District 10 Hunting Prospects
Lewis, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties
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DISTRICT 10 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 10 is in southwestern Washington and includes Lewis, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties. Game management units (GMUs) in this district include 501 (Lincoln), 503 (Randle), 504 (Stella), 505 (Mossyrock), 506 (Willapa Hills), 510 (Stormking), 513 (South Rainier), 516 (Packwood), 520 (Winston), 522 (Loo-Wit), 524 (Margaret), 530 (Ryderwood), 550 (Cowee-man), and 556 (Toutle). The topography of this wide area ranges from tidally influenced Columbia River shorelines in Wahkiakum County to Cascade peaks in Lewis County.

A high percentage of this district is privately-owned, which presents a variety of access challenges. The recent trend is for timber companies to limit public access to their land or sell access permits for hunting seasons to a limited number of participants. When planning your hunt, it’s important to understand the recreational access policies of individual timber companies. You can typically find recreational access information on timber company websites or by calling access hotlines. A list of recreational access websites and hotlines, maintained by private industrial timber companies, is included at the end of this document. It is always a good idea to obtain a map from the landowner.

Weyerhaeuser owns a significant amount of land in District 10. Major changes to hunting access in 2015 include a requirement that hunters buy an access permit to hunt on Weyerhaeuser land, including the St. Helens Tree Farm (GMUs 550, 520, 524, and 556). As of this writing, motorized access permits are being sold for between $200 and $350, while non-motorized access permits are between $75 and $100. You can find information about permits for recreational access to Weyerhaeuser land, including maps, from Weyerhaeuser on their website at: https://wyrecreationnw.com/contact_us.

Other industrial timber company lands are generally open to public hunting without an access fee, but vehicle access may be limited. Other major industrial forest landowners in District 10 include Hancock Forest Management, Port Blakely, Sierra Pacific, Green Diamond (permit fee access), and Pope Resources/Olympic Resource Management. Access to these lands may be restricted in August, September, and – in some cases – October due to high fire danger. You can find more information about hunting opportunities on private land on the WDFW website at: https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations/private-lands, on page 102 of the Big Game pamphlet, or on WDFW’s Hunt Regulations Mapping Tool at: https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/

Public land in the district includes WDFW’s Cowlitz and Mount St. Helens Wildlife Areas. You can find Details about the Wildlife Areas on the WDFW website at: https://wdfw.wa.gov/to-go/wildlife-areas. Additionally, there is the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in eastern Lewis and Cowlitz counties, as well as state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) scattered throughout all three counties. These state and federal lands are open to public access. Contact the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Cowlitz Valley Ranger District at 360-497-1100.
Historically, District 10 has been among the leaders in statewide elk harvest. The highest general season harvests in 2018 occurred in GMUs 506 (Willapa Hills), 530 (Ryderwood), 520 (Winston), and 550 (Coweeman). There are also many permit hunts in District 10, which we offer to manage the elk population, address agricultural damage the elk cause, and provide recreational opportunity. Additionally, two GMUs – 522 (Loo-Wit) and 556 (Toutle) – are permit-only for both cow and bull elk. In 2018, 1,034 elk were harvested during the general season in addition to 187 elk harvested by permit in District 10. Elk found west of Interstate 5 are considered to be of the Roosevelt sub-species, while those in the Cascade Mountain Range are of mixed origin. Specifically, Cascade elk are a genetic combination of native Roosevelt elk and introduced Rocky Mountain elk.
the objectives of the St. Helens Elk Herd Plan. Liberal antlerless elk hunting opportunity, combined with several years of late winter and spring storms, reduced the elk population in these GMUs. The winter of 2016-17 was unusually severe, with early snowfall and persistent cold wet conditions throughout the winter. These conditions are hard on elk. Severe winters are made worse when animals are in relatively poor condition entering the winter. Elk within the St. Helens herd typically lack large fat reserves to help with long, hard winters.

Reflecting these challenging conditions, the 2017 spring survey of elk in the monitored portions of the St. Helens herd showed a decrease in the population of elk. More specifically, elk populations were down 30-35 percent from 2016 numbers. The winters of 2017-18 and 2018-19 were mild. Survey efforts conducted during the spring of 2018 and 2019 indicate that the Mount St. Helens elk herd has stabilized at this lower population level. These indicators point toward an elk population that is below objectives and well below historic highs. Therefore, hunters should expect a generally less productive elk hunting season during the 2019 hunt. WDFW gas reduced antlerless hunting opportunity accordingly.

Elk population surveys in GMUs 506 (Willapa Hills) and 530 (Ryderwood) are conducted on an every-other-year basis and were most recently completed in spring 2018. Surveys conducted in 2014, 2016, and 2018 indicate a stable or slightly increasing elk population in GMU 506 and a slightly decreasing population in GMU 530. Severe winter conditions rarely cause population level impacts to Willapa elk populations. Hunting opportunities and success rates should be similar to recent years.

The general bull elk season is always challenging, but the District 10 elk population produces a harvest of nearly 1,000 bull elk annually, and those hunters who put in the effort and remain focused may be rewarded with success.

Photo by Sam Kolb (WDFW)
Hunting strategies during fire restrictions

Early hunting season access for archery hunters is often complicated by hot weather and fire access closures. If that occurs, hunters should consider going west to GMUs 506 or 530 (Willapa Hills and Ryderwood), where blocks of state (DNR) forestlands are available. Another good choice during times of fire danger is GMUs 513 (South Rainier) and 516 (Packwood), which are comprised mostly of national forest lands. These public lands usually stay open during times of high fire danger, but be sure to check with land managers before heading to the field.

Elk scouting strategies

Use the Hunting Regulations Mapping Tool at: https://geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/ to look at aerial photos to identify recent clearcuts and drainages. You can do some preseason scouting on the commercial tree farms by bike or on foot, as most areas will not be open to
motorized access yet. Motorized access and camping are available on state DNR lands unless there is high fire danger. Prospective elk hunters should keep in mind that the animals often prefer cooler, wetter areas during times of warmer weather, and are more often active during dawn and dusk.

**Additional resources for those interested in District 10 elk**


**TRE PonEME-ASSOCIATED HOOF DISEASE OF ELK**

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 completely 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 been documented in elk or any other wildlife species until 2013.

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**

WDFW confirmed cases of elk afflicted with TAHD in all six counties in WDFW’s Region 5 (Lewis, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, Clark, Skamania and Klickitat) as well as many other areas in western Washington. Since 2015, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has also confirmed TAHD in elk populations in both western and eastern Oregon. Most recently a confirmed case of TAHD was documented in an elk from western Idaho.

**How you 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 2019-20 hunting season, this rule applies to all 400, 500 and 600 series GMUs.

- **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 has partnered with Washington State University to monitor and research the disease. For more information on TAHD, please see pages 66-68 of the Big Game Hunting pamphlet, the WDFW website, and Washington State University’s website.

![Photo by Eric Holman (WDFW)](image)

**DEER**

Several GMUs in District 10 are among the best in the state for black-tailed deer harvest. The highest 2018 general season buck harvests within District 10 occurred in GMUs 550 (Coweeaman), 520 (Winston), 530 (Ryderwood), 501 (Lincoln) and 505 (Mossyrock). The majority of the harvest occurs during general seasons, with a small portion of the harvest occurring during special permit seasons (see figure below). For more information on deer in District 10, see the annual Game Status and Trend Report on the WDFW website.
Black-tailed deer populations are stable in District 10. The annual harvest of more than 2,000 bucks has been typical for many years. The severe winter of 2016-17 caused some deer mortality and led to a decline in harvest in the 2017 season. The winters of 2017-18 and 2018-19 were mild, and deer hunting opportunity should be good in 2019.

Hunting for black-tailed deer is often best near the end of the general season, when conditions improve for stalking and moving through the woods in heavily vegetated western Washington. The best opportunity often occurs during the late buck hunt, when favorable stalking and weather conditions combine with the breeding season or rut. The 2019 late buck season runs Nov.14-17. Black-tailed deer generally favor dense vegetation and have small home ranges. The most successful hunters study the area carefully and move very slowly, constantly searching for deer.

**SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FOR 2019**

2019 represents the central year in the three-year big-game season setting cycle. There are no significant changes in the structure of either general or permit deer hunts in place for 2019.
District 10 makes up part of both the South Cascades and Coastal black bear hunt zones for the fall bear hunting season. Harvest numbers and hunter success for 2018 in the South Cascades and Coastal zones were 131 (4 percent success) and 268 (8 percent success), respectively. For more information on the management of black bears in Washington, including the Coastal and South Cascades management zones, see the Status and Trend Report on the WDFW website at https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/plans.

Successful bear hunters must submit a premolar tooth. See page 70 of the Big Game pamphlet for details.

Hunting for black bears is challenging, but also can be rewarding. Hunters should try a variety of methods, including targeting areas of favored foods like huckleberries, blackberries, cascara trees, etc. Other methods include glassing clear cuts or alpine areas at dawn and dusk, as well as predator calling.

Photo by Nicholle Stephens (WDFW)

In 2018-19, hunters harvested 11 cougars in the GMUs that make up District 10. Cougar hunting in this region is managed under a harvest guideline designed to harvest 12-16 percent of the population (excluding kittens) annually. The season consists of an early (Sept. 1-Dec. 31) and late (Jan. 1-April 30) hunt period. The harvest guideline may be achieved during the early hunt
period, and prospective hunters should visit the cougar hunting page of the WDFW website at https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/big-game/cougar to assure that the season in their prospective area remains open.

Most cougar hunting in western Washington occurs as an additional opportunity concurrent with deer and elk hunting. Hunters who want to harvest cougars should focus on areas with concentrations of deer and elk. Fresh snow facilitates tracking, and hunters may want to try predator calling.

![Photo from Nicholle Stephens, Brooke George, and Eric Holman (WDFW)](image)

**MOUNTAIN GOAT**

The southern Washington Cascade Mountains support a robust population of mountain goats. Areas with goat populations span the boundaries of WDFW districts. Specifically, the Goat Rocks population lies in both Districts 8 and 10, while the Mount St. Helens population lies in Districts 9 and 10.
Goat populations in the Goat Rocks area have remained stable at approximately 300 goats over several years. Hunter success in this unit is usually 100 percent. The Goat Rocks area has been divided into two hunt areas. Selected hunters need to review the boundaries of the hunt areas before going afield.

For the first time in many decades, mountain goat permits are available for the Mount St. Helens population. Goats have re-colonized the area following the 1980 eruption and the population is now approximately 250 goats. For the purpose of hunting management, two hunt areas have been delineated and one tag has been awarded in each area.

Successful draw applicants for all hunt areas will receive a letter with additional details regarding hunt areas, mandatory checking requirements, mandatory goat identification training, biological sample collection, and more.
Goat Rocks Mountain Goat photo provided by Kristina Luttrell
WDFW releases pheasants at three locations in District 10. These are located on the Kosmos Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area (Lewis County), DNR property in the Woodland Bottoms (Cowlitz County), and DNR property on Lincoln Creek (Lewis County). For more information about the pheasant release program and directions to release sites in western Washington, visit the [WDFW website](#).

Youth hunters and those over 65 years of age should be sure to check the regulations closely for opportunities to hunt earlier in the season.
Forest Grouse

District 10 supports substantial forest grouse populations and is one of the top producing areas for hunters in western Washington. Spring conditions for chick survival were average this year, which should translate into typical grouse hunting this fall. Some good strategies for hunting grouse include hunting riparian areas with mixed forest species and walking closed or abandoned roads.
WATERFOWL

We expect duck and goose hunting to be good this fall after the rains in November and December encourage birds to come south into the area. See the following sources for information on North American waterfowl populations (2018 information should be published in August):

http://flyways.us/


DUCK HUNTING

As of this writing, the results from 2019 surveys to monitor duck populations were not yet available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Hunters are reminded to consult the Migratory Waterfowl Rules pamphlet for details on hunting regulations. Prospective hunters should take special note of the late September season open only to youth hunters. Check the regulations closely for the details on this mentored hunting opportunity for early season ducks.
Hunting early in the season is often best along the Columbia River and other large, permanent bodies of water. The Columbia River up to the Bonneville Dam is tidally influenced, so it is a good idea to be aware of outgoing tide conditions to avoid getting your boat stuck. Later in the season, high water might disperse birds, and hunters may have more success by targeting flooded farmlands. Prospective hunters should be aware that success often depends on the severity of fall/winter weather, with wet, blustery conditions generally producing better duck hunting in southwest Washington.
GOOSE HUNTING

Hunters are reminded of the complex goose hunting regulations in Goose Management Area 2, designed to protect wintering populations of the dusky Canada goose. New hunters and those whose hunting authorization for Goose Management Area 2 was invalidated the previous year need to pass an exam with a minimum of 80 percent to receive their current year hunting authorization. Goose hunters are encouraged to review the different subspecies of Canada geese in southwest Washington, where the ability to identify those birds is critical for a productive and enjoyable season.

Please review the information regarding goose identification found at https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/goose-identification-testing before hunting this season, and see the WDFW Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons pamphlet for more information.

While dusky Canada geese remain of concern, several other subspecies are abundant and support large annual harvests.

Goose hunters are also encouraged to take advantage of the early goose season in September. See the waterfowl hunting pamphlet for details on this enjoyable goose hunt for western Canada geese.
Canada geese during a banding effort in southwest Washington – Photo by Brian Davern
PUBLIC LAND RESOURCES

DNR-Pacific Cascades Office (SW WA)
601 Bond Road
PO Box 280
Castle Rock, WA 98611-0280
Phone: 360-577-2025
pacific-cascade.region@dnr.wa.gov

Link to purchase DNR quadrangle maps:

Gifford Pinchot National Forest

Headquarters
10600 N.E. 51st Circle
Vancouver, WA 98682
(360) 891-5000
http://www.fs.usda.gov/giffordpinchot/

Cowlitz Valley Ranger District
10024 US Hwy 12
PO Box 670
Randle, WA 98377
(360) 497-1100

Mt. Adams Ranger District
2455 Hwy 141
Trout Lake, WA 98650
(509) 395-3402

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument
42218 N.E. Yale Bridge Road
Amboy, WA 98601
(360) 449-7800
PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

Green Diamond
- Recreation permits must be purchased for motorized and non-motorized access.  
  https://greendiamond.com/recreation/rec-program/

Hancock Forest Management (HFM)
HFM Cathlamet Tree Farm
- Open for non-motorized recreation access
- Access hotline 360-795-3653

Pope Resources/Olympic Resource Management
- Generally open to walk-in access
- http://www.orm.com/Timberlands/PublicUse.aspx

Port Blakely
- Generally open to walk-in access

Sierra Pacific
- Generally open to walk-in, day-use access with select areas open for motorized access
- Access hotline 360-623-1299

Weyerhaeuser
- Recreational access hotline-866-636-6531, recreation webpage:
  https://wyrecreationnw.com/permits
- Includes St. Helens Tree Farm, Yacolt (Columbia River East), Vail, Pe Ell, Columbia Timberlands
  - Access is by permit only, and you can buy permits on the website above. Please see website for details including maps.
  - Permit required for recreational access year round
  - Motored and non-motorized permits available
  - Permits go on sale in May or June and may sell out quickly