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WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 12 HUNTING PROSPECTS

King County

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISTRICT 12 GENERAL OVERVIEW	2
ELK	2
Elk Hoof Disease (Treponeme Bacteria)	4
DEER.....	6
BEAR	9
COUGAR	9
PHEASANT	10
QUAIL.....	10
FOREST GROUSE	10
EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE.....	11
TURKEY	11
WATERFOWL.....	12
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.....	12
Firearms Restriction Areas in King County	12

DISTRICT 12 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 12 is comprised of six game management units (GMUs), including 422 (Vashon/Maury Islands), 454 (Issaquah), 460 (Snoqualmie), 466 (Stampede), 485 (Green River, open to appropriate deer and elk permit holders only), and 490 (Cedar River, currently closed to hunting). Land ownership in the district is a checkerboard of private, state, and federal holdings. The densest private (urban and suburban) developments are found in the Issaquah Unit (GMU 454), while private agricultural holdings are primarily located in the northwestern part of the Snoqualmie Unit (GMU 460).

A great tool for determining property ownership and boundaries can be found at King County [iMap](#).

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

The largest percentage of huntable area is U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land, but industrial timber companies also have large land holdings in the area. Private, state, and federally-owned lands are managed primarily to produce timber. USFS lands are managed for multiple uses, including timber, recreation, and wildlife, with a current emphasis on growing and managing old-growth forests.

Remember to be a good hunting and outdoor recreation steward. Be respectful of others. Don't hunt areas where there is heavy, regular recreation use. Please pick up after yourself and don't leave a gut pile out in the open – cover, bury, or hike it out and dispose of it properly.

ELK

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

GMU 460 (Snoqualmie) provides good hunting opportunities in areas of the unit. However, hunters are advised to scout their preferred hunting areas well in advance because state and private timberlands are gated with restricted access. Many elk in the GMU are found (at least at times) on private property in valley bottoms. Hunters should network well in advance to gain access to hunt these properties. Please be mindful of residences, domestic animals (pets/livestock), and other non-target objects down range when hunting these areas. Hunters should plan for safe shooting lanes. A map of [King County no shooting areas](#) is available online and a description of firearm restriction areas can be found on page 95 of the [hunting regulations pamphlet](#).

Elk in GMU 454 (Issaquah) continue to be managed with liberal seasons designed to reduce road kills and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly developed areas. Much of this unit is in private property. Preseason planning and networking may be most important for hunters trying to gain access in this unit. Hunters should also be mindful of safety concerns and firearm restrictions (see above) in this unit. Bow hunters should have an advantage in gaining permission.

GMU 466 (Stampede) is a mix of private, state, and USFS lands (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest). There are some old growth stands on USFS lands, with second growth timber dominating much of the unit. Hunters should be prepared for up to a 2,500 feet elevation change and steep terrain in this unit. Early snowfall in the unit has the potential to strand hunters, but also the potential to aid in success.

GMU 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled access portion of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Elk are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2019 season, 10 any bull tags and 10 antlerless elk tags are available for hunters through the draw system.



Elk in King County – Photo by Mike Smith



Group of elk in GMU 460 – Photo by Mike Smith

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

Elk hoof disease in Washington

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 are susceptible to many conditions that result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new sickness – now known as treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) – suggested something completely different.

Diagnostic research conducted by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) along with a panel of scientific advisors found that these abnormalities were strongly connected with treponeme bacteria, known to cause digital dermatitis in cattle, sheep, and goats. Although this type of disease has impacted the dairy industry for decades, TAHD had never before been documented in elk or any other hooved wildlife species.

Since then, WDFW has continued to work with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others through its Hoof Disease Technical Advisory Group and Public Working Group to develop management strategies for elk infected by TAHD.

WDFW seeks to understand and respond to diseases that affect the health of elk in our state. You can help by reporting [Limping Elk or Dead Elk with Hoof Deformities](#).

Several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Susceptibility:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect hooves of 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 should be safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** Currently, no vaccine exists to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by walking infected animals through foot baths and cleaning and bandaging their hooves. Unfortunately, that is not a possible option for free-ranging elk.

WDFW has confirmed cases of elk infected with TAHD in 14 Washington counties, primarily in the southwest region of the state. Early efforts to formally estimate the frequency and distribution of TAHD show the disease is most prevalent in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and the western half of Lewis county. In April 2018, WDFW confirmed the disease in Klickitat County – the first such finding in Washington east of the Cascade Range. In early 2019, TAHD was detected in an elk in Walla Walla County.

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

How hunters and others can help

State wildlife managers are asking for the public's help to monitor and prevent the spread of TAHD in several ways:

Leave hooves: Scientists believe that treponeme bacteria may persist in 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 2019-2020 hunting season, this rule applies to GMUs 407, 418, 437, 454, 501-564, 633, 636 and 642-699.

Report elk: Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of healthy or limping elk as well as dead elk with hoof deformities using the reporting tools found [here](#).

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 or tires before leaving the area.

Diagnosing and monitoring TAHD in elk

From 2009 through 2014, WDFW collected hooves and tissue from 43 elk and partnered with the USDA National Animal Disease Center and four other diagnostic laboratories to analyze them to find the cause of the disease. WDFW took samples from elk in areas of southwest Washington known to have the disease as well as those believed to be free of the disease.

By 2014, all five laboratories had found treponeme bacteria in samples from diseased elk but not in those from healthy elk, providing evidence of the role of treponeme bacteria in causing the disease. A WDFW technical advisory group, which includes the State Veterinarian's office, public health officials, university researchers, and other specialists, independently reviewed and accepted the findings

Since then, WDFW has continued to partner with leading experts to better understand this disease and started a variety of field studies to assess the distribution and prevalence of the disease, along with its effect on elk survival and reproductivity. WDFW is also working closely with Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, which was named in 2017 by the state Legislature as the state lead in assessing the causes and potential solutions for elk hoof disease.

DEER

WDFW has not done population surveys for several years throughout District 12, but hunting prospects are believed to be quite good on private and public lands, where hunting is allowed, from anecdotal observations.

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

WDFW continues to manage deer in GMU 454 (Issaquah) with liberal seasons designed to prevent road kills and keep damage issues at acceptable levels in highly-developed areas. More opportunities were recently added in the second deer special permit category for GMU 454 with the addition of Deer Area 4541 (North Issaquah). Please refer to the current [Big Game pamphlet](#) for updated listings of these opportunities. This unit (and corresponding deer area) is about 90% private land and hunters continue to have a problem with access. Success in this unit may well depend on getting to know your neighbors and raising the subject of hunting as a means of protecting their fruit trees and vegetables. Firearm restrictions are in place because landowners are concerned about safety. Bow hunters should have an advantage in getting permission.



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

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



A black-tailed deer doe in GMU 460 – Photo by Mike Smith

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

GMU 485 (Green River) follows the posted boundary of the controlled access area of the Tacoma Water Green River Watershed. Tacoma Water limits public access to protect the water supply. Deer are managed with special permit hunts. During the 2019 season, five any buck tags in the Quality category and five any buck tags in the Youth category (alternates annually with Hunters with Disabilities category) are available for state hunters through the draw system.

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

BEAR

Bears inhabit areas of District 12, but like elk, many are on private lands. Hunters should ensure they have permission to hunt where they're interested. Berry production throughout the district was good this year. Bears are often at lower elevations early on before they move higher as the season progresses.



A bear in GMU 454 – Photo by Mike Smith

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

COUGAR

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

be updated weekly beginning Jan. 1, 2020. Hunters must have a 2020 cougar license and tag to hunt cougar in April 2020.

PHEASANT

WDFW will release game farm pheasants this fall on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. Site maps are available in the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Pamphlet](#). Hunters must use nontoxic shot on all pheasant release sites.

Hunting hours for pheasant and quail in western Washington are from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This includes the Stillwater, Cherry Valley, and Crescent Lake units of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. For the rest of the hunting season, normal hunting hours (half hour before sunrise to half hour after sunset) will apply.

QUAIL

There are few quail in District 12.

FOREST GROUSE

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

Forest management in much of District 12 is still favorable for grouse. Hunters looking to harvest ruffed grouse should focus on elevations below 2,500 feet, early seral forests (5-25 years old) with ample berry crops in the understory, and riparian forest habitats. Sooty grouse hunters can expect the greatest success along trails and ridgelines above 2,000 feet and within Pacific silver fir and noble fir forest stands with abundant huckleberries.



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

EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE

While not a managed game species, Eurasian collared doves (an exotic species) are now in District 12. People can hunt Eurasian collared doves year-round with a big or small game license. The best way to hunt them is to seek landowner permission in lowland agricultural areas that have a barnyard setting where birds roost in trees but go to the ground to feed. Hunters should be sure they are hunting in compliance with any firearm restrictions and in a manner compatible with existing infrastructure (buildings, farm equipment, or power lines).

TURKEY

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

WATERFOWL

Breeding waterfowl assessments (2018) show good wetland and weather conditions in major breeding areas. Harvest opportunities should be good, dependent on weather conditions through the season. The best waterfowl hunting opportunities continue to be in the lower Snoqualmie Valley, with public access on WDFW's Snoqualmie Wildlife Management Area (Cherry Valley, Stillwater, and Crescent Lake units). Hunters can only enter and hunt units between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. during the pheasant season. More opportunities are in the Kent Valley. Hunters are encouraged to work with local private landowners to get access to one of District 12's many river and agricultural valleys and improve their waterfowl hunting success. Refer to the [Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Regulations](#) for season dates and hours.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, see [Let's Go Waterfowl hunting](#).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

More information about tribal hunting rights and state-tribal co-management is [online](#).

FIREARMS RESTRICTION AREAS IN KING COUNTY

Centerfire and rimfire rifles are not legal for hunting west of Highway 203 (Monroe-Fall City), the Fall City-Preston Road to I-90, I-90 to Highway 18, Highway 18 to I-5, and I-5 to Pierce-King County line. They are also not legal for hunting on Vashon and Maury islands. For more information, see page 95 of the [2019 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). There aren't many shooting areas in King County per county ordinances. Please contact your local sheriff for specific locations.