about 80 comments from the public regarding recreation on the L.T. Murray WLA.

### **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Corral Canyon Damage Elk Permits:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand prepared and delivered two additional permits for a landowner who filled earlier issued permits. Good harvest success is being reported on these permits with almost all being yearling spike bulls. These permits are a very useful tool in pressuring elk away from valuable crops and back to the Hanford Monument lands.

**Rattlesnake Hills Elk Hazing:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand spent time this past week hazing elk near the top of Rattlesnake Mountain. Increasing numbers of animals are leaving the Hanford site to forage in winter wheat crops on the southern exposure of Rattlesnake Mountain.



*Elk in a wheat crop from a trail camera captured 140 images of elk entering or leaving crop areas mostly at night*



*Elk browse in wheat*

**Walla Walla County Deer Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received a complaint from a large wine grape vineyard in the Walla Walla area concerning many deer that are foraging on high-value wine grapes. A new Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement was developed and processed to identify both lethal and non-lethal strategies that will be implemented to address the conflict. Further follow-up will be conducted to evaluate success.

**Paterson Wine Grape Deer Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand handled a complaint from a vineyard in the Paterson area near the Columbia River experiencing deer damage to a large block of wine grapes. Several non-lethal hazing techniques (liquefied petroleum gas cannons, scent deterrents and sprays, and pyrotechnics) are already being employed with only minimal success. A renewed Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement was produced, and two kill permits issued.

**Horn Rapids Deer Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand responded to a new deer damage complaint from a large wine grape vineyard near the Yakima River. Gas cannons and active hazing will be employed to reduce the damage impacts. The manager of the vineyard also commented that a cougar was seen in the vineyard chasing the deer. Some advice was given on dangerous wildlife encounters.

Three livestock depredation investigations were conducted this week by District 8 Wildlife Conflict staff members. The first was a calf in the Thorp area, the second was a series of calf mortalities in the Reecer Creek area, and the third was several sheep mortalities in the Robinson Canyon area. Two were confirmed as a cougar. The third, probable cougar. Hounds were unable to track the cat at one site. A trap was set at a second, but no animal(s) were captured.

A subadult male cougar ended up in a backyard well within Ellensburg City limits. The cat was removed by WDFW Enforcement for public safety concerns. The cougar was healthy and had an empty stomach.



*Cougar removed in Ellensburg city limits*

Carcass dumping continues to be a problem in the Naneum Wolf Pack territory. Free disposal is now provided by WDFW at the transfer station and the Kittitas County Conservation District is assisting with getting information to livestock owners.

Wolf monitoring by Range Rider Ward, Range Rider McBride, Conflict Technician Leuck, and Conflict Specialist Wetzel occurred each day this week in areas of cattle and sheep grazing allotments. The large area combined with the high numbers of livestock creates numerous calls from livestock producers concerned about wolf activity.

District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck checked for wolf presence in several areas of Kittitas and Yakima counties. Most large producers have cattle and sheep turned out into the Naneum Wolf Pack territory this month. No wolf conflict has been reported, even with cattle and wolves in proximity based on collar data and observed cattle in the area.



*Cattle (all calves) on Section 18*

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Assistant Manager Winegeart measured grass in Upper Parke pasture to establish utilization before cattle being introduced for the 2020 year. Very little utilization was observed.



*Utilization monitoring on Quilomene WLA*

**Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Seedings Growth:** Private Lands Biologist Hulett began to inspect Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) contracts that were in their first and second year. Many of the SAFE seedings had heavy weed pressure on top of a healthy grass stand. This is expected early in the stand's maturity but needs to be managed. Hulett recommended to landowners that mowing as soon as possible would be the best choice of management. One landowner decided to spray his field instead of mowing and unfortunately, the chemical hit all present species including what was seeded.



*A SAFE contract that was sprayed with unknown herbicide. A line can be seen where the chemicals were not applied. It is unknown what effects this will have on the grass stand.*

Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett took part in a site visit to the Esquatzal Unit, part of the Sunnyside and Snake river WLA, to help plan a fire restoration project. The area burned early October of 2020. The plan will include native grass and forb seeding, shrub plantings, and weed control.

Private Lands Biologist Hulett attended Natural Resource Conservation Service's South Central and Big Bend Local working group meeting to give them input on resource concerns. The meeting concluded with the South-Central team using their funding for water quality and soil health with a wildlife habitat focus. The Big Bend team decided to use their funding on water quality management for irrigation projects.

Sunnyside Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber, Assistant Manager Ferguson, and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin installed four vegetation monitoring plots in upland and seasonal marsh habitats throughout the Sunnyside Unit. The plots will be used to track vegetation changes resulting from new management practices we are implementing in 2020.



*Site of one of four vegetation monitoring plots before restoration work near Mosbar point.*

Ferguson and Wascisin have mowed out approximately 20 acres of poison hemlock and kochia in the Snipes Reserve and an additional 30 acres in the habitat portion of the large center pivot just north of the office in the Sunnyside Unit in preparation for disking and planting native grasses and pollinator strips.

On May 28, Tina Blewett and Steve Liske from Ducks Unlimited spent the day touring the Sunnyside Unit with Manager Kaelber, Assistant Manager Ferguson, and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin brainstorming ideas for projects to rehabilitate wetland sites. They

identified about five potential projects and Assistant Manager Ferguson will follow up with Ducks Unlimited by providing more information about the project sites and next steps.

### 5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing this installment.

### 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

**New Equipment Arrived:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett and the Sunnyside/ Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber received the new 100 HP tractor and duel-blade eight-foot rotary mower that will be shared between the two programs.



*Private Lands Biologist Hulett on the new tractor testing out its controls*

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Manager Babik attended the Upper Robinson thinning tour. Several stream crossings will create challenges for the project. Road abandonment will also be a challenge because there are plans to perform a prescribed burn in 2023 and the team will require access.

Manager Babik continues to work with Yakama Nation staff members to refine plans, perform cultural resource surveys, and complete permitting for stream restoration at Ragland, Heart K, Cedar Meadow, and Frost Meadow units.

Natural Resource Technician Nass and Blore closed gates on enclosure fences at Green Gate and Parke Creek and propped up laydown fences along the Wild Horse Windfarm for cattle grazing. These staff members also put up electric fencing at two restoration sites and connected solar charges.



*One of the laydown cattle fences along the windfarm border*

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 4**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Black-tailed Deer Collar Recovery:** District Wildlife Biologist Waddell gained access to some private commercial timberland in southern Skagit County to retrieve a collar from a dead black-tailed deer buck. This buck was the most northern in a department research project evaluating different techniques for monitoring population trends in black-tailed deer, including buck survival via GPS collars. When an animal dies, the GPS collar emits a mortality signal that aids in their recovery in the field. Unfortunately, the quality of the signal can be impacted by things like terrain and dense vegetation, making recovery difficult at times. Ultimately, Biologist Waddell worked along a steep, densely vegetated ridge for almost three hours but was unable to determine the collar's exact location.



*Dense western Washington forests make it difficult at times to find a collar but they sure are beautiful*

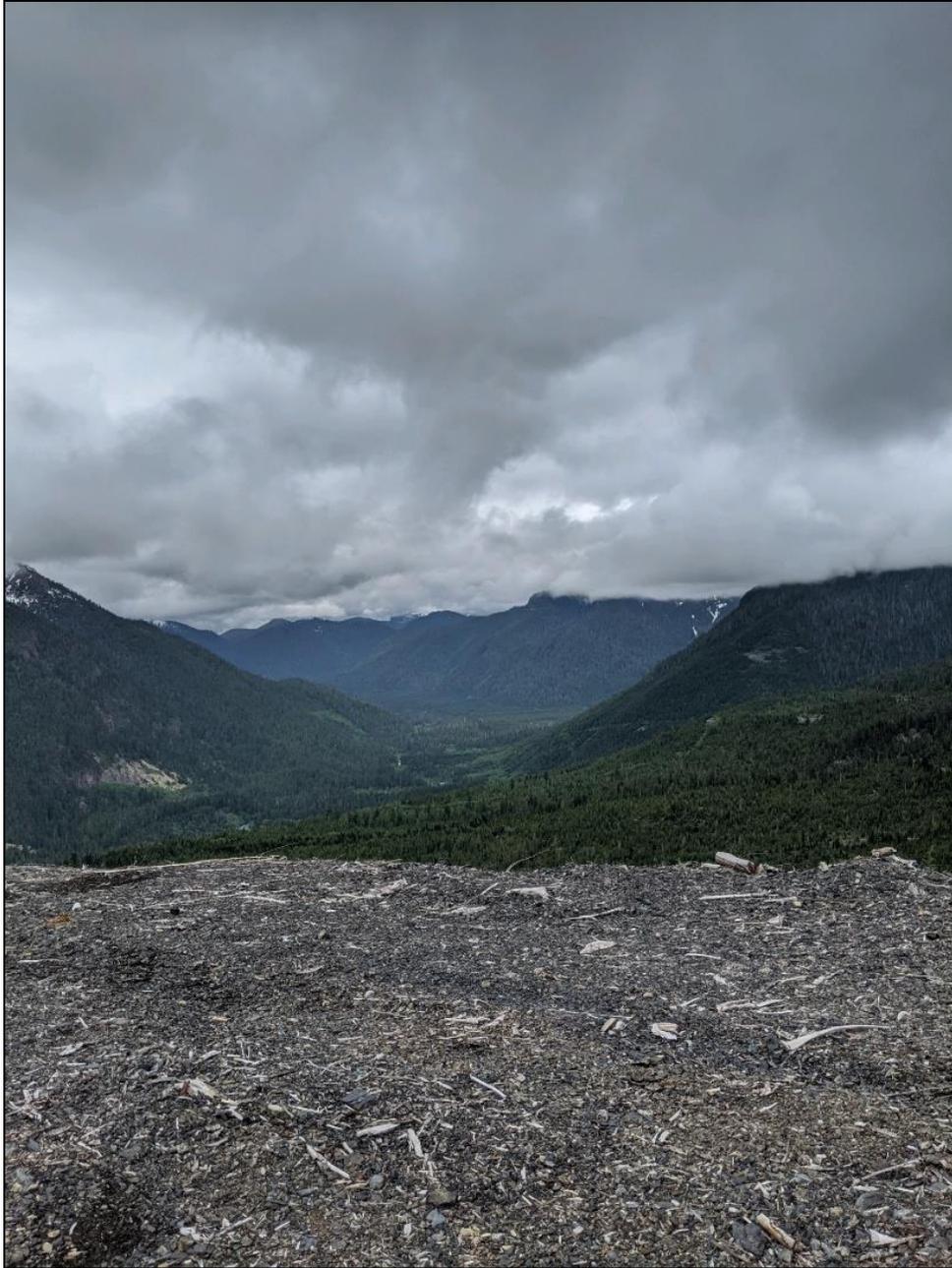
## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Region 4 Private Lands Access Program, Waterfowl Access, and Habitat:** Region 4 Private Lands Access Program staff members met with multiple landowners about their planting plans and how to fit waterfowl forage production into the spring planting season. WDFW partners with private landowners to plant barley for migratory birds to feed on over the winter. Funding for these efforts comes from the Washington State Migratory Bird Stamp. Multiple contacts were made with other partner landowners regarding hunting plans for the upcoming season.

**Region 4 Private Lands Access Program Spring Bear Hunt:** The North Skagit Bear hunt continues with more successful hunters. Region 4 Private Lands Access Program staff members continue to observe bear peeling damage on trees and have sent update emails to hunters about where tree damage is occurring.



*A freshly peeled tree in the North Skagit Spring Bear Hunt unit. Black Bears peel the bark off the base of the trees and scrap the sap from the outer wood, this girdles, and kills the tree. This bear peeling damage can be severe in locations with the right age class of trees.*



*A great view of the upper South Fork Nooksack River valley*

**Ebey Island Acquisition:** Projects Coordinator Brokaw submitted a grant application that proposes acquiring two properties adjacent to the Ebey Island Unit of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. The acquisition would conserve wetland habitat and could also provide an access point that would allow walk-in access of over 300 acres of WDFW that is currently only accessible by boat.



*Aerial view of Ebey Island property proposed for acquisition*

**Waterfowl Forage Plantings:** Skagit Wildlife Area staff members are preparing Samish and Island Units for waterfowl forage plantings this week. Planting should be completed at Samish this week and the Island will be finished as conditions allow.

**3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

**4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Livingston Bay Funding:** Projects Coordinator Brokaw received notification that the project will receive funding from the National Estuary Program. The project is a feasibility study that will assess restoration potential on 250 acres along Livingston Bay on Camano Island and is a partnership project with Whidbey Camano Land Trust and Snohomish Conservation District.



*Shorebirds at Livingston Bay* - Photo by Whidbey Camano Land Trust

**Ebey Island Planning:** Projects Coordinator Brokaw and Habitat Biologist Desmul finalized contract documents and hired Triangle Associates and Colorado State University (CSU). Triangle is the stakeholder outreach facilitator for the project and CSU is going to survey an area to gather data in a suspected rare bog habitat. The project intends to gather input from stakeholders and collect technical information regarding the Ebey Island Unit to develop a plan for the future of the site.

**Wiley Slough Water Data Collection:** Projects Coordinator Brokaw and Habitat Planner Jenny Baker downloaded data from transducers in groundwater wells and surface ditches. The transducers take readings of water level, salinity, and temperature every fifteen minutes, and the data is used to understand how drainage infrastructure is working.

#### 5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

#### 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

#### 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 5**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Black Bear Population Estimation:** Biologists Holman and Stephens started the fieldwork portion of this year's effort to generate a population estimate for black bears in GMUs 550 (Coweeman) and 556 (Toutle). The work involves setting up 36 barbed-wire stations that are baited with an attractant and then collecting hairs that the bears leave when entering and exiting the station. This week's effort involved the location of the stations and piecing together sensible routes through the maze of forestlands that comprises the study area.

**Western Pond Turtle Trapping:** Biologists Bergh and Wickhem assisted Region 6 biologists with trapping of western pond turtles for two days this week. The Region 5 western pond turtle trapping effort had to be canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions, but the Region 6 effort could be accomplished with the help of additional staff members. The group processed 160 individual turtles over two days and Region 6 staff members continued the trapping effort for the remainder of the week. The effort provided a census of turtles at the site and adult female turtles received

radio transmitters so that they could be tracked to their nests. The nests are evaluated for success as part of a study to help understand the effects of shell disease on reproduction.



*Social distancing while processing western pond turtles*



*Lakewood female western pond turtle*

**John Day and Lower Rock Creek Golden Eagle Territory Check:** Biologist Bergh visited both the John Day and Lower Rock Creek golden eagle territories this week to see if any nests were active or if any eagles were around. No active golden eagle nests were found, and no golden eagles were observed in either area. Typically, a survey or two to establish occupancy of an eagle territory would be conducted in late March or early April, but that was not possible this spring with COVID-19 restrictions.

**Townsend's Ground Squirrel Survey:** Biologist Bergh completed surveys of five grid cells of potential ground squirrel habitat on DNR land in eastern Klickitat County. The surveys are accomplished by walking transects and looking for squirrels and burrows in these areas that have been identified as a potential habitat using ArcGIS datasets. The ideal time for the surveys is in April when conditions are not so dry and warm, but surveys had to be delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions. No ground squirrels or evidence of burrows were located on the five grid cells and conditions were noted as being abnormally dry. The weather was much warmer this week and the survey period ends May 31 so no other grid cells will be completed.



*Eastern Klickitat County views during Townsend's ground squirrel surveys*



*Curious horses trying to follow Biologist Bergh during her Townsend's ground squirrel survey*

**Klickitat County Western Gray Squirrel Surveys:** Biologist Wickhem spent two days deploying Western gray squirrel transects for the FINAL year of the multi-year survey effort. Over the past two seasons, staff members from the district and several other partners have completed 55 transects, which leaves only five to finish during the 2020 season. Each transect is made up of twelve PVC tubes with a walnut glued inside and double-sided tape affixed to both entrances of the tube. When a squirrel enters the tube to investigate the walnut, they leave behind hairs on the tape that allows biologists to identify which species of squirrel was inside the tube. Biologist Wickhem deployed three transects this week, and they will be checked for activity and rebaited three times over the next eight weeks. Biologist Bernatowicz will be completing the remaining two transects for the district this season (thank you!). For more information on the State Threatened Western gray squirrel, please visit our website [here](#).



*Excellent views on the way to squirrel transect #99*



*A set and baited tube, ready for squirrels!*

**Coordinated Sandhill Crane Survey:** Biologists Wickhem and Bergh joined staff members and Americorps volunteers at Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge for the annual survey of sandhill cranes in the Glenwood Valley. Glenwood Valley is one of only a few places in Washington where greater sandhill cranes regularly nest and the valley contains more than 30 territories. The same pair of cranes will return to their territory each spring to nest and raise their young. The crew checked on each territory and recorded all individual cranes and any evidence of reproduction. A few individuals appeared to be sitting on a nest, and Biologist Wickhem was lucky enough to spot a pair of cranes with two new colts (hatchlings cranes), which is not very common.



*Getting distracted by the view while looking for cranes*



*A pair of cranes through the spotting scope*

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Nothing for this installment.

### 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Fawn Rescue:** Biologist Holman responded to a situation involving a newly born black-tail fawn that had chosen a very poor place to hide and rest while digesting milk and waiting until it was time to eat again. The reporting party located the fawn while on a morning walk and called State Patrol for help. The young deer had selected a spot along a busy road and directly in the path of the mail delivery truck. A quick capture and re-location to a safer hiding location set things in order. The reporting party contacted WDFW the next day to report that the fawn was gone and to express his appreciation for the response.



*Black-tail fawn hiding in its new location post-rescue*

**Bear Issues and Black Bear Timber Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey continued to verify damage to multiple stands of timber from black bears. Fresh, current year damage was verified in the stands.

Aubrey met with a landowner experiencing issues with a bear showing too much interest in a chicken coup. Unfortunately, the electric fence set up available to Aubrey did not work in this situation. Aubrey will continue to work with the landowner to install an electric fence as a permanent deterrent for potential future conflicts. In the interim, WDFW enforcement officers placed a trap at the landowner's house to attempt to capture the nuisance bear.

**Birds in Window Well:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey received a call about a pair of scrub jays stuck in a window well under a security grate at a post office. Aubrey contacted the post office and explained the best way to capture the birds and move them back out of the window well. The post office employees were able to successfully capture and move the birds out of the window well.

**Elk Damage:** Aubrey met with a landowner experiencing elk damage. Aubrey has worked with the landowner in the past and provided some hazing supplies and advice to assist the landowner with the damage currently occurring.

**Barn Owl Issues:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met with a concerned landowner who had a family of barn owls living in an open barn. The landowner was concerned because the owls were defecating on hand tools and farm equipment. The young owls were already able to fly, albeit clumsily, and were likely within a few days of leaving the nest area. The advice was given to the landowner about ways to exclude the owls in the future to prevent more conflicts. It was explained that removing the owls would be a temporary solution and that they may return if relocated, or other owls may take over the barn structure.

#### 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Nothing for this installment.

#### 5) Providing Education and Outreach

**Weyerhaeuser Presentation:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey gave a virtual presentation to the Lower Columbia River area employees on encounters with Washington's large carnivores. The presentation gave some background information on large carnivore interactions and allowed employees time to ask questions and have further discussion on the topic.

#### 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

#### 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

### **REGION 6**

Nothing for this installment.