



SEPTEMBER 23, 2024

Rainbow Lake Blue-Green Algae

In the summer of 2023, a blue-green algae bloom developed in Rainbow Lake. WDFW worked with Columbia County Public Health to periodically submit water samples to the Washington Department of Ecology lab in King County to test for toxicity. Warning signs were placed at every entry point to Rainbow Lake to inform the public about the danger of blue-green algae.

Blue-green algae appeared in Rainbow Lake again this summer. WDFW contacted Columbia County Public Health and informed them of the bloom. No water samples were submitted to the lab this year.

WDFW has hired Amaruq Environmental Services to put together a lake characterization of

Rainbow Lake this fall, which will include water and sediment samples to hopefully determine what is causing the blue-green algae blooms. WDFW will then develop a plan to try to keep the blue-green algae blooms from occurring in the future.



Wooten Floodplain Management Plan - Tucannon Assessment

In cooperation with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe, WDFW is conducting an assessment of the Tucannon River and associated infrastructure from Camp Wooten Environmental Learning Center to just north of the WT Wooten Headquarters.

The assessment will be used to drive the designs of the future projects involving the lakes, campgrounds, and powerline. A survey is being used to gather public input. The survey and more information on the Assessment can be found at: <https://tucannonriver.org/tucannon-pa5-15-assessment/>.

Tucannon River Restoration Projects

WDFW, in conjunction with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe, applied for RCO funding through the Salmon Recovery Board Large Cap and ranked #1 restoration project in the state. The project will decommission Big 4 Lake and restore ~2.5 miles of floodplain from Curl Lake to Beaver-Watson Lake. Funding decisions will be made in December.

Designs are being started to restore the floodplain downstream of the Hatchery Bridge and downstream of the Panjab bridge. No funding for construction of those projects has been secured to date.

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TO PRESERVE,
 PROTECT AND
 PERPETUATE FISH,
 WILDLIFE AND
 ECOSYSTEMS WHILE
 PROVIDING
 SUSTAINABLE FISH
 AND WILDLIFE
 RECREATIONAL AND
 COMMERCIAL
 OPPORTUNITIES.

2020 Flood Event Update

Repairs from the 2020 flood event are ongoing. An irrigation well at the WT Wooten Headquarters was drilled, and the culvert on the Russell Unit near the old river ford was removed.

Bighorn Sheep Update

Current population size is 19 sheep, with all 6 lambs born last spring still alive. The sheep are still outside the elk fence and in the Merengo area.

Wolf Update

There are currently 6 wolf packs in SE Washington (pack numbers from 2023 Annual Report): Touchet (9 members), Columbia (3 members), Tucannon (5 members), Grouse Flats (10 members), Couse (formerly 139 Group) (5 members), and Butte Creek (6 members).

Captures are continuing as the opportunity arises to try to get working collars in each of the packs. Due to the dynamic nature of packs in newly colonized areas, pack numbers will likely fluctuate now that most of the suitable habitat is occupied.

Weed Spraying

WDFW received the RMEF grant again this year to continue aerially treating noxious weeds with a helicopter. The funds were used in May to aerially treat 230 acres in upper Tumalum Creek.

The RMEF grant funds from 2023 were used in May to treat the 100 acres on Hatchery Ridge that burned in September 2023.

The Mule Deer Foundation grant funds received in 2023 were used in May to aerially treat 430 acres for yellow starthistle along Blind Grade and Oliphant Road.

Elk Calf Mortality Study

WDFW conducted three years of the study to look at elk calf survival. Elk calves were captured in May and June each year and fitted with radio-telemetry collars. The collars were tracked daily by technicians and mortalities were investigated to attempt to determine the cause of death.

The final report had not been finalized at the time of this newsletter.

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area
 2134 Tucannon Road
 Pomeroy, WA 99347
 Phone: 509-843-1530
 E-mail: kari.dingman@dfw.wa.gov

The W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area consists of 16,481 acres in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. The main valley contains the Tucannon River, along which are located eight man-made lakes which were constructed in the early 1950s. The lakes are stocked with hatchery raised rainbow trout for a put-and-take fishery. There are 11 campgrounds located on the wildlife area.

The area is historically a major big game wintering location and lies adjacent to National Forest lands. The bulk of the land purchases occurred from 1941-1944. The elk fence was constructed in the 1960s.

Current management objectives and problems are similar to past goals and problems which include providing maximum winter-range forage conditions while meeting recreational use demands. At the present time there is a harvest season of some type taking place 12 months of the year within the boundaries of the wildlife area.



Chronic Wasting Disease is in Washington

This summer, Washington became the 35th state to confirm the presence of chronic wasting disease (CWD). Four Canadian provinces also have the disease within their borders. Knowing we have CWD in our state means that some things may change for Washington's hunters and wildlife lovers.

What is CWD and how is it transmitted?

CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) that infects members of the cervid family—deer, elk, and moose. Studies show that other species outside of cervids do not naturally get CWD. CWD is fatal and there is no vaccine or cure. The only way to confirm the presence of CWD is to test lymph node or brain tissue in cervids. Physical signs of CWD such as emaciation, drooling, drooping ears, and lack of fear of humans, do not show until the end stages of the disease, so animals can spread CWD long before it is apparent they have it. CWD is transmitted between animals through feces, saliva, urine, other bodily fluids, contact with remains of an infected animal, and can be transmitted between does and fawns in utero.

What is being done to stop or slow the spread of CWD?

With CWD confirmed in WA, testing for the disease is now required for all harvested or salvaged deer, elk, or moose in the Initial Response Area (GMUs 124, 127, and 130). For information on how to have your deer, elk, or moose tested, go to wdfw.wa.gov/cwd. A CWD Management Plan is also available on the website that outlines WDFW's response to finding the disease in our state. In addition, WDFW is coordinating with other government agencies, tribes, and meat processors to collect samples to test.

How can you help?

Make sure to stay up to date on the rules and regulations in the area you are hunting and salvaging animals by checking WDFW's regulations at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations>. If you hunt or salvage roadkill, it is mandatory to have your salvaged or harvested deer, elk, or moose tested if it originated from GMUs 124, 127, or 130. To prevent spreading prions that cause CWD, whole carcasses cannot be transported outside of the Transport Restriction Zone (100 series GMUs). Check the website for information on how to properly transport and dispose of inedible parts. If you are notified by another state or provincial fish and wildlife agency that the animal you have harvested has tested positive for CWD, you have 24 hours to notify WDFW. WDFW will assist with disposal of any meat or parts not consumed.

Health and Human Safety

CWD has not been shown to infect people, but research is still ongoing, and it is not known for certain if people can get infected with this disease. While CWD has not been associated with human disease, there is a theoretical risk to people who eat an infected animal. As a precaution, the WA State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that people do not eat any animal that tests positive for CWD or appears to have CWD. WDFW and DOH also advise hunters to:

- Avoid harvesting any animal that appears sick or behaves strangely.
- Wear eye protection and disposable gloves while field dressing game.
- Thoroughly wash hands and equipment after processing carcasses.
- Minimize handling parts where the CWD prions accumulate including brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, pancreas, tonsils, and lymph nodes.
- Avoid cutting through bone, brain, or spinal cord.
- Disinfect processing tools by soaking in household bleach (>2% free chlorine) at a 40% solution (with water) for a minimum of 5 minutes. Rinse tools after soaking.