DISTRICT 11 HUNTING PROSPECTS
Thurston and Pierce counties and GMU 667 of Lewis County
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District 11 includes all of Pierce and Thurston Counties as well as a portion of Lewis County (GMU 667) for big game management purposes. The Game Management Units (GMUs) that comprise District 11 are Puyallup (GMU 652), Anderson Island (GMU 655), White River (GMU 653), Mashel (GMU 654), Deschutes (GMU 666), and Skookumchuck (GMU 667). Land ownership in the district includes private residential and agricultural (e.g. GMUs 652 and 666), and both private and public industrial timberlands (e.g. GMUs 653, 654, and 667). The eastern portion of GMU 653 contains higher-elevation alpine conditions bordering Mount Rainier National Park.

Map depicting the six District 11 Game Management Units and surrounding units in neighboring districts (400s for Region 4 and 500s for Region 5).

Varied hunting opportunity exists within District 11, from waterfowl hunting on waterways of Puget Sound to deer, elk, bear, and cougar hunting on commercial forest land. WDFW’s Scatter Creek (GMU 666), Skookumchuck, and West Rocky Prairie wildlife areas (GMU 667), and Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills State Forest (GMU 654), Tahoma State Forest (GMU 654/667), and additional patchwork
ownership in the district provide ample opportunity for small and big game hunting on public land. U.S. Forest Service land (federal) surrounding Mount Rainier National Park in the eastern portion of the district is also accessible free of charge.

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

- Pierce County: [https://matterhornwab.co.pierce.wa.us/publicgis](https://matterhornwab.co.pierce.wa.us/publicgis)
- Thurston County: [http://map.co.thurston.wa.us/Html5Viewer/Index.html?viewer=Parcels.Main](http://map.co.thurston.wa.us/Html5Viewer/Index.html?viewer=Parcels.Main)
- WDFW statewide: [https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations](https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations)

Timberlands throughout the district are owned or managed by various private commercial timber companies, each having their own access regulations, including some with fee access programs. Hancock Timber Resource has sold significant land to various other companies/tribes in Pierce County (see Figure 1 below). Although most of those new owners still run their public access through Hancock’s Fee Access Program, this is likely to change in the coming years with each company controlling its own access program. Most of these commercial timberlands provide excellent small and large game hunting opportunity.
In eastern Pierce County (GMUs 653 and 654), the following ownership and contact information may be found:

- Hancock Timber Resource: [https://www.hancockrecreationnw.com/](https://www.hancockrecreationnw.com/)
Muckleshoot Indian Tribe (access managed by Hancock Access Program): http://www.muckleshoot.nsn.us/services/culture--wildlife/wildlife-program.aspx

Pope Resources (Olympic Resource Management; access managed under Hancock Access Program): http://www.orm.com/Timberlands/PublicUse.aspx

Weyerhaeuser: https://www.weyerhaeuser.com/timberlands/recreational-access/

In Thurston County (GMUs 666 and 667):

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

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds are partially contained in District 11, providing an opportunity to harvest elk as they migrate out of Mount Rainier high country and follow river drainages to low elevations during the hunting season. Waterfowl hunting on Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, off Anderson Island (GMU 655), and inland lakes in the district are some of the best opportunities in the South Puget Sound Region.

Hunters should be aware of firearm restrictions in certain localities of Pierce and Thurston counties. Maps of Pierce County firearm restriction areas can be seen on the Pierce County website’s Public GIS tool and the Pierce County firearm regulations can be found here. Maps of no-shooting and controlled shooting zones in Thurston County can be seen here. Note that fire season can result in both public (USFS) and private industrial timberlands closing for all access. Hunters may check with the local ranger station on closures before setting out. The Incident Information System is also a great place to check fire status https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/. Anderson Island is mostly private property with some public property and much of the island would be Hunt by Written Permission.

The South Cascades of Washington, including District 11, are currently at less than 50 percent of normal moisture levels as of June 2019 and considerably drier than spring 2018 which will affect browse abundance for ungulates, possibly berry production and may affect the overall hunting season in 2019-20. Two notable wildfires in 2017 occurred within District 11: the Norse Peak and American fires. These fires burned a total of 56,241 acres in eastern Pierce and Yakima counties according to the USFS. Hunters should be advised that downed logs/brush and dead standing timber continue to pose a safety hazard to recreationists in most the burned area, so take
caution. The fires are expected to benefit big game species by opening the canopy, adding nitrogen to the soil, with a resulting lift to browse.

Snowpack moisture as percent of normal June 2018 vs June 2019 (NRCS 2019).

ELK

Both the North Rainier and South Rainier Elk Herds are partially contained in District 11, providing ample opportunity to harvest elk. Elk availability should continue to increase in all GMUs as both the North and South Rainier Elk Herds continue to recover, having met recovery goals over the past 20 years. Antlerless restrictions, winter elk habitat closures, and permit hunt restrictions in GMU 653 continue to benefit herd recovery in the North Rainier herd. Hunters report a quality hunting experience and quality bulls for those fortunate enough to be drawn for the GMU 653 bull only permit hunt.

The larger portion of each elk herd migrates down from high alpine meadows in Mount Rainier National Park to lowland winter range. Public lands and private commercial timberlands
bordering the park are good prospects. Hunters are encouraged to scout for elk leaving the Mount Rainier National Park and following the Carbon River northwards into the Clearwater Wilderness Area, the White River into the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, and the Nisqually River to the southern part of the district.

Forest areas off USFS Roads 71, 73, and 74, and Bullion and Big Crow Basins east of Crystal Mountain Ski Resort (outside ski boundaries once ski season officially opens) offer good opportunity for high-elevation, rugged elk hunting with plenty of robust elk. USFS, which permits the ski resort, wants to remind hunters that service roads built and maintained by Crystal Mountain Ski Resort are not open to the public, but hunters may ask for permission from the ski resort to haul out a harvested animal.

The Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests and University of Washington Charles Lathrop Pack Experimental and Demonstration Forest (Pack Forest) in GMU 654 are good prospects for deer or elk and can be accessed by boot, bike, or horse during the general deer or elk season. UW Pack Forest managers caution hunters to be aware of students conducting research in the forest any time of the year. The Elbe Hills State Forest has limited vehicle access during the elk season as follows: entire 5 Road is closed, the 8 Road is open from Ashford to Scott Turner Road, and the 6 Road is closed except for hunter’s having a disabled access permit (see ADA Hunting opportunities on the WDFW website for more information). Much of the Tahoma State Forest is also closed to vehicle access due to the ski hut management program and various road and bridge washouts. Call the DNR office in Enumclaw if you have a question about a specific road (360-802-7055). Maps of Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forest, as well as other Washington Department of Natural Resource public lands in the South Puget Sound, can be found here. Hunters can legally walk, bike, or horse ride behind locked gates for hunting unless otherwise posted.

Subherds of the South Rainier elk herd continue to increase and expand on and around the Centralia Coal Mine and Skookumchuk Wildlife Area (GMU 667). Hunters are encouraged to scout the area from the Skookumchuk Wildlife Area, south to the northern boundary of the Centralia Coal Mine (GMU 667). Hunting on the coal mine is only allowed under specialized permits which require a mining escort. For many years, TransAlta allowed two senior and two disabled permit hunts on the mine but in 2019 will only be allowing one of each for a total of 10 permits over two weekends. Some elk can occasionally be found and hunted on WDFWs West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area in south Thurston County (GMU 666) and on JBLM property in Pierce County (GMU 652). Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744) or thru the JBLM website. Elk may also be found in
Elk continue to increase on private farmlands and properties in GMUs 652 (around Graham, Buckley, and Enumclaw), GMU 667 (Yelm and Hanaford area), and GMU 666 (foothills of Capitol State Forest to Delphi Road SW and Waddell Creek Rd SW). Overall, elk are plentiful in these damage areas, with access onto private property being the primary limitation. Hunters must request permission to access private lands, and are encouraged to obtain permission weeks in advance of the season from the landowner (e.g. visit property and ask for permission). Elk Area 6013 in GMU 652 has been reduced in size to encompass primarily the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation. There were several new hunting restrictions implemented in 2015 aimed at conserving elk for tribal purposes on the reservation. In response to increasing elk and elk-associated damage off-reservation in Buckley and Enumclaw, Elk Area 6014 was expanded and provides a 3-point minimum or antlerless general modern firearm season, as well as three separate winter antlerless hunts allowing up to 10 elk per hunt. Elk Area 6014 is comprised primarily of agricultural lands, hobby farms, and ranch homes, and supports approximately 150-200 total elk. Access to these properties is limited and hunters interested in these hunts are encouraged to obtain access prior to applying for these permits. The local WDFW conflict specialist Matt Blankenship may be able to assist with suggesting access sites.

Three antlerless elk permit hunts for controlling private property damage are also provided in the Hanaford Elk Area 6069, which provide five permits each (a November, December and January hunt). Finally, Region 6 Master Hunter elk permits are also available. Hunters drawn are often sent to damage properties in both the Buckley/Enumclaw and Hanaford area, as needed, and elsewhere in the region but must be available to hunt on a 24-hr notice.

General season elk harvest has been gradually increasing over the past 15 years for all weapons within GMUs 652, 666, and 667. This makes for good prospects for harvesting an elk in those GMUs in 2019. Muzzleloaders traditionally experienced the highest harvest over those years but modern firearm and archery harvest now equals that taken by muzzleloaders giving all three user groups good opportunity.
Harvest trends have also gradually increased in GMUs 653 and 654 over the past 15 years (combined these make up Elk Population Management Unit 67). Antlerless harvest in GMU 654 has declined despite increasing property damage caused by an increasing elk sub-herd. In response District 11 has changed the boundaries of Elk Damage Hunt Area 6054 for 2019-20 to encompass more elk and focus the hunt on those properties experiencing damage.
Weyerhauser’s Vail Tree Farm in GMU 667 and Hancock Timber Resources Group managed forestland (Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653) all support elk but require a vehicle access permit obtained by contacting the company directly (see more information under Deer). Eleven (11) recreational access permit holders are drawn to hunt elk on the Kapowsin Timberlands and one (1) recreational access permit holder is drawn to hunt elk on the Eatonville Timberlands during the elk seasons. No recreation access is allowed on the Buckley block during any bull elk season. Each Hancock recreational access permit purchased for Kapowsin Timberlands from mid-March thru mid-May (see dates on Hancock website each year) is automatically entered into a drawing to hunt elk during any bull elk season for GMU 654. Each Hancock recreational access permit purchased for Eatonville Timberlands for that time period is also automatically entered into a drawing to hunt elk during any bull elk season for GMU 653 Eatonville Block. At time of purchase you must select which weapon you would be
using if drawn, and Hancock randomly selects 3 archery, 3 muzzleloader, and 5 modern firearm permitees. The drawing occurs in early May and once winners have been notified, names are posted on the Hancock recreational website. Only drawn permitees are allowed to hunt elk on any Hancock properties during elk seasons. Questions regarding Hancock recreational access program can be sent to recadmin@hnrg.com.

Hunter success is expressed as both the percentage of hunters that reported successfully harvesting an elk and by the number of days it took to harvest an animal in the following graphs for the five GMUs in District 11 supporting elk (GMU 655, Anderson Island, has no elk). Success has been generally increasing in most GMUs over the past seven years. This is tracking elk population recovery in both the North Rainier and South Rainier elk herds. The exception is the Deschutes GMU 666, where access to hunting grounds is difficult due to the higher percentage of privately owned land. Regardless, success for hunters that have gained private land access in that GMU has remained stable and thus prospects are good for those hunters obtaining access in 2019-20. Elk hunters are also less successful in GMU 667, which in general supports fewer elk than the northern GMUs. The bull only permit hunt in GMU 653 has the highest success rate in the district, averaging 40 percent since it began in 2006. This is a rugged, high alpine hunt, but worth the effort for those lucky enough to draw a permit.
Black-tailed deer population surveys in District 11 are limited. Surveys are not done annually, and when they are done, they have consisted of one survey done in the highest quality location (Vail Tree Farm). Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best opportunity for deer hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout regenerating clear cuts. In particular, timberlands worthy of scouting for both deer and elk include the Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group managed properties (Kapowsin Tree Farm and Hampton Lumber properties in GMU 654, Buckley Block in GMU 653, and White River Tree Farms owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and managed by Hancock in GMU 653), DNR’s Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMUs 654) and DNR and USFS managed lands (scattered across District 11).
District biologist with successful deer hunter at Vail Tree Farm deer check station in the Skookumchuck Unit 667.

A limited access recreation program is in effect for Vail Tree Farm. Hunters are required by Weyerhaeuser to purchase an access permit in order to access Vail Tree Farm. Motorized and non-motorized permits allow access Aug. 1 – July 23 and typically sell out well in advance of the hunting season. All forestry operations continue during the permit season. To see or purchase permits and additional information, go to Weyerhaeuser website or call 866-636-6531.

Hancock Timber Resources also requires an access permit for motorized access into the Kapowsin Timberlands, Eatonville Tree Farm (owned by Hancock), and White River Tree Farm (owned by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe but managed by Hancock). Access into Kapowsin and Eatonville by horseback, walking, or bicycling is also allowed, but only if you have a motorized access permit, as there is currently not a non-motorized access program for these areas. Non-motorized access is allowed through the non-motorized access program into the White River Forest. Permits allow access April 1, 2019 – March 30, 2020, with no access from July 3-7 or during the elk bull season. To see or purchase permits and additional information, go to the Hancock website or call 800-782-1493. Hancock initiated a 2-point minimum buck harvest restriction in 2018 on the Kapowsin and Eatonville timberlands which remains in effect. In 2019, they also eliminated the doe harvest on both of these areas. Their reasoning is “an effort to increase deer populations over time and ultimately provide a better hunting experience, long term.” These restrictions are conditions of access placed by the landowner and were not enacted by WDFW. There are no additional deer hunting restrictions on the White River Tree Farm, with the exception of the winter motorized access restriction. Questions regarding Hancock recreational access program can be sent to recadmin@hnrg.com.
High elevation trophy black-tail hunting experiences can be found in the eastern portions of GMUs 653 and 654 accessed by US Forest Service road and trail systems that lead to high mountain hunting areas, including portions of the Norse Peak, Clearwater, and Glacier View Wilderness Areas and Crystal Mountain Resort (see description under Elk).

Deer harvest combined in District 11 has declined, most notably in 2017, driven primarily by private lands access restrictions. Harvest regulations have altered somewhat in District 11 GMUs over the years, which plays a role in harvest trends. However, notable declines occurred in GMU 653, 654 and 667, all units in which private timberland access permits were initiated. Harvest in GMUs 652, 655 and 666 all increased slightly. Anderson Island was previously Deer Area 6014 and had antlerless permit hunts only. The entire island became GMU 655 in 2013 and has since provided both general seasons (both sex) and antlerless permit hunts. Ferry logistics and property access reduce the actual harvest despite plentiful deer on the island. GMU 655 followed by GMU 667 continue to have the highest deer hunter success rates, while GMU 653 and 654 have the lowest of any District 11 GMU.
GMU 652 (Puyallup) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)

GMU 653 (White River) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)
GMU 654 (Mashel) harvest, number of hunters, and hunter success rates (all weapons)

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

Commercial and state timberlands continue to provide the best availability for bear hunting. Hunters are encouraged to scout sign (scat and tree bark peeling) in regenerating timber stands. Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), Hancock Timber Resources Group-managed lands (Kapowsin Tree
Farm in GMU 654 and Buckley and White River Tree Farms in GMU 653), Capitol State Forest (GMU 663), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Parks (GMU 654), and Joint Base Lewis McChord offer the best prospects for bear hunters in the district. (See comments earlier regarding access permit requirements for Weyerhaeuser and Hancock properties).

First big game harvest (S. Holznagel 2014).

A spring black bear special permit season is provided on Hancock’s Kapowsin Tree Farm in GMUs 653/654 within the South Cascades BBMU. A total of 150 permits for the April 15 to June 15 season will be available once again in 2020. Those successfully drawn for a hunt permit must also purchase a vehicle access permit from Hancock. A spring bear season only vehicle access permit is available from Hancock for all drawn permittees to hunt only the permit area at the cost of $100 (see additional information regarding Hancock under Elk and Deer sections).

General season bear harvest trends in the District 11 portion of the South Cascades BBMU (e.g. GMUs 653 and 654) declined 2008 thru 2011 and have remained stable since 2012. A noticeable decline in harvest took place from 2008 to 2009 (despite season lengths and permits remaining the same) and again from 2011 to 2012 (partially due to a one-month reduction in spring hunting season length). The number of bear hunters in these combined GMUs remained fairly stable 2008-2016 and then declined by over 100 in 2017 and 2018. Hunter success rates fluctuate year to year, but have slightly increased the last seven years.
Bear harvest in the GMUs of the Puget Sound BBMU that are within District 11 (GMUs 652, 666, 667) has remained stable over the past 10 years and has shown signs of improving since a low in 2012. The number of hunters hunting this BBMU and the success rate of hunters has increased slightly since 2008 with the latter just over 4 percent. Bear harvest prospects in 2019-20 are questionable given the low snowpack and moisture levels which may affect berry and
Comparing success rates of each GMU in District 11 for the fall general bear season over the past 18 years, GMU 653 and 652 have the highest success and thus the best chance of harvesting black bear in the district.
Seventy-seven hunters (out of the 150 permits issued) participated in the 2018 Kapowsin spring permit hunt and successfully harvested seven black bears for a hunter success rate of 9.1 percent. This is up slightly from the 8.2 percent success rate in 2017 but much lower than the cumulative statewide spring bear success rate of 27.5 percent. The 10-year average success rate for this hunt is 12 percent. This is in the lower half in terms of success of the 18 spring bear permits offered statewide.

**COUGAR**

Cougar are widespread in the forest lands of District 11. Areas supporting high numbers of deer and elk also provide great opportunity for cougar. District 11 comprises three cougar population management units (CPMUs) made up of GMUs containing similar habitats and having similar cougar population objectives: 1) GMUs 652/666, 2) GMUs 653/654, and 3) GMU 667 (note: cougar hunting is not provided in GMU 655).
WDFW changed cougar hunting season design in 2012 with a liberalized season coupled with harvest guidelines (see wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar). Two general cougar seasons are offered:

- Early: Sept. 1 - Dec. 31, 2019
- Late: Jan. 1 - Apr. 30, 2020 OR when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever occurs first.

Be aware that a 2020 cougar license/tag is required to hunt cougar in April 2020. GMUs 652 and 666 have no cougar harvest quota limit, GMUs 653 and 654 have a quota of five cougars (combined), and GMU 667 has a quota of three to four cougars--meaning at a harvest of three WDFW determines if other non-hunting forms of mortality have occurred and whether the GMU should be closed.

Cougar harvest in District 11 has been fluctuating over the past five years but fairly stable since 2008. A total of six cougar were reported harvested in the district in 2018 (not including tribal). The Skookumchuck (GMU 667) annually provides the highest cougar harvest in the district. Thus, prospects for hunting cougar in the district are very good.

![Cougar Harvest District 11 General and Other Harvest Combined](image-url)
The majority of Pacific Flyway waterfowl are born on the prairies of the United States and Canada, primarily Alaska, northwestern Canada, and other western states. According to the USFWS Waterfowl Population Status report for 2018, the western North American survey area habitat conditions in 2018 were similar to or declined, with a few exceptions, relative to 2017. Much of the Canadian prairies experienced average fall and winter precipitation and below-average spring precipitation. Fall and winter temperatures were mainly average. However, well-below-average temperatures were recorded from February to April 2018 and were well-above average in May 2018. Overall, habitat quality according to USFWS remains good over a large portion of the region and should lead to average waterfowl production this year.

In the traditional survey area, the total duck population was 41.2 ± 0.7 million birds. This estimate was 13 percent lower than the 2017 estimate of 47.3 ± 0.8 million and 17 percent higher than the long-term average (1955–2017). The Pacific goose and tundra swan (Cygnus columbianus) population count also increased 4 percent over 2017 estimates making for good goose and swan harvest. Total duck breeding population estimates were up 16 percent in Washington in 2018 compared to 2017. The total duck long-term average estimate for Washington was unchanged from the 2017 estimate, and 59 percent above the long-term average. Prospects for waterfowl hunting in District 11 remain good.

Information on the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Surveys and the Mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory can be found here: https://www.fws.gov/birds/surveys-and-data/population-surveys.php. Population trends for several species of ducks found in District 11 are as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Breeding Population Estimate Trend North America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mallard</td>
<td>Estimated abundance was 9.3 ± 0.3 million, which was 12% lower than the 2017 estimate of 10.5 ± 0.3 million but 17% above the long-term average of 7.9 ± 0.04 million.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green-winged teal</td>
<td>Estimated abundance was 3.0 ± 0.2 million, which was 16% below the 2017 estimate of 3.6 ± 0.2 million and 42% above the long-term average (2.1 ± 0.02 million).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadwall</td>
<td>Estimated abundance of 2.9 ± 0.2 million was 31% below 2017 but 43% above the long-term average.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American widgeon</td>
<td>Abundance estimates for was 2.8 ± 0.2 million) were similar to their 2017 estimates and their long-term averages of 2.6 ± 0.02 million and 0.6 ± 0.01 million, respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern shoveler</td>
<td>The 2018 estimate was similar to last year and 62% above the long-term average of 2.6 ± 0.02 million.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern pintails</td>
<td>Estimated abundance of 2.4 ± 0.2 million was 18% below the 2017 estimate and 40% below the long-term average of 4.0 ± 0.03 million.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaup (combined)</td>
<td>Estimated abundance of 4.0±0.2 million was similar to the 2017 estimate and 20% below the long-term average of 5.0±0.04 million.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canvasbacks</td>
<td>Estimated abundance of 0.7 ± 0.06 million was similar to the 2017 estimate and the long-term averages of 0.6 ± 0.01 million.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Duck harvest in District 11 has been declining slightly in the past two years. Thurston County supports more waterfowl than Pierce County, primarily as a result of Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and other Puget Sound inlets. However, survey results for breeding ducks for the South Puget Sound area which includes District 11 show a fairly stable trend over the last 10 years. Hunting prospects for waterfowl hunters remain good in the district in 2019 with the best prospects being in Thurston County.
The South Puget Sound lowlands compete with the North Puget Sound lowlands on an annual basis as the area having the highest percent of breeding ducks in western Washington according to WDFW’s annual breeding duck surveys. In 2019, breeding season duck estimates increased in Hood Canal and the Dungeness area of western Washington compared to 2018 but decreased in the Chehalis Valley, South Puget Lowlands and North Puget Lowlands. Regardless of decline, according to the WDFW Waterfowl Section Manager, waterfowl availability should be similar to 2018 in western Washington and very good in eastern Washington.
Goose breeding survey trends have generally increased across the South Puget Sound which includes District 11 over the last 10 years but remained constant since 2016. Prospects for goose hunting in District 11 remain good.

Hunting violations remain a concern on small water bodies in the district that are surrounded by housing. Hunters are urged to obey all hunting regulations at such sites to avoid potential future closures. All bodies of water are open for hunting unless located within a county firearm.
restriction area (see introduction). Rapjohn Lake in Pierce County has a Register to Hunt program and requires hunters to hunt from two established blinds. Registration for the blinds is on a first come basis and is established by parking in one of the two mandatory parking spots at the WDFW Rapjohn Lake Access Site.

The goose harvest in the district has remained relatively stable since 2009. The best waterfowl hunting areas in District 11 include Nisqually Wildlife Refuge; Puget Sound marine inlets associated with western islands of Pierce County and Henderson, Budd, and Eld Inlets of Thurston County; and Centralia Mine in Lewis County. Flooded agricultural fields in the western half of the district can be good prospects for waterfowl hunting, but hunters must seek landowner access.

Note that a majority of the water bodies on Key Peninsula, Pierce County, are within a firearm restriction zone, thus prohibiting waterfowl hunting. For information on hunting Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, call (360) 753-9467 or go to: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Billy_Frank_Jr_Nisqually/visit/visitor_activities/hunting.html.
The Centralia Coal Mine has a limited, high quality hunt. Hunters must sign up for this hunt directly at the Mine. Note that the majority of the available timeslots for this hunt are taken by the Mine employees. This is primarily a goose hunt but does provide some mixed waterfowl when fields flood. A maximum of three hunters per day are authorized to hunt and you can only hunt on the days you have successfully signed up. Hunters are urged to contact TransAlta directly with questions regarding participation (360-736-9901).

### MOURNING DOVE

The department uses the annual USFWS Mourning Dove Population Status Report to analyze trends in mourning dove populations. The report summarizes trends in the number of doves heard and seen per route from the all-bird Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), and provides absolute abundance estimates based on band recovery and harvest data. Harvest and hunter participation are estimated from the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP). BBS data suggested that the abundance of mourning doves over the last 51 years decreased in the western management units, which is composed of the seven western states, including Washington. Estimates of absolute remained stable in the western management unit in 2017 compared to 2016 (note, reports are always two years out).

![Graph showing mourning dove abundance over years]

Estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals of mourning dove absolute abundance in the western management units combined, 2002–2017. Estimates based on band recovery and harvest data.
Estimated harvest (▲) and harvest rates of mourning dove in the western management units combined, 2002–2017. Harvest rates presented separately for hatch-year (□) and after-hatch-year (○; USFWS 2016).

Approximately 23,700 ± 80 percent mourning doves were harvested by 2,700 ± 42 percent active hunters in the 2017-18 season in Washington, for an average of 8.7 ± 91 percent doves per hunter (note, data always two years out). This is a decrease over 2015-16 estimates.

District 11 is not a prime dove hunting area in Washington and normally averages approximately 100 doves harvested per year. Mourning dove harvest exponentially increased in 2018 with no obvious explanation. Lewis County traditionally provides higher harvest numbers in the district, with Thurston and Pierce counties providing far less. However, this depends on hunter participation, which fluctuates year to year. As an example, in 2017, the harvest was 0, 34, and 38 for Lewis, Thurston, and Pierce counties, respectively, compared to the 2016 harvest of 80, 90, and 27. Our WDFW small game hunter survey may also underestimate harvest when participation is low, as it was in 2017.
FOREST GROUSE

Ruffed and sooty (formerly classified as blue) grouse are present throughout the public and private forest lands in District 11. The prospects for harvesting sooty grouse go up with increasing elevation. Hunters can expect the greatest success along logging roads, trails, and ridgelines above 2,000-3,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands. The best hunting will be near fruiting shrublands such as huckleberry, grouse whortleberry, elderberry, and other species. Logging roads are particularly good locations since they provide the sand that grouse need to eat for digestion and the dust grouse seek to discourage mites and other biting infestations. In particular, look for inaccessible or closed roads and walk behind gates (with permission by owner) to get the best chance of finding grouse.

Hunters targeting ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500’, particularly in riparian forest habitats, early seral forests (5-25 years old), and deciduous-conifer mixed forest types. Prime forest grouse hunting may be found on JBLM (GMU 652), Elbe Hills and Tahoma State Forests (GMU 654), Weyerhaeuser’s Vail Tree Farm (GMU 667), and Capitol State Forest (GMU 663). Forest grouse harvest has trended downward in District 11 over the past 10 years. Removing the 2009 spike in harvest, an average of 2,500 grouse are harvested annually in the district. The best prospects for hunting grouse in District 11 are in Lewis County, followed by Pierce and Thurston counties.
A hunter must purchase either a big game license or a small game license to hunt grouse. Grouse hunting is included in the purchase of any big game license purchase. Forest grouse season in District 11 runs Sept. 1 through Dec. 31, with a daily bag limit of four of any species (to include not more than three of each species) and a possession limit of 12 (to include not more than nine of any one species).

**PHEASANT**

Western Washington does not support self-sustaining populations of pheasants primarily due to the wet climate and lack of grain farming. Hunting pheasant on the west side of the state is dependent upon releases of pheasants in the fall. District 11 is fortunate to contain three of the 24 pheasant release sites in western Washington. For that reason, pheasant hunters continue to have great prospects for harvesting pheasant in this district. In addition, WDFW often releases pheasants into District 11 via the network of collaborators used across the state. The shorter distance means less travel time, stress, and fatigue for the birds prior to release. According to our pheasant production manager, this equates to more consistency and stronger birds at release, which should improve hunting opportunity for District 11 hunters.
Game farm produced pheasants will be released this fall on sites which are described and mapped on the Hunting Regulations, the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program and the Upland Bird Hunting websites. The release program utilizes state ( Scatter Creek and Skookumchuck) and federal ( JBLM) managed lands in District 11. There are special access processes in place for JBLM, so please visit their website. Note that nontoxic shot is required on all pheasant release sites statewide. The general pheasant season is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with a daily bag limit of two (either sex) and a possession limit of 15 (either sex). An extended pheasant season is also provided in District 11 at the Skookumchuck and Scatter Creek wildlife areas and JBLM release sites from Dec. 1-15 under the same hours and daily/possession limits as the general season. Pheasants are not released as part of the extended season. Hunters need a western Washington pheasant license to hunt pheasants. Additional information on hunting pheasants can be found on the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program website noted above.

Pheasant release in western Washington will be similar to last year, with an estimated 39,000 pheasants to be released at 24 pheasant release areas in 2019. Be aware that total production could still be affected by seasonable temperature fluctuations and other mortalities in 2019 and these are estimates only. Approximately 2,000 pheasants (5 percent of total production) will be released at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area this season, with 50-75 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays beginning Sept. 29 through Thanksgiving Day morning. Approximately 3,900 pheasants (10 percent of total production) will be released at Scatter Creek Wildlife Area, with 120-135 birds released each day on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays. Some areas of Scatter Creek are off limits to hunters due to endangered species recovery work so please OBEY ALL POSTED SIGNS. Approximately 4,000 pheasants (10 percent of total production compared) will be released on JBLM. Military training and listed species management dictates which fields will be open in any given week for both release and hunting access on JBLM. Hunters must register to hunt on JBLM through NW Adventure Center (253-967-8282 or 253-967-7744 or the JBLM website). The website lists the areas of the base open for hunting.

**QUAIL**

Quail are as limited in District 11 as they are throughout western Washington. Quail harvest in District 11 fluctuates annually dependent on the number of hunters participating. As example, only eight hunters hunted quail in the district in 2017. Regardless, quail harvest in the district is not significantly lower than the other 10 counties in western Washington in which hunters hunt quail. California quail can be found in scattered locations throughout District 11, with the greatest opportunity in grasslands and woodlands of south and east Thurston County and northern Lewis County. Mountain quail are more prevalent in the brushy areas of the Key Peninsula, Pierce County, and southeast portions of Thurston County. Where private property access is limited, seek out state ( WDNR) and county forestland. The western Washington
California (valley) quail season runs end of September thru end of November, with a daily mixed bag limit of 10 and a possession mixed bag limit of 30. The mountain quail season runs the same season with a daily bag limit of two and possession limit of four.

**Quail Harvest**

District 11

![Quail Harvest District 11](image)

**TURKEY**

District 11 is not managed for wild turkeys and the species remains relatively rare. Regardless, there are huntable populations of the eastern sub-species of wild turkey in the district and harvest reflects hunter participation year to year. Turkey harvest for Turkey Population Unit 50, within which District 11 lies, has remained stable since 2012 with the exception of spikes in 2012 and 2017. Those spikes may reflect higher hunter participation in those years.

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

Band-tailed pigeon estimates based on mineral site surveys have been trending upwards in the district since 2014 and rose sharply this year. Hunting prospects for band-tailed pigeon hunters is very good this season.

Pierce County in District 11 has the second highest average harvest in Washington (average harvest of 45 per year) and thus prospects for hunting band-tailed pigeons in the district are good. For comparison, average harvest in Lewis County is 10 bandtails per year and in Thurston...
County the average is six. The best hunting locations for band-tailed pigeons in District 11 are Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Luhr Beach area (Pierce/Thurston county boundary), Mud Bay (Thurston County), Totten Inlet/Oyster Bay (Thurston County), and along marine shorelines of District 11.

![Band-tailed Pigeon Harvest Comparison by Counties within District 11](image1)

![Average Harvest of Band-tailed Pigeon by County 2002-Present](image2)
COTTONTAIL RABBIT

District 11 provides some of the best cottontail rabbit hunting opportunities in western Washington. Rabbits are prolific in the shrub and grassland habitats found throughout Pierce and Thurston counties. Cottontail rabbit harvest in the district fluctuates depending on hunter annual participation. The average harvest since 2008 has been 300 annually (2016 low removed; Pierce and Thurston counties only). Pierce County has often had one of the highest harvests of all western Washington counties. Thus, prospects for cottontail hunting in District 11, and Pierce County specifically, are good for 2019.

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