Food plot waiting for migrating waterfowl at Frenchman Regulated Access Area
Photo by Chattan McPherson, Natural Resource Specialist 2
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DISTRICT 5 GENERAL OVERVIEW** ................................................................................................................. 4  
  Public Lands in District 5 GMUs .................................................................................................................. 5  
  Habitat Management ........................................................................................................................................ 11  
  Game reserves .................................................................................................................................................. 16  

**ELK** ................................................................................................................................................................. 18  
  General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status ................................................................. 18  
  What to Expect During the 2019 Season .......................................................................................................... 18  

**DEER** ............................................................................................................................................................. 19  
  General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status ................................................................. 19  
  What to Expect During the 2019 Season .......................................................................................................... 21  
  Deer Areas ......................................................................................................................................................... 22  

**BEAR** ............................................................................................................................................................. 25  
  General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status ................................................................. 25  
  What to Expect During the 2019 Season .......................................................................................................... 25  

**COUGAR** ......................................................................................................................................................... 25  
  General Information, Management Goals, and Population Status ................................................................. 25  
  What to Expect During the 2019 Season .......................................................................................................... 25  

**PHEASANT** ....................................................................................................................................................... 25  

**QUAIL** ............................................................................................................................................................ 26  

**CHUKAR AND PARTRIDGE** .............................................................................................................................. 27  

**DOVE** ............................................................................................................................................................ 28  

**UPLAND BIRD MANAGEMENT** ...................................................................................................................... 29  

**WATERFOWL** .................................................................................................................................................. 30  
  Waterfowl Population Status .......................................................................................................................... 30  
  Waterfowl Migration Chronology and Concentration Areas ........................................................................... 32  
  Hunting Tips ....................................................................................................................................................... 33  
  Hunter Collected Data from RAA ..................................................................................................................... 39
DISTRICT 5 GENERAL OVERVIEW

There are abundant hunting opportunities throughout District 5, but this district is most recognized for waterfowl, upland bird and mule deer hunting. Ring-necked pheasants and California quail are the most abundant and popular upland game birds in District 5. Additionally, Grant County is one of the top-producing counties for both of those species year after year. There are other opportunities within the district to hunt bobcat, cougar, chukars, gray partridge, cottontail rabbit, coyote, and both general season and permit opportunities for mule deer. Elk are harvested in GMUs 278 and 284, but resident populations are not prolific. WDFW manages the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area that boasts approximately 190,000 acres that is open to the public (Figure 5). There are additional public lands open to public access that are managed by WA Dept. of Natural Resources, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bureau of Land Management.

Habitat in District 5 is highly variable. Most habitat would be characterized as shrubsteppe with the dominant native upland vegetation including big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata), bitterbrush (Purshia tridentata), rabbitbrush (Chrysothamnus nauseosus), bluebunch wheatgrass (Pseudoroegneria spicata), Sandberg’s bluegrass (Poa secunda), great basin wildrye (Leymus cinereus), needle-and-thread (Hesperostipa comata), and Indian ricegrass (Oryzopsis hymenoides) with Cheatgrass (Bromus tectorum) being the most common non-native species.

Many riparian areas and wetlands exist and are most commonly associated with the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project (CBIP). Coyote willow (Salix exigua), golden currant (Ribes aureum), and Woods’ rose (Rosa woodsii) are the dominant native shrubs associated with riparian habitats. Non-native riparian species include Russian olive (Eleagnus angustifolia), which dominates much of the landscape throughout CBIP. There are many important crops for wildlife within the CBIP, including corn, wheat, other grains, alfalfa, and orchards. Within the CBIP, hunters can expect to find abundant waterfowl, good numbers of pheasant and quail and special permit hunting opportunities for mule deer (GMU 290). Lands surrounding the CBIP tend to consist of highly fragmented shrubsteppe, dryland wheat, coulee, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands. In these areas, hunters can expect to find gray partridge, mule deer, and chukar in the steepest portions of the district (Sun Lakes, Quincy Lakes, and Banks Lake units). Much of this land is in private ownership, but some is enrolled in private lands access programs with WDFW. For more information, see the WDFW website.
Figure 1. Public Lands GMU 272.
Figure 2. Public Lands GMU 278.
Figure 3. Public Lands GMU 284.
Figure 4. Public Lands GMU 290.
Figure 5. Columbia Basin Wildlife Area units.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species/Habitats</th>
<th>Banks Lake</th>
<th>Sun Lakes</th>
<th>Gloyd Seeps</th>
<th>Quincy Lakes</th>
<th>Winchester Lake</th>
<th>The Desert</th>
<th>Pothole’s Reservoir</th>
<th>Seep Lakes</th>
<th>Goose Lakes</th>
<th>Lower Crab Creek</th>
<th>Priest Rapids</th>
<th>Billy Clapp</th>
<th>Sprague Lake</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mule Deer</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>VL</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>VG*</td>
<td>VG*</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>VL</td>
<td>VL</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>N</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>VL</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Cougar</td>
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<td>VL</td>
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<td>G</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobcat</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>VL</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>VL</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>VL</td>
<td>VL</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>VL</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pheasant (Released)</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>VG**</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>N</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Quail</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Ducks</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>G</td>
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<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mourning Dove</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullfrogs</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>VL</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>VL</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.** Generalized Hunting Opportunity for Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Units.
HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Biologists continue working with wildlife area staff to target grant opportunities to fund wetland projects, manage wetland succession, plant food plots, and enhance shrubsteppe habitat.

Figure 7. Distribution of wildlife habitat projects in Ephrata District. Green circles represent project areas.
1. **Gloyd Road 20 Sharecropping**: This site is share-cropped to provide food and habitat for pheasant, quail, and doves. During most years, alfalfa is grown with requirements for delayed harvest to allow for upland game bird production, but years when wheat is grown this area can be a very productive bird hunting area.

2. **West Potholes Reservoir Vegetation Control**: *Northern Leopard Frog Management Area (NLFMA)*: This project consists mostly of vegetation management, primarily aimed at improving northern leopard frog habitat, and it has the added benefit of improving waterfowl habitat by reducing tall emergent vegetation and creating more open water. Prescribed burning is tentatively scheduled for late winter or early spring 2020. These efforts will improve wetland habitat for many species.

3. **Winchester Regulated Access Area Management**: There continues to be an emphasis on mowing vegetation to improve hunting access. Water flow will be restored in November 2019 with the creation of a new delivery ditch into the project area. The restored water flow increased the overall huntability of the site.

4. **Common Reed Control**: Many acres of common reed are controlled along Winchester Wasteway (Dodson to Potholes Reservoir) and throughout North Potholes. WDFW has received considerable positive feedback regarding the opening of previously closed wetlands. In the future, WDFW hopes to use fire in addition to herbicide to remove residual debris and increase nutrient cycling.

5. **239 Drain Project Recovery**: Herbicide treatments for common reed continue in order to maintain open wetland basins.

6. **Harris Ponds Maintenance**: There has been regular maintenance to maintain open water within shallow excavated wetlands.

7. **Frenchman Restricted Access Area Management**: Two ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) blinds were constructed at this project area (Figure 8), which are available for use by contacting the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 for a reservation and combination to the lock.
Figure 8. Frenchman Regulated Access Area ADA blind #1 just after installation at the Frenchman Regulated Access Area. Photo by Conner Webster.

Figure 9. Harrowing cell 4 of Frenchman Regulated Access Area for wild millet planting. Photo by Chattan Mcpherson.
Figure 10. Harrowing and breaking up dead tall emergent vegetation at Winchester Regulated Access Area. Photo by Chattan McPherson.

Figure 11. Contouring in Cell 5 of regulated access area. Photo by Chattan McPherson.
8. *Buckshot Goose Field*: The crops within these fields look great and should provide ample forage for geese. There is a pit blind on site that can accommodate disabled hunters, but it is not fully ADA-compliant. Disabled hunters with assistance from another hunter have been successful using the blind. Disabled hunters are required to contact the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 in order to get the gate key and access the blind. Additionally, those hunters are required to fill out a “Hunting/Viewing Blind Special Use Permit” prior to each use of the blind. This permit is also available at the regional office.

9. *Block 26 Fields*: These fields are located southeast of Mattawa and planted with winter wheat and corn, so the overall attractiveness to waterfowl should be good.

10. *North Potholes Regulated Access Area*: New for 2019, this RAA will be open seven days a week throughout the waterfowl season. Hunters should note that all huntable species can be hunted when the site is open.

11. *North Winchester Excavations*: Deteriorated wetlands were excavated in the winter of 2018. The intent was to enhance wetlands for waterfowl hunting and production and improve the overall health of the wetlands within the Columbia Basin. Thus far, 45 acres have been excavated of the planned 96 acres. The second stage of excavation will occur in winter of 2019.

12. *Lower Crab Creek Fire*: In June 2019, the 243 Fire burned much of the Lower Crab Creek Unit. Approximately 17,000 acres of the nearly 25,000 total acres were burned. Hunters should note that despite the fire, vegetation is recovering well and should still provide hunting opportunities through the 2019-2020 hunting season.

13. *2018 Buckshot fire update*: The vegetation is recovering at the Buckshot Unit, but hunting opportunities will still be limited. There will be no pheasant releases at this site in 2019.

14. *2018 Quincy Lakes Fire update*: The effects of the fire that occurred in the summer of 2018 are still quite prevalent throughout much of the unit. The vegetation is recovering, but progress has been slow. The site will still function as a pheasant release site through the 2019 season.
GAME RESERVES

Game Reserves are lands where hunting and wildlife disturbance is not allowed. These undisturbed areas help wildlife in the area and available for hunting locally.

Figure 12. Location of wildlife reserves and closed federal refuge units (in red) throughout and adjacent to District 5.
Figure 13. Close ups of reserve boundaries in District 5.
GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Elk are rare and, therefore, are not a management priority in District 5. Resident elk herds do not exist in GMU 272, GMU 278, or GMU 290. Due to the potential for significant crop depredation issues, WDFW does not encourage the establishment of elk herds in District 5. WDFW provides Any Elk hunting opportunities during the general archery, modern firearm, and late muzzleloader seasons.

GMU 284 is near the Hangman Creek sub-herd of the Selkirk herd. This herd is composed of approximately 300 individuals and occurs approximately 16 miles to the northeast at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge (GMU 130). These elk enter into GMU 284, where they are harvested. Twelve elk in GMU 284 (7 bulls and 5 cows) were harvested during 2018, all of which were taken by modern firearm hunters. There were also 2 bull elk harvested in GMU 272.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2019 SEASON

If hunters wish to hunt elk in District 5 during the 2019 season, they should seek access on private lands in the eastern portions of GMU 284. Without access to private lands, the public land opportunities are very limited.
GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Figure 14. Bachelor group of mule deer bucks. Photo by Eric Braaten.

**GMU 272** includes approximately 53,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Gloyd Seeps, Banks Lake, Sun Lakes, Billy Clapp, and Quincy Lakes units), most of which is open to hunting. The number of deer hunters hunting general seasons (includes multi-weapon permits) within GMU 272 since 2001 ranges from about 1,100 to 1,700. The reported antlerless permit success rates for youth and disabled hunters were 77 percent and 63 percent, respectively. The Lakeview Unit second deer antlerless permits typically see variable success rates (27-91 percent), with 44 percent occurring last year.

**GMU 278** includes approximately 36,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Lower Crab Creek Unit), which is predominantly shrubsteppe habitat. Numerous parcels within DNR and Federal ownership also exist in this GMU. Harvest in this unit generally falls between 20 and 90 deer. The number of general season deer hunters within GMU 278, including multi-weapon permits, ranges from about 150 to 310.

**GMU 284** is predominately private property, so hunters should plan to seek permission to access private lands and/or plan on hunting lands enrolled in the WDFW Access Program. There are
some public lands scattered throughout this GMU, but they tend to be scattered and small (<640 acres). The number of deer general season hunters within GMU 284 ranges from about 650-1,100. The reported Benge Deer Area and Washtucna antlerless permit success rate for youth hunters was 91 percent and 64 percent, respectively.

**GMU 290** is a Quality Hunt permit only unit, thus all hunting opportunities are provided through the public draw. Post-hunt ratios have remained consistent at approximately 50 bucks:100 does, with the majority of bucks being classified as greater than 2.5 years old during aerial surveys. Harvest success for bucks varies greatly by hunt choice. Hunts listed in order from highest to lowest success rates are as follows: late modern, early modern, muzzleloader, late archery, and early archery. This GMU contains very few access roads, and scouting is strongly recommended to increase success. Forty-one percent of the land in GMU 290 is part of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and managed by WDFW, thus public opportunity is widely available. Public land in this unit consists of riparian areas associated with the Winchester and Frenchman wasteways, and is surrounded by sandy dunes with varying densities of shrub cover. The majority of the private agricultural land in this unit occurs throughout the western half. Hunters with permits will experience much greater success by hiking further away from access roads and scouting the area. Additionally, during nearly all of the permit hunts, other types of hunting are also occurring. Waterfowl and upland birds are the two most popular.
Table 1. Mule deer harvest summary for District 5 GMUs by weapon type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GMU</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Anterless</th>
<th>Antlered</th>
<th>Total Harvest</th>
<th>Number of Hunters</th>
<th>% Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>272</td>
<td>Archery</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Modern Firearm</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>1028</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-Season</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>158</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muzzleloader</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
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<td><strong>347</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>278</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>46</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Multi-Season</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
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<td><strong>84</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
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<td>290*</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>Youth</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>75%</td>
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</table>

*Please note that GMU 290 data are based only on hunter reports; not all hunters reported effort or harvest.

For additional information, please see the Adams and Grant counties Deer Harvest Statistics.

**WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2019 SEASON**

Most deer harvest occurs in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284 (Ritzville). Post-hunt buck:doe ratios from ground surveys in 2018 were 22:100 and 26:100, respectively. Fawn:doe ratios were good during the 2018 ground survey efforts, with 67:100 in GMU 272 and 64:100 in GMU 284. Given the modest escapement of bucks in 2018, hunters should expect an average year for mule deer hunting throughout the district. Winter of 2018 was relatively mild overall, but late-winter (February through March) did increase in severity. There were numerous reports of winterkilled deer, but hunters can still expect to see average numbers of deer throughout the hunting season.
DEER AREAS

There are localized deer concentration areas in District 5 where, during harsh or prolonged winters, deer have the potential to cause crop damage. To address this issue, WDFW provides limited, permit-only opportunities to harvest antlerless deer that occur in close proximity to these areas. By providing these opportunities, WDFW hopes to minimize crop damage by deterring mule deer from congregating. WDFW defines such areas as Deer Areas and in District 5 they include Deer Area 2010 (Lakeview), located in GMU 272, and Deer Area 2011 (Benge), located in GMU 284. See the most recent Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions.
Figure 16. Lakeview Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow)
Figure 17. Benge Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow)
BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

District 5 does not have a resident population of black bears. The establishment of a black bear population in this district is not expected in the near future.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2019 SEASON

District 5 is not an optimal area to target black bears. Occasionally, bears may disperse through this district, and the most likely places to encounter those individuals are the Beezley Hills and Moses Coulee.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

There is a small population of adult cougars in District 5, and annual harvest is very low (typically fewer than 10/year). Cougar harvest comes mostly from GMU 272 (Beezley Hills). Populations are expected to remain stable in this area for the foreseeable future.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2019 SEASON

District 5 is not an optimal area to target cougars. However, the most likely places to encounter cougars are Beezley Hills, Moses Coulee, and adjacent to the Crab Creek drainage upstream from the town of Stratford. Hunters take the majority of cougars incidentally when they are hunting other predators.

PHEASANT

Grant County was Washington’s top pheasant producing county in 2018 and has been the top county since 2006. Hunters harvested 9,767 birds in Grant County and 2,624 in Adams County for a total harvest of 12,391 pheasants in District 5. See the 2018 Adams and Grant counties Pheasant Harvest Statistics for additional information.

The largest concentrations of wild pheasants on WDFW lands in District 5 are likely to be found within GMU 290 (Desert Unit) between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George. Mixed bags of wild and released birds can be found in the Lower Crab Creek and Gloyd Seeps, whereas hunters will likely only find released birds in the Dry Falls, Steamboat Rock, Quincy, and Buckshot sites. Directions to pheasant release sites can be found in the Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program pamphlet. Nontoxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites. Please note that the release dates are not made public, to reduce overcrowding at release sites, however hunters can count on pheasants being released before the youth upland season (Sept. 21-22, 2019), before the general season opening day (Oct. 19, 2019), and two additional releases occurring before the end of November. Adams County does hold good numbers of wild pheasants, but hunters should seek permission on private lands to improve their chances of success.
Hunters looking for wild birds should focus their efforts on areas of dense cover. Thickets of Russian olive, cattail, roses, weedy areas associated with irrigation ditches, canals, and ponds are most likely to hold pheasants. Hunters should be prepared to do some walking when pursuing wild pheasants as they tend to flush, well in advance of hunters and are just about as likely to run as flush. Hunters can increase their odds with a dog to both find and retrieve the birds in the dense cover.

Winter and spring conditions are presenting an optimistic picture for the 2019-2020 hunting season. Hunters can likely anticipate seeing average numbers of pheasants. Most hunters who invest effort and cover a lot of ground will cross paths with wild birds. Hunters can increase their chances for a productive hunt by selecting nontoxic shot and diversifying the game bag with waterfowl.

Pheasants are an excellent species for beginning hunters to gain entry into the sport with numerous opportunities available for success and mentorship. WDFW, in coordination with Pheasants Forever, co-hosts numerous pheasant youth hunts statewide where farm-raised birds are released in select locations. Mentors and instructors are available to teach kids hunting safety, and basic hunting techniques. In District 5, the Columbia Basin Pheasants Forever Chapter hosts a hunting event for both youth and first-time hunters, information regarding their local hunts can be found on their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/ColumbiaBasinPF/.

**QUAIL**

Grant County was Washington’s second-highest-producing quail county in 2018 (behind Yakima County), with 19,868 birds taken, while Adams County had much lower harvest with 4,211 birds. See the 2018 Adams and Grant counties Quail Harvest Statistics for additional information.

In Grant County, there are many opportunities to hunt quail on public lands (see Figure 6 for more details). Hunters focusing on Adams County should seek permission on private lands to improve the chances of finding birds. Private lands access can be acquired through the WDFW Private Lands Access Program or by simply knocking on a few doors. Hunters will improve their odds with a trained dog to find and retrieve birds.

Large coveys are difficult to find by mid-season on public lands, and successful hunters will benefit by identifying multiple coveys to pursue throughout the season. Riparian areas will offer the best hunting and hunters can increase their chances by securing access to private lands, where pressure can be much lower. If pressure is high, some coveys can be found in shrub cover away from the heavily hunted areas. Hunters willing to do more hiking will likely find more birds.

Quail hunting is expected to be good again this year with reports from the field being very positive with lots of quail broods frequently being observed. As mentioned previously, hunters can increase the chances of a successful hunting trip by using nontoxic shot and targeting multiple species.
CHUKAR AND PARTRIDGE

Hunters harvested 977 chukars in District 5 during the 2018 season, with 879 being taken in Grant County and 98 harvested in Adams County. Hunters harvested 598 gray partridges in District 5 during the 2018 season, with 347 taken in Grant County and 251 in Adams County. The harvest success rates for both species in both Grant and Adams counties fluctuate quite dramatically from year to year. However, hunters should not be overly concerned with these fluctuations because the populations of both species are widely dispersed. See the 2018 Adams and Grant counties Chukar Harvest Statistics for additional information.

District 5 is not a popular destination for chukar or gray partridge hunters due to relatively small populations, but birds can still be found throughout much of the district. Most chukar hunting in the district occurs in the Coulee Corridor areas around Banks and Lenore lakes and along the Columbia River breaks north of Vantage. Gray partridges occur in low densities throughout the Columbia Basin, but are rarely targeted by hunters. They are instead taken incidentally while hunting chukars, quail, or pheasants. Most gray partridges occur in private agricultural fields, particularly in the dryland wheat portions of Adams County and, to a lesser degree, Grant County. Chukars and gray partridge are resilient birds and likely fared well despite less than ideal later winter conditions. Reports from the field paint a very good picture for both chukars and gray partridge.

Figure 18. Chukar brood. Photo by Eric Braaten
DOVE

Grant County was Washington’s top mourning dove producing county in 2018, with hunters harvesting 15,672 birds. Hunters harvested 3,151 doves in Adams County, making the combined District 5 total 18,823 doves.

This upcoming hunting season continues with the hunting season extension through Oct. 30, and dove hunting is expected to be similar to last year. If conditions are stable, the birds found during scouting trips should be around during the hunt, but unstable conditions often redistribute birds. Hunters may improve their success by securing access to wheat fields for morning hunts. Evening hunts can be productive in wheat fields or in traditional roosting areas. Look for large stands of trees (ideally with dead limbs) near water and surrounded by agriculture for the best roost hunt results. Roost site hunting can be found along the north and west sides of Potholes Reservoir, the east side of Winchester Lake, and throughout the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

Hunters should be aware that Eurasian collared doves co-occur with mourning doves, and the Eurasian collared doves do not count towards daily bag limits. Eurasian collared doves are classified as a Deleterious Species in Washington and as such have few regulations governing harvest, so be sure to take a few when the opportunity arises.

Figure 19. Banded mourning dove. Photo by Sean Dougherty
Upland bird management in District 5 consists primarily of sharecropping, strategic use of bird feeders to increase over-winter survival, and actively working to improve nesting cover on private and public lands. Wildlife area staff have finished establishing approximately 140 acres of nesting cover in the Gloyd Seeps Unit of Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

See Figure 6 for more detailed information on huntable species within the wildlife area units.

Figure 20. Generalized upland bird concentrations (pheasant, quail, and chukar) throughout the Ephrata District.
Grant County is consistently Washington’s top duck-producing county. Last year, hunters harvested 68,092 ducks in Grant County. Adams County hunters added another 15,853 ducks for a district total of 83,945. Additional information can be found at WDFW’s game harvest statistics webpage.

Grant County was also Washington’s top goose-producing county in 2018. Hunters harvested 15,851 geese in Grant County, and Adams County hunters added 3,384 for a district total of 19,235. Additional information can be found at WDFW’s game harvest statistics webpage.

Figure 21. Drake cinnamon teal. Photo by Eric Braaten

WATERFOWL POPULATION STATUS

The Washington Breeding Population Survey (BPOP), conducted in May, has been occurring since 2009. These surveys are a regional indicator of waterfowl breeding effort. The data may best represent hunting prospects for the earlier part of the waterfowl season (opening weekend through mid-November), since most migratory waterfowl will not have arrived.
Early-season species that occur in abundance during opening weekend include mallard, gadwall, American wigeon, and American green-winged teal. As shown in Figure 22, 2018 was the best spring breeding season in the last five years and 2019 was close. Overall, the species estimates were pretty similar to 2018. Hunters looking for some early-season success should be able to find birds more effectively than the last few years. However, be sure to take some time to scout ahead of the season to increase your chances for success.

Table 2. Washington Breeding Population Survey Estimates for 2019 and 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mallard</td>
<td>89,675</td>
<td>91,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadwall</td>
<td>22,142</td>
<td>27,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Wigeon</td>
<td>7,459</td>
<td>8,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am. Green-winged Teal</td>
<td>9,405</td>
<td>8,049</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the BPOP survey, WDFW also conducts regular brood routes throughout eastern Washington. Routes in the Ephrata District include the East Low Canal, West Canal, Winchester Ditch, and Ephrata Lake. The total numbers are presented in Figure 23 for 2007-2019. Surveys have continued to demonstrate a decline in local duck production over the past 12 years.
Figure 23. Duck brood count totals for Ephrata District strata, including West Canal, East Canal, Winchester Ditch, and Ephrata Lake.

WATERFOWL MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

Migration (peaks in mid to late-November) will bring the best waterfowl hunting to the Columbia Basin. Large numbers of mallards, gadwalls, redheads, canvasbacks, wigeon, teal, and scaup arrive from northern breeding grounds. Until then, hunters mostly rely on locally produced birds and early season migrants, such as American wigeon and green-winged teal. December typically provides the peak of mallards, ringnecks, and canvasbacks, while other dabbling and diving species continue south. Goose hunting will typically improve in November, when early season migrant Canada geese (lesser and Taverner’s) begin to scatter from their initial staging area at Stratford Lake to alfalfa or grain fields within feeding distance of Moses Lake and the Columbia River. In average years, the best hunting occurs in December and January during warming periods after extended freeze ups.
Scouting is the key to success when waterfowl hunting. Many opportunities exist for public waterfowl hunts, but hunters should first identify the general flight paths to determine feeding and roosting locations. Feeding flights for ducks typically occur early in the morning and late in the evening, typically outside legal shooting hours. Select areas to hunt based on the species you want to target. Dabbling ducks are more commonly targeted on the Columbia Plateau, where grain corn and wheat fields attract mallards and pintails and shallow wetlands attract teal, American wigeon, and gadwall. Canada geese feed primarily in wheat and alfalfa fields, so requesting permission from private landowners is often necessary to secure field goose hunting. Diving ducks are typically hunted along the Columbia River, particularly at Wells Pool, Wanapum Pool, and Priest Rapids Pool. They forage over beds of submerged aquatic vegetation such as pondweeds and milfoil. Knowing when and where ducks are feeding will help hunters determine the best locations to intercept the duck traffic with decoy spreads. Setting up a decoy spread on waters between the feeding and roosting sites will generally yield good hunting opportunities, particularly during periods of wind, snow, or fog. Typically, the larger roosting

HUNTING TIPS

Scouting

Scouting is the key to success when waterfowl hunting. Many opportunities exist for public waterfowl hunts, but hunters should first identify the general flight paths to determine feeding and roosting locations. Feeding flights for ducks typically occur early in the morning and late in the evening, typically outside legal shooting hours. Select areas to hunt based on the species you want to target. Dabbling ducks are more commonly targeted on the Columbia Plateau, where grain corn and wheat fields attract mallards and pintails and shallow wetlands attract teal, American wigeon, and gadwall. Canada geese feed primarily in wheat and alfalfa fields, so requesting permission from private landowners is often necessary to secure field goose hunting. Diving ducks are typically hunted along the Columbia River, particularly at Wells Pool, Wanapum Pool, and Priest Rapids Pool. They forage over beds of submerged aquatic vegetation such as pondweeds and milfoil. Knowing when and where ducks are feeding will help hunters determine the best locations to intercept the duck traffic with decoy spreads. Setting up a decoy spread on waters between the feeding and roosting sites will generally yield good hunting opportunities, particularly during periods of wind, snow, or fog. Typically, the larger roosting

Figure 24. Migration curves for several species that winter in large numbers on the Columbia Plateau.
sites will be the Wanapum Closure (Columbia River), Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, and Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Marsh units.

Hunters should be mindful that water (and muck) depths are highly variable and it takes a lot of trial and error to learn where you can and cannot set decoys. For some areas, boat access may be the only or best option. Winchester and Frenchman wasteways (the two major drainages entering the west side of Potholes Reservoir) are crossable in some areas with chest waders, but use caution, as deep holes do exist and patches of muck can be difficult to exit, particularly when packing decoys.

**Early and Late Season Goose Hunting**

Hunters should continue to be excited about the goose bag limits being separated by species. This change will provide hunters have the potential to put more birds in the bag. The changes will not affect where to go, but goose hunters in mid-October could increase their focus on white-fronted geese around Moses Lake, Winchester Lake, and along the Winchester Wasteway. There are no guarantees for those birds to be around during hunting season, but in typical years, there are 200-500 white-fronted geese for the first few weeks of the waterfowl season.

During the later parts of the waterfowl season, there have been increasing numbers of snow geese observed around Potholes Reservoir and even Moses Lake. Hunters pursuing those birds should focus efforts on the grain fields surrounding those reservoirs south of Interstate 90. In 2017 and 2018, approximately 1,500-2,500 snow geese spent the winter on Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. Those birds were frequently observed flying north towards agricultural fields surrounding Potholes Reservoir.

**Where to Hunt**

**Regulated Access Areas**

Dogs are often a necessity for retrieving throughout most of District 5, but Regulated Access Areas (RAA) have some shallow ponds that can be effectively hunted with only chest waders. Time restrictions and the number of vehicles allowed for the RAA can be found in the hunting pamphlet and Table 3 (below). These sites are Register to Hunt, so be sure to register at the box provided in the parking areas. Hunter information collected from these sites is used to inform management decision, and justify further habitat improvements. Below each RAA is discussed in more detail.
Figure 25. Regulated Access Area locations adjacent to game reserves closed to hunting.
Figure 26. Winchester Ponds Regulated Access Area.

Winchester Ponds RAA

Winchester Ponds is the most popular RAA in the district and consistently produces birds. Five blinds (established in 2012) are distributed throughout the access area and are available on a first-come basis, but hunters are not required to hunt from blinds, as the area is open to free-roam. Typically all five parking spots are filled once access is allowed at 4 a.m. This RAA is only open during Goose Management Area 4 Goose Days.
Frenchman Ponds RAA

Frenchman Ponds is not as productive as the Winchester Ponds RAA, likely because the adjacent Frenchman Reserve typically supports smaller numbers of mallards. As a result, this area receives less attention and hunters are more likely to get a spot, even if showing up later in the morning. The area is open to free-roam and allows for both upland and waterfowl hunting. There are two wheel-chair accessible hunting blinds that are open to all hunters but must be forfeited by non-disabled hunters in the event that a disabled hunter requests the site. Disabled hunters may check out a key from the Ephrata Regional Office and will be able to drive to the blinds and park relatively close. Call the Regional Office at 509-754-4624 for details.

This area is open seven days/week throughout all hunting seasons.
North Potholes RAA

North Potholes RAA is a relatively new area and has unique hunting conditions because the Potholes Reservoir water level ultimately determines water levels within these ponds. Some identified hunt sites, like Ponds 3 and 5, could be dry, particularly from October through November during the hunting season. The lowest water levels probably occur during the first half of November. Because the deepest portions of these ponds do not dry out, extremely mucky conditions exist for early season hunting. Parking spots correspond to specific hunt sites. Hunters will be required to hunt within eyesight of identified sites in the field. Hunters must not hunt waterfowl away from their designated hunt site, but may pursue other game, such as upland birds, mule deer, coyote, and cottontail rabbits, on a free-roam basis. Hunters pursuing species other than waterfowl are strongly encouraged to stay at least 400 meters (1/4 mile) from designated waterfowl hunt sites.

New for the 2019-2020 hunting season, this RAA will be open seven days/week.
### Hunter Collected Data from RAA

**Table 3.** Data collected from Hunters at each RAA in District 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulated Access Area</th>
<th>Parking Spots</th>
<th>Register to Hunt</th>
<th>Hunt Days</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winchester</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Register on site</td>
<td>Wed, Sat, Sun; Mgmt Area 4 goose hunting days</td>
<td>No vehicles before 4 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frenchman</td>
<td>5 + 2 ADA</td>
<td>Register on site</td>
<td>All huntable days</td>
<td>No vehicles before 4 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Potholes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Register on site</td>
<td>All huntable days</td>
<td>No vehicles before 4 a.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Winchester Ponds</th>
<th>Harvest</th>
<th>Frenchman Ponds</th>
<th>Harvest</th>
<th>North Potholes</th>
<th>Harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Goose</td>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Goose</td>
<td>Duck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>149</td>
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<td>2014-15</td>
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<td>2014-15</td>
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<td>165</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other public lands

A common opinion amongst some hunters is that the RAAs discussed previously are the best option for public waterfowl hunting. While this opinion may hold true under the right circumstances, it is not always the case. When migrant waterfowl are in the area, just about any suitable site can be productive. Many places throughout the Columbia Basin provide excellent hunting opportunities.

One of the more popular waterfowl hunting areas is Potholes Reservoir. The abundance of small sand dune islands, where hunters find cover, makes this an attractive area. Most hunters use the northern portion of the reservoir, where they find shallower water and numerous islands. Hunters new to the reservoir should be aware that potholes reservoir water levels do increase dramatically through the hunting season. Hunters looking for less hunting pressure should choose days during the week.

Figure 29. Aerial imagery showing difference between high water (June) and low water (September) levels on Potholes Reservoir.

Figure 30. Potholes Reservoir water surface elevation (in feet) during waterfowl season. Note that water surface elevation is measured at O’Sullivan dam and some lag in flooding will occur in the upper portions of the reservoir.
Winchester Lake is another location where hunters can expect to see good numbers of ducks, but hunting pressure can be relatively high there too. Winchester Lake sits in a prime location, getting traffic from mallards that feed on grain corn in the surrounding area. Ducks typically come from Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, Moses Lake, and/or the Wanapum Closure to feed in fields, and they occasionally attempt to shorten their commute to the roost by stopping at Winchester Lake.

Realistically, there are very few “secret spots” within the Columbia Basin. There are just places that are hunted less frequently. Hunters willing to put some time into exploring new areas will likely discover a few gems. Walk-in areas that hold waterfowl include the following: Desert Unit, Lower Crab Creek, and Royal Lakes. All of these areas are predominantly public.

SMALL GAME

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION STATUS

Small game in District 5 consists primarily of bobcats, raccoons, foxes, crows, coyotes, and cottontail rabbits. There are no sizeable populations of forest grouse, but there is a small population of turkeys in the northern portions of GMU 272. Formal surveys to assess population status of small game species are not conducted. Bobcats occur in small numbers, and harvest is relatively low. Raccoons occur in fair numbers in association with wetlands and residential developments when adequate habitat exists. Fox farms occurred adjacent to the Columbia Plateau during the early 1900s, but declines in fur prices during the 1950s resulted in foxes being released into the wild. A few descendants of these individuals occur and can still be found. However, these introduced foxes are still considered relatively uncommon, with most reports coming from areas north of Moses Lake. Crows are typically hunted in areas where damage occurs, but hunting opportunities for crows locally are limited. Coyotes are likely the most abundant and wide-spread small game species within the district. Hunters interested in pursuing coyotes should be sure to spend time refining their tactics and be patient when making calling sets. There are many online resources available to hunters who are interested, and there are many landowners willing to allow access for hunters willing to ask for permission.

Cottontail rabbits are widespread and abundant throughout District 5, in areas of optimal habitat. In native landscapes, hunters should look for rock outcrops, greasewood patches, or other brushy thickets where suitable escape cover occurs. These rabbits are often found along habitat edges. Therefore, focusing efforts in areas where two or more of their preferred habitats occur will produce the best results, particularly if green forage is nearby. On private lands, cottontails can be found within and around equipment storage areas or rock piles. To be successful hunting rabbits, hunters should cover lots of ground while “kicking” brush. Stopping periodically will cause nearby rabbits to become nervous and they will oftentimes flee when you resume walking, providing a brief shooting window. Another popular way to hunt rabbits is through the use of trained beagles. Hunters targeting cottontails should be aware of the endangered pygmy rabbit. They look similar to cottontails but are found exclusively in shrubsteppe habitat. Hunters would likely only encounter pygmy rabbits north of the town of Ephrata.
PUBLIC LANDS

WDFW-MANAGED LAND
The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area contains about 190,000 acres and provides habitat for a multitude of species. For more information on this wildlife area, please visit the WDFW Lands website. Visitors to the wildlife area need to be aware that a Discover Pass or Vehicle Access Pass is required to access all WDFW lands.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
The Washington Department of Natural Resources maintains land that is open to the public for recreational purposes. Visitors to DNR land should be aware that a Discover Pass is required for access. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on DNR land can be found here.

NATIONAL FOREST
There is no national forest in District 5.

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Some BLM land is found in District 5 and is open to public hunting. For more information regarding BLM property, please visit the BLM website.

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) maintains property that is open to public use for recreational purposes. Much, but not all, of the BOR property is managed by WDFW. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on BOR lands can be found here.

PRIVATE LANDS

LAND OWNERSHIP
Whether hunting, hiking, or wildlife viewing, it is important to respect private property rights and always ask permission before entering private lands. Fortunately, technology has made the process of ownership determination easy. Simply log on to the Adams County parcel map or the Grant County parcel map and use the interactive map program to zoom into your area of interest. Clicking on the parcels will reveal landowner information. The disadvantage of these resources is the lack of portability and difficulty scanning a large area for availability of public land. However, these are by far the best available resources for identifying ownership of specific locations. The best resource available for identifying where public land occurs is the Department of Natural Resources public lands quadrangles (1:100k), available for a fee at the DNR website. There are other mobile applications that are now readily available and can be purchased through various sources; with a little sleuthing hunters can find lots of information.

PRIVATE LANDS PROGRAM
Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through negotiated agreements. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative
agreement retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases monetary compensation. These lands under agreement are well-known by WDFW Enforcement.

Currently, the private lands access program includes four basic access agreement types: Feel Free to Hunt, Register to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, and Hunt by Reservation. For more information, see WDFW’s private lands webpage. Currently, there are approximately 175,000 acres of private property that are accessible to hunters through these agreements. When accessing these lands, hunters should obey all the rules posted and should also be respectful of the private property that is open to public access. Most complaints received from hunting access cooperators is that hunters do not follow rules and are disrespectful. However, many hunters are not aware of the tremendous opportunities that are available on these private properties. With a little scouting and planning, hunters could improve their odds of success. Find more information on where these enrolled lands occur at WDFW’s private lands search or use the Mobile Hunting Regulations mapping feature.

Table 4. Approximate acreage of access available by access type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private Lands Access Program</th>
<th>Grant County</th>
<th>Adams County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel Free To Hunt</td>
<td>10,596</td>
<td>5,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt By Written Permission</td>
<td>27,012</td>
<td>118,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt By Reservation (Online)</td>
<td>18,513</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td><strong>56,121</strong></td>
<td><strong>123,400</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ADA ACCESS**

The Ephrata District maintains some access for people with disabilities. These sites occur at Rocky Ford Creek (Drumheller Pond), Buckshot Ranch, and the Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area. Hunters must have a Disabled Hunter Permit to access hunting areas behind locked gates. For additional information, please call or write to Dolores Noyes, WDFW, 360-902-2349, Fax: 360-902-2392 or Email: Dolores.Noyes@dfw.wa.gov.

Rocky Ford Creek Directions: Travel south from Ephrata on SR 282 for 7.2 miles. Turn right onto Neppel Road (Old Moses Lake Highway). Go 0.1 miles and turn right at the public fishing sign. Continue 0.5 miles to the access site. The access duck blind is on a small pond off the creek. A vehicle can be used to drop off a disabled hunter next to the blind. The ground around the blind is rough and access into the water is best with a small hand launch boat or raft. An accessible vault toilet is in the parking lot located nearby for the walk-in anglers. Use of the blind is by reservation only. Hunters can obtain a key from the Ephrata Regional Office by calling 509-754-4624.

Buckshot Ranch: Drive south on SR 243 along the Columbia River from Vantage toward Mattawa. Turn right (west) onto Road 26 SW and go about one mile to the Priest Rapids/Buckshot Wildlife Area. Follow the gravel road into a parking area and turn right between two fence posts. Follow the dirt road north 0.25 miles to a locked gate on the left. A
ground level roll-in goose pit blind is available with seasonal success dependent on weather. Call the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 to reserve the blind and obtain a key.

Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area: From Moses Lake, travel south on Highway 17 to Road M SE and turn right (south). Continue on Road M for about six miles and turn right (west) onto Highway 262 (O’Sullivan Dam Road). Continue on Highway 262 across O’Sullivan Dam and past Potholes State Park, and turn right (north) onto Road C SE. Proceed north on Road C SE for 1.4 miles and look for the disabled access gate on the left hand side of the road. For further detail, see the map in the Regulated Access Area section of this document. Call the Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624 to reserve the blind and obtain a combination to the lock.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**YOUTH HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES**

*Waterfowl*

New for 2019, there is a youth hunt scheduled for Sept. 28, as well as Feb. 1, 2020. Both dates will provide tremendous opportunities to get kids out hunting. Additionally, the Feb. 1 hunt day has the potential to be an awesome opportunity. That date will occur after the general waterfowl season, which is great for hunters because at that time there are typically more ducks in the area. Additionally, those ducks will be widely distributed and will have become habituated to no hunting pressure.

*Pheasants*

WDFW and the Columbia Basin Chapter of Pheasants Forever have been collaborating in recent years to host a day of pheasant hunting during the youth season. This event will take place on Saturday, Sept. 21, 2019, at the Gloyd Seeps Unit Road 10 parking lot ([View a map](#)). WDFW Hunter Education instructors will be onsite and will help with shooting instruction and offer “loaner” shotguns, and volunteers will be providing dogs to assist youth hunters. Additionally, Pheasants Forever will provide food for all hunters and parents and will also give away a shotgun to one youth hunting participant. No purchase will be required. For more information, check the [Columbia Basin Chapter of Pheasants Forever - Facebook Page](#) or call the WDFW Ephrata Regional Office at 509-754-4624.

*Deer*

District 5 staff members have increased youth hunting permits throughout most GMUs and have also changed most permits from Antlerless to Any Deer. Interested hunters should check the [2019 Big Game Regulations Pamphlet](#) for additional information.

**BIRD DOG TRAINING**

District 5 does not currently have any areas designated for bird-dog training, although work is under way to develop a dog training area. Any training on WDFW land must occur within the
established bird-dog training season, which runs from Aug. 1-March 31. Please see the website and regulations booklet for more details.

TARGET SHOOTING

Per WAC 332-52-145, target shooting is allowed in developed recreational facilities or areas with an unobstructed, earthen backstop capable of stopping all projectiles and debris in a safe manner. Targets are defined as items that are commercially manufactured for the specific purpose of target shooting. Because of extensive misuse of WDFW managed lands (primarily litter and human safety issues), some areas have been closed to target shooting, particularly in the Lind Coulee, Potholes, and Seep Lakes units of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. Many large wildfires have been caused by target shooting on WDFW and other publicly owned land in the last few decades and has led to extensive habitat and wildlife loss as well as land restoration costs.

Table 5. Information for shooting range facilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>Lind Golf &amp; Gun Club</td>
<td>509-671-3314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>Othello Gun Club</td>
<td>509-488-3768</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>Ritzville Gun Club</td>
<td>Gun Club Road, Ritzville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>Washtucna Gun Club</td>
<td>509-646-3263</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Boyd Mordhorst Memorial Range</td>
<td>509-345-2550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Coulee City Sportsmen</td>
<td>509-632-5137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Marlin Trap Club</td>
<td>509-982-2445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Moses Lake Gun Club</td>
<td>509-765-1382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>Quincy Gun Club</td>
<td>509-787-5506</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

Numerous resources exist to assist hunters with finding hunting opportunities and improving their experiences. WDFW has created numerous mapping tools that identify public and private lands and their associated regulations. WDFW also provides the public with access to our Status and Trends Reports, Management Plans for species, and harvest statistics. These can all be found on the WDFW website [https://wdfw.wa.gov](https://wdfw.wa.gov).

Handheld GPS units can help identify your locations in remote places, but even smartphones can work in areas with and without cellular reception. Numerous resources are available through retailers to assist in mapping and comfort, but scouting, shooting proficiency, and learning wildlife habits will provide the best chances of improving your hunting success.

BE A WILDLIFE STEWARD - GET INVOLVED

WDFW and other agencies are always looking for good volunteer assistance in improving habitat for wildlife. Find time to help with wildlife-related projects and encourage kids to learn about nature and our wildlife heritage through our [WDFW Volunteer Program](https://wdfw.wa.gov/volunteer).
LITERATURE CITED


Desert Unit (GMU 290) photos
DESSERT UNIT (GMU 290) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Where should I start looking for a mature buck?
A: The highest density of mule deer typically occurs between Dodson Road and Potholes Reservoir, bounded on the north by Interstate 90 and on the south by Frenchman Hills Road. It is recommended to explore all access points around this area when getting to know the unit, then branch out from there.

Q: What is the area like?
A: The unit sits within the heart of the Bureau of Reclamation Columbia Basin Irrigation Project, which delivers water to over 600,000 acres of farmland in the area. As a result, many small ponds and streams have been incidentally created in this area. Hunters should be familiar with the orientation of Frenchman and Winchester wasteways, as they pose a significant barrier and can only be crossed by boat or with chest waders in places. There are many small ponds associated with these wasteways that are used by waterfowl hunters. The Desert Unit provides a rich source of natural vegetation, so although mule deer utilize agricultural fields such as alfalfa, the crops may not be the best place to seek out your deer. Bitterbrush, which is common within the Desert Unit, is an important mule deer food item during winter. Be familiar with the distribution of bitterbrush patches, particularly during the later seasons if snowfall has occurred. The soils are deep, sandy and have been wind-blown, resulting in long east-west running dunes which characterize the landscape (and provide great vantage points to scan for deer). These dunes and sandy soils can make walking difficult at times and will certainly make packing out an animal a lot of work.

Q: What size bucks am I likely to encounter?
A: The typical buck harvested from the Desert Unit is a 4x4 with a 24” spread. Many hunters report having seen larger bucks than the one they harvested.

Q: Are there any areas that I cannot hunt?
A: Hunters need to be aware of the locations and boundaries of Winchester Reserve, Frenchman Reserve, and North Potholes Reserve. Private lands within the Desert Unit are only open to hunting if the hunter first obtains landowner permission.

Q: Where should I stay?
A: The town of Moses Lake is the nearest location, with many amenities (motels, restaurants, etc.). Camping is allowed on WDFW lands, and most folks camp within the parking areas. Expect crowds during the opening weekend of duck and pheasant hunting and lots of hunting activity thereafter.

Q: Is there any other hunting going on in the area?
A: The entire unit is open to hunting. Expect to see waterfowl and upland bird hunters throughout the area. However, these hunters are typically associated with the wasteways and associated ponds. Once you get far enough into the shrub dominated uplands, you will find far fewer people.