

# 2020

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Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**



## DISTRICT 3 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Asotin, Garfield, Columbia, and Walla Walla counties

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## BE AWARE OF FIRE CONDITIONS

Wherever you choose to hunt, be sure to check on fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. In addition to potential wildfires, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) may be conducting prescribed burns and/or forest-thinning projects in your hunt area. For more information, see:

- [Wildfire status updates \(InciWeb – Incident Information System\)](#)
- [Northwest Interagency Coordination Center](#)
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#)

## BE AWARE OF ROAD CLOSURES

Due to severe flood damage along the Tucannon River Road, multiple roads are closed within the Umatilla National Forest (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/umatilla/alerts-notices/?cid=fseprd701752>). Check back to the USFS website for updates, but due to the washout of the bridge over the Little Tucannon River and lack of funding, the road beyond the bridge with access to Panjab, Meadow Creek, and the Upper Tucannon is expected to be closed through the fall hunting season.

## DISTRICT 3 GENERAL OVERVIEW

WDFW's District 3 is located in southeast Washington and consists of 13 game management units (GMU). GMUs in District 3 include 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), 157 (Watershed- **Closed entry except elk hunting by permit**), 162 (Dayton), 163 (Marengo), 166 (Tucannon), 169 (Wenaha), 172 (Mountain View), 175 (Lick Creek), 178 (Peola), 181 (Couse), and 186 (Grande Ronde). Administratively, District 3 includes Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin counties, and is one of three management districts (1, 2, and 3) comprising WDFW's Region 1. The northern part of District 3 (north of Highway 12) includes the southeastern portion of the Palouse Prairie ecoregion, while the southern part of the district is in the Blue Mountains ecoregion.



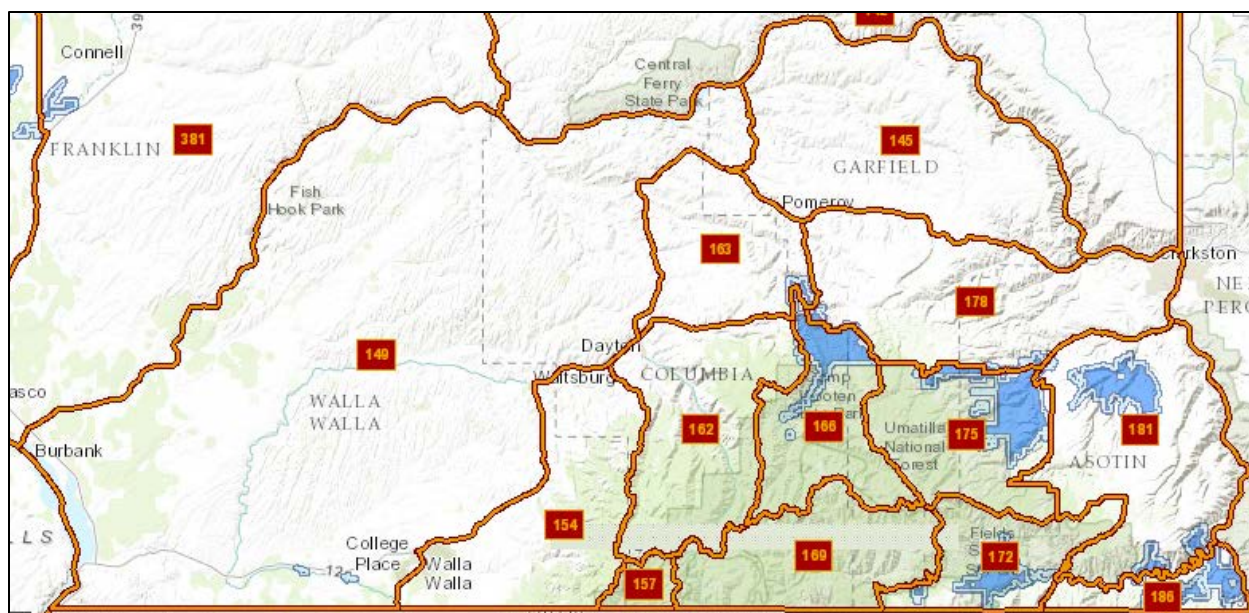


Figure 1. GMU map (from GoHunt) depicting District 3 GMU boundaries, west and south of the Snake River, east of the Columbia River, and north of the Oregon border. Green areas are U.S. Forest Service land and blue areas are WDFW Wildlife Areas.

The landscape in District 3 is dominated by agricultural land in the prairie and foothill regions, with interspersed grassland areas and brushy draws. In the mountains, the most common habitat is characterized by second-growth forests consisting primarily of Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, grand fir, and subalpine fir. The Blue Mountains have been characterized as a high plateau dissected by steep draws and canyons carved by numerous creeks and rivers. The Tucannon and Touchet rivers flow north out of the mountains, while major tributaries of the Wenaha and Grande Ronde Rivers generally flow south. Numerous creeks drain the western edge of the foothills, including Mill Creek, with its drainage located in the Walla Walla Watershed. Asotin Creek is a major watershed on the eastern side of the Blue Mountains that flows east into the Snake River.



Image 1. Blue Creek in the western foothills of the Blue Mountains.

District 3 is best known for its elk hunting opportunities in the Blue Mountains and mule deer hunting opportunities in grassland/agricultural GMUs. However, hunting opportunities also exist for other game species, including white-tailed deer, black bear, chukar, turkey, and pheasant. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest and harvest-per-unit effort (HPUE) for most game species in District 3 during the 2019 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2018 season and the five-year average. **Small game and waterfowl harvest updates were not available at the time of writing, therefore values shown are for 2017 and 2018 seasons.** For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Species	Harvest					HPUE				
	5-yr avg.	2018	2019	% change (5yr)	% change (2018)	5-yr avg.	2018	2019	% change (5yr)	% change (2018)
Elk (General)	137	82	89	-46%	2%	126	147	131	4%	-11%
Elk (Bull Permit)	102	90	81	-21%	-10%	55%	54%	60%	(Permit success)	
Deer	2,564	2,422	2,150	-16%	-11%	14.0	14.8	14.6	4%	-2%
Bear	82	104	92	13%	-12%	107	76	94	-12%	23%
Cougar	20	30	12	-40%	-60%	Not estimated			**	**
Wild Turkey	821	1,053	1,048	28%	0%	0.10	0.10	0.10	-3%	-5%
Canada Goose	3,475	3,462	3,860	11%	11%	1.21	1.33	1.22	1%	-8%
Chukar Partridge	1,536	1,297	3,045	98%	135%	1.13	0.42	1.31	24%	213%
Cottontail Rabbit	420	451	1,101	162%	144%	0.53	0.49	1.92	263%	296%
Duck	27,422	27,423	23,412	-15%	-15%	2.81	2.80	2.65	-6%	-5%
Forest Grouse	1,738	2,143	1,735	0%	-19%	0.40	0.41	0.36	-10%	-11%
Gray Partridge	747	721	1,052	41%	46%	0.48	0.37	0.62	29%	66%
Mourning Dove	2,940	4,156	2,480	-16%	-40%	3.21	3.66	3.65	14%	0%
Pheasant	8,213	9,177	8,408	2%	-8%	0.69	0.73	0.73	6%	0%
Quail	5,630	3,537	3,587	-36%	1%	1.06	0.64	0.62	-42%	-4%
Snowshoe Hare	63	11	20	-68%	82%	0.48	0.06	0.05	-89%	-15%

Table 1. General season harvest and HPUE estimates for most game species found in District 3 during the 2018 and 2019 hunting seasons. Also included are the five-year averages and a comparison of 5-year estimates and 2018 to 2019 estimates. HPUE is expressed as #hunter days/harvest for elk, deer, and bear (lower is better), and as #harvested/hunter day for all other species (higher is better).

## ELK

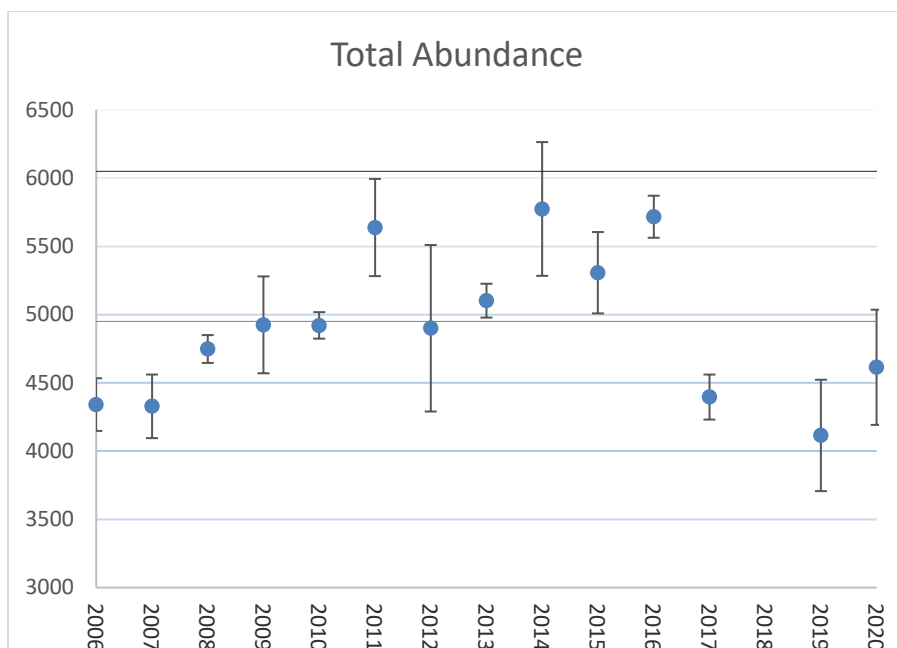
### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

In Washington, elk are managed at the herd level, while harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. Population objectives are set at the herd level, and survey data is summarized at that level as well. District 3 is comprised of the single Blue Mountains elk herd (GMUs 145, 149, 154, 157, 162, 163, 166, 169, 172, 175, 178, 181, and 186).



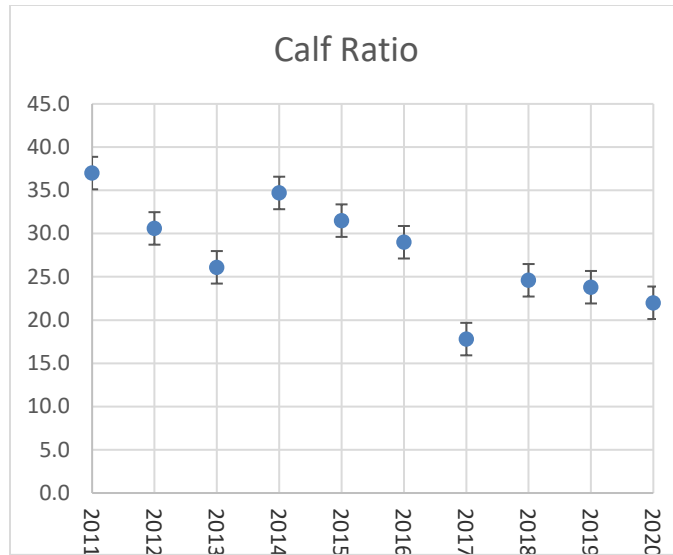
Only the GMUs within the forested portion of District 3 are managed for elk population stability or growth (GMUs 154, 157, 162, 166, 169, 172, 175, and 186). GMUs 145, 149, 163, 178, and most of 181 are managed to limit elk numbers, although some recreational opportunity is provided as determined through surveys and damage complaints. In all GMUs, minimizing elk depredation to agricultural crops on private agricultural lands is a priority. An additional management objective is to maintain a minimum of 22 bulls: 100 cows in the post-season population, with a range of 22 – 28 bulls:100 cows as the management target.

Biologists in District 3 conduct an annual helicopter survey within the core elk areas to estimate the post-winter population size. In the spring of 2020, survey efforts resulted in a population estimate of 4,614 (90% Confidence Interval of +/- 422) elk. Surveys are conducted along the state line of Oregon (and within Oregon), resulting in approximately 500-600 elk being classified that likely are not available for harvest in Washington during the fall. The average five-year population estimate prior to 2020 was 5,062 elk, which is 9 percent higher than the 2020 estimate. The 2020 surveys documented a calf ratio of 22.0 calves per 100 cows and a bull ratio of 22.1 bulls per 100 cows.



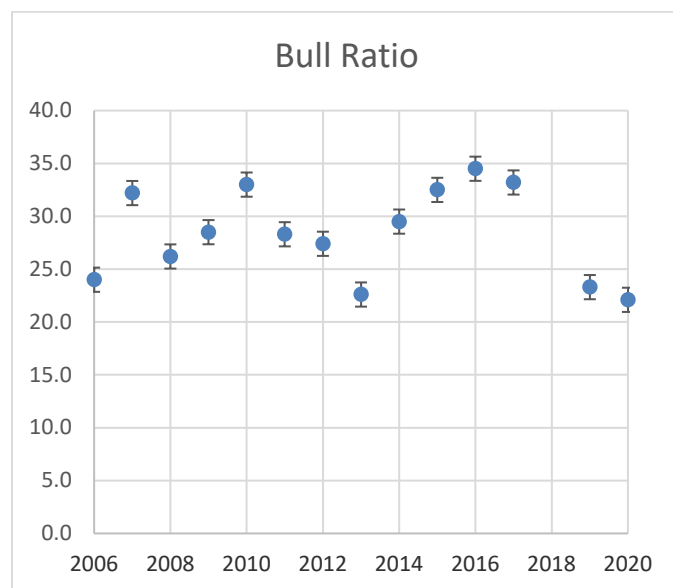
Abundance estimates for the Blue Mountains elk population. Vertical bars represent 90% confidence intervals.

Calf ratios in 2020 declined from 2019 and are lower than the 5-year average of 27.4. The low calf recruitment is attributed to the lingering effects of the severe winters of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, predation on calves, and other factors. Biologists were expecting higher recruitment numbers in 2020 due to mild summer conditions in 2019 and a normal winter in 2019/2020. The effects of climate on elk productivity are difficult to quantify in years following a severe winter or summer drought. Poor body condition can result in calves with low birth weight and lower survival, or effects can carry-over into the breeding season (summer drought) decreasing pregnancy rates and resulting in fewer pregnancies, all of which may have influenced depressed cow/calf ratios over the past few seasons.



Calf ratios for the Blue Mountains elk herd, generated from helicopter surveys conducted in March. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals in the estimate.

Bull ratios and total bull numbers remained lower than the 5-year average (30.6 bulls per 100 cows), which will be reflected in lower permit opportunity in 2020. The recent decline in the number of elk in the Blue Mountains is likely a result of multiple factors; such as the hard winters observed in 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, summer droughts, and similar levels of predation over the past 5 to 10 years which cumulatively reduced survival of adults and negatively impacted recruitment. The low number of calves being recruited into the population in 2020 will result in a low number of yearling bulls (spikes) available for harvest this fall. This fall will be another below-average year for yearling bull harvest.



Estimated bull ratio (bulls per 100 cows) from helicopter-based surveys. Vertical lines represent 90% confidence intervals.

For more detailed information related to the status of Washington's elk herds, hunters should read through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#), which is available for download on the department's website.

## **WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?**

Most general season hunters in the Blue Mountains have been hunting here for many years, with the exception of branched-antlered-bull tag holders and archery hunters in GMU 175. New hunters to this area will have to consider several options, such as weapon type, private land access versus public land, the difficulty of hunt desired (wilderness versus landscapes with roads), and, as archery hunters, whether the availability of antlerless opportunity is important.

Throughout District 3, the harvest of branched-bulls is regulated through the permit system. All GMUs in District 3 are managed for quality hunting, except GMUs 145, 186, and some hunts in 149. The drawing of these tags can be difficult, and many hunters invest years before successfully obtaining a permit. Once a permit is obtained, district biologists are available to provide information on where to hunt within a GMU.

## **A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH GMU**

### **GMU 145**

This is a private land unit managed for zero elk. Very few elk reside in this unit. Their movements are unpredictable and make them difficult to locate, and knowledge of their locations is often not readily available.

### **GMU 149**

This large GMU is predominantly private land managed to minimize elk numbers because of conflicts with agricultural activities. A relatively large number of bulls inhabit the southwest corner of the GMU and cross back and forth between Oregon and Washington. Most harvest in recent years has occurred in the area of the Boise Cascade poplar tree farm. The poplar tree farm has been converted to row crops and access to this area for elk hunting has changed considerably in the last 2 years. Another herd of elk exists in the northern portion of the unit on the breaks of the Snake River. This is a very difficult herd to hunt without access to numerous private lands, as the elk are highly mobile in this area and can be difficult to locate.

### **GMU 154**

This GMU is 99 percent private land but does include numerous landowners in the WDFW access program. The elk are heavily hunted in this GMU due to conflicts with agricultural activities. Access has historically been available to branched-bull tag holders and general season hunters.

### **GMU 157**

This GMU is 99 percent public land but closed to the public to any entry other than branched-bull permit holders. The Mill Creek Watershed is the source of drinking water for the City of Walla Walla, and access is highly regulated. Successful permit applicants will be contacted by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) with an information packet containing rules for hunting the

watershed. This unit is very steep and rugged, contains few maintained trails, and is physically challenging to hunt. No scouting or overnight camping inside the watershed boundaries is permitted. Only the perimeter roads and trails can be accessed for scouting.

### **GMU 162**

The Dayton GMU is a mix of private and public lands and has historically supported about 1,000 elk. Currently, the number of elk in the Dayton GMU is about 60% percent below the historic numbers. This unit has the highest density of general season hunters in District 3. Access to the northern portion of the GMU can be difficult, as it is predominantly private. The southern portion of the unit is predominantly USFS and lands owned by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). Both of these lands are open to the public, with motorized vehicle restrictions throughout.

### **GMU 163**

This GMU is not managed for elk and only occasionally supports enough elk to hunt. The GMU is predominantly private land.

### **GMU 166**

This GMU has recently had the highest success rate for general season hunters but also has one of the higher densities of hunters. The unit is mostly USFS and WDFW-owned lands. A portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness extends into this GMU and offers backcountry hunting opportunities.

### **GMU 169**

Most of this GMU is located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. Numerous road access points occur along the edge of this GMU, but a majority of the unit requires backpacking or horse packing to access. This can be a physically challenging unit to hunt. Elk densities have remained low in this unit for the past 30 years and do not show indications of improving. However, a large wildfire burned in this unit in 2015, which is expected to have a positive effect on elk numbers and habitat quality for years to come.

### **GMU 172**

Elk numbers have declined slightly in the past couple of years in this GMU with low recruitment observed in the spring of 2020. Calf ratios of 12:100 were observed on the Oregon elk feedlot on Bartlett Bench. Calf ratios throughout the rest of the unit were better. Approximately 60 percent of this GMU is private and access can be challenging. The USFS lands within this GMU are physically challenging to hunt. WDFW has been acquiring land within this GMU recently (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area), but deer and elk hunting there is managed by permit only access.

### **GMU 175**

This GMU is predominantly public land owned by WDFW, USFS, and Washington DNR. Access is good throughout the unit. One major change as the result of declining elk numbers observed in this unit is the restriction of archery hunters to spike-only, with no antlerless opportunity available for any weapon type without an antlerless permit.



### **GMU 178**

This private land unit is managed to minimize elk numbers due to conflict with agricultural activities. Access can be challenging to obtain. Elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and do not offer a reliable recreational opportunity during the general season without knowledge of landowners and herd behavior.

### **GMU 181**

This private land unit is managed to minimize elk numbers due to conflict with agricultural activities. Access can be challenging to obtain. Elk numbers are highly variable in the unit and do not offer a reliable recreational opportunity during the general season without knowledge of landowners and herd behavior.

### **GMU 186**

This unit is split equally between private and public lands, with very limited private land access available. This GMU is predominantly winter range for elk in Oregon, although approximately 100 elk reside in the unit throughout the year. The individual elk may reside on private land throughout the season where access is not available, although some years have proven highly successful for the few hunters that know the unit.

### **Summary of GMU Harvest Attributes**

The information provided in Table 2 provides a quick and general assessment of how District 3 GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. The values presented are from the 2017 harvest reports. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of elk harvested and hunters per square mile.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 10 for elk harvested/mi<sup>2</sup> (bulls only for modern firearm and cows included with bulls for archery), hunters/mi<sup>2</sup>, and hunter success rates. The three ranking values were then summed to produce a final rank sum, with Public Access ranking excluded. The modern firearm comparisons are the most straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same in each GMU.

MODERN FIREARM											
GMU	Size (mi²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	2	0.00	9	37	0.03	1	5.4%	4	3	14
154	216	18	0.08	6	222	1.03	6	8.1%	6	3	18
162	210	4	0.02	4	459	2.19	10	0.9%	8	2	22
166	131	1	0.01	4	232	1.77	8	0.4%	6	1	18
169	161	7	0.04	7	151	0.94	5	4.6%	8	1	20
172	108	11	0.10	1	214	1.98	7	5.1%	2	2	10
175	158	6	0.04	3	397	2.51	9	1.5%	3	1	15
178	275	2	0.01	9	80	0.29	3	2.5%	10	3	22
181	262	1	0.00	7	93	0.35	2	1.1%	5	3	14
186	53	8	0.15	1	55	1.04	4	14.5%	1	2	6
ARCHERY											
GMU	Size (mi²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	2	0	8	12	0.01	2	16.7%	6	3	16
154	216	5	0.03	3	85	0.63	8	5.9%	3	3	14
162	210	2	0.02	4	84	0.78	9	2.4%	2	2	15
166	131	0	0	8	28	0.37	6	0.0%	6	1	20
169	161	0	0.01	5	22	0.25	5	0.0%	6	1	16
172	108	2	0.06	2	39	0.43	7	5.1%	1	2	10
175	158	1	0.15	1	75	1.68	10	1.3%	6	1	17
178	275	0	0.01	5	24	0.18	4	0.0%	6	3	15
181	262	2	0	8	26	0.08	3	7.7%	6	3	17
186	53	0	0	8	3	0	1	0.0%	6	2	15
MUZZLELOADER											
GMU	Size (mi²)	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	
		Total	Harvest per mi²	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi²	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	Rank Sum
149	1409	0	0	5	10	0.01	1	0.0%	7	3	13
154	216	0	0.0	5	11	0.05	3	0.0%	7	3	15
162	210	3	0.0	2	29	0.14	5	10.3%	1	2	8
166	131	2	0.0	5	29	0.22	6	6.9%	7	1	18
172	108	1	0.0	1	54	0.50	8	1.9%	2	2	11
175	158	5	0.0	3	67	0.42	7	7.5%	3	1	13
178	275	0	0	5	4	0.01	4	0.0%	7	3	16
181	262	0	0	5	23	0.09	1	0.0%	7	3	13

Table 2. Rank sum analysis that provides a quick and general comparison of how total harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success rates compare among GMUs during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons. GMUs are generally limited to spike bull harvest, but some may have an antlerless opportunity as well (see hunting regulations for specific restrictions). Data presented are based on 2019 harvest reports.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2020 SEASON**

It has been uncommon for elk populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where severe winter weather conditions seldom occur. Unfortunately, the winters of 2016/2017 and 2018/2019 were uncommonly severe, resulting in a significant decline in elk numbers. Calf recruitment since 2016 has remained below average, consequently, populations available for harvest are expected to remain lower than years prior to the 16/17 winter. The 2020 general season is expected to be similar to the average during the past 4 years. Harvest since 2016 has been the lowest in the past 20 years. Hunter numbers also typically do not change substantially from one year to the next, but a slow decline has been observed with the declining population. The weather during hunting season does change from year to year, which will influence success rates.

## **HOW TO FIND ELK**

When hunting elk in District 3, hunters need to do their homework and spend plenty of time scouting before the season opener because it is often difficult to predict where the elk are going to be, especially after hunting pressure increases. The majority of hunters spend most of their time focusing on open ridge tops where they can glass animals from a considerable distance. During the general season, past research on bulls has indicated that a majority of the elk will move to north aspect, mid-slope timbered hillsides within one day of the opener. With only nine days to hunt the general season, there is a lot of pressure in the first few days. Pressure declines as the season progresses and may allow the elk to return to normal behaviors if they are not close to major roads.

Later in the season, it is a good idea to consult a topographic map and find “benches” located in steep terrain and thick cover because elk often use these areas to bed down during the day. Lastly, on public land, hunters should not let a road closed to motorized vehicles keep them from walking into an area to search for elk. More often than not, these areas hold elk that have not received as much hunting pressure.

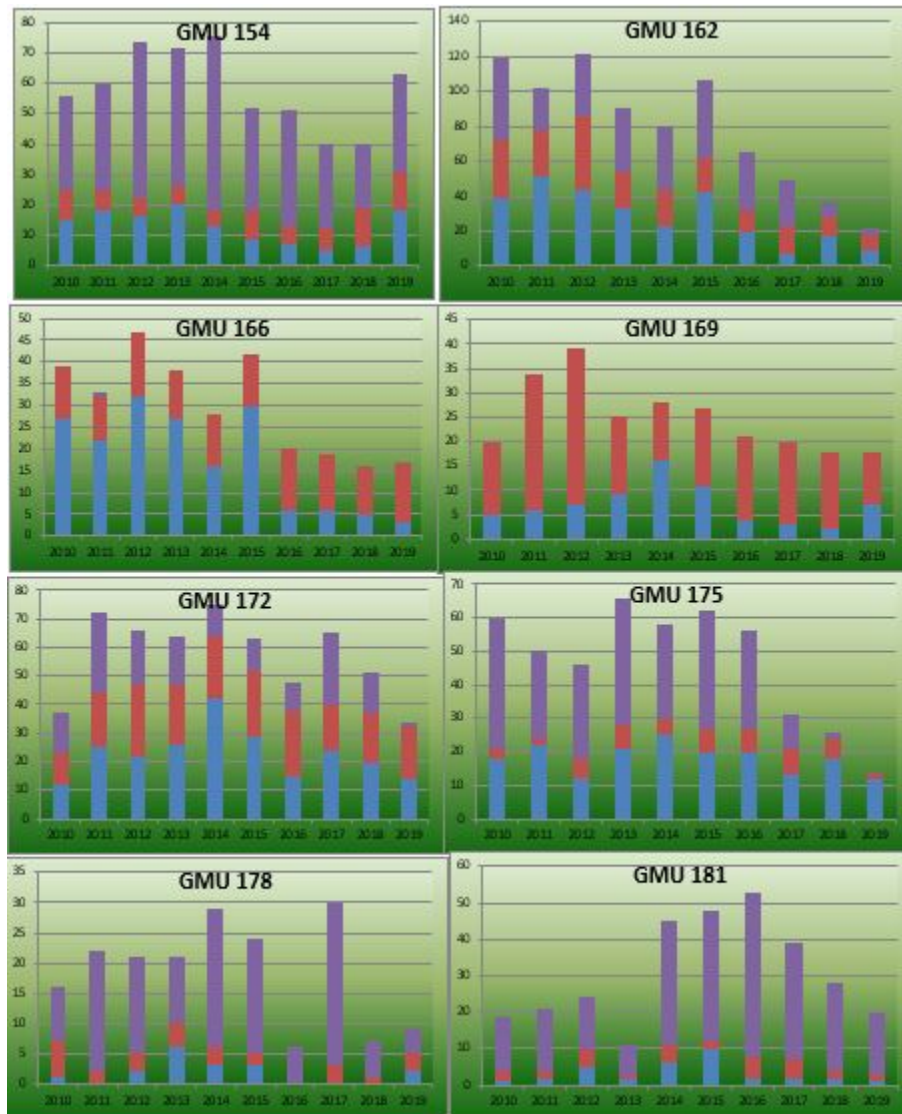


Figure 2. Trends in total number of yearling bulls (blue), branched bulls (red), and antlerless (purple) elk harvested during general and permit seasons combined, 2010-2019. Harvest does not include tribal harvest.

## ELK AREAS

There are nine elk areas in District 3: Elk Area 1008 and 1009 (Wenaha Wilderness West and East), Elk Area 1010 (Dayton private lands), Elk Area 1013 (Mountain View Private), Elk Area 1016 (GMU 162 excluding the Rainwater WLA), Elk Area 1040 (4-0 Wildlife Area), Elk Area 1075 (Lick Creek Private Lands), and Elk Area 1081 (GMU 181 + extreme west side of GMU 172).

The intent of Elk Areas 1008 and 1009 was to distribute the hunting pressure within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. In the past, most permit hunters focused in the western corner of the unit where the road density was highest. By spreading out the hunting pressure, additional hunting opportunity was created.



Elk Area 1010 is used to focus antlerless and branched-bull elk hunting on private land in the Dayton Unit. In the past, branched bull tag holders focused on public lands where access was guaranteed, but also increased pressure on that segment of the population. This elk area is also used to focus antlerless harvest on the private lands where depredation complaints have historically been high but limits antlerless harvest on public lands where higher elk densities are desired. For the 2020 hunting season, no antlerless opportunity exists in any portion of the Dayton GMU.

Elk Areas 1013 and 1040 are used to manage hunters within GMU 172. Elk Area 1013 limits antlerless hunting to private lands where damage can occur on agricultural areas while maximizing elk numbers and recruitment on public lands. Elk Area 1040 is the 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area, which is managed for quality hunting opportunity as part of the sale agreement from the previous landowner. All deer and elk hunting on this wildlife area will be managed for quality opportunity, whereas all other species may be hunted by general seasons as listed in the pamphlet.

Elk Area 1075 has recently been created to try to use hunters to alter the behavior of elk that leave the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area for private agricultural grounds during early winter. To minimize crop damage, hunters are being used to move elk off of private lands in the Lick Creek GMU. The same is true for Elk Area 1081.

## **NOTABLE ISSUES AND HUNTING CHANGES**

1. Elk Area 1040 (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area) is closed to general season deer and elk hunting. Elk hunting will only be allowed through the permit system on these lands.
2. Antlerless elk opportunity has decreased in GMU 181 due to declining herd size and depredation complaints. Boundary changes were made to hunts in this area in 2018 to include Elk Area 1075 and 1082 to continue refining our efforts to address problematic elk distributions. Elk in this unit primarily inhabit private lands during hunting seasons and acquiring access prior to applying for permits is highly recommended.
3. During the summer of 2015, a large wildfire burned through a large portion of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, extending slightly into GMU 172 on Grouse Flats. A large portion of the fire that occurred in Washington burned later into September, creating desirable habitat conditions for elk with low intensity burning.
4. Severe winters occurred during 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, resulting in high mortality rates of elk. Antlerless opportunity throughout the Blue Mountains has been severely reduced on public lands as a result. Calf recruitment has yet to rebound and harvest will remain below average.

## DEER

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Both mule deer and white-tailed deer occur throughout District 3. Deer hunting opportunities in District 3 vary from marginal to quite good, depending on the GMU. The GMUs with the highest success (GMUs 145, 178, 181, and 186) also have the highest amount of private land, and access can be limited. GMUs where access to public land is highest (GMUs 166, 169, and 175) have the lowest success, probably due to a combination of high hunter numbers, a high percentage of legal bucks harvested, and lower quality deer habitat. While overall harvest is one indicator of GMU hunting quality, harvest/unit effort (HPUE) and harvest/unit area (HPUA) equalize GMUs based on hunter numbers, number of days hunting, and GMU size. However, both HPUE and HPUA can be misleading, as HPUE is complicated by private land access limitations and HPUA is complicated by the amount of habitat in the GMU that supports deer. In general, HPUE seems to be a better indicator of hunting success. Hunter success and HPUE of either white-tailed or mule deer in District 3 is highest in GMUs 145 (Mayview), 178 (Peola), 181 (Couse), and 186 (Grande Ronde) while total general season harvest is highest in GMUs 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), and 162 (Dayton).

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 3. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and HPUE (harvest/hunter day) are used to monitor population status. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and are conducting annual road surveys to determine herd composition and periodic aerial sightability surveys to monitor deer populations that are independent of harvest data, in addition to exploring the use of integrated population models.

All available harvest data indicates deer populations are variable within a relatively narrow range in District 3. Although hunter numbers were down in 2019, overall success (25%) was similar to last year (26%) and not far below the 5-year average (27%). For more detailed information related to the status of mule deer and white-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read the

most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#), which is available for download on the department's website.

## WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

Probably the most frequent question from hunters is, "What GMU should I hunt?" This is not always easy to answer because it depends on the hunting method and the type of hunting experience desired. Some hunters are looking for a quality opportunity to harvest a mature buck, while others just want to harvest any legal deer, and still, others prefer to hunt an area with few other hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high deer densities, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario does not exist in any GMU that is open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 3. Instead, because of general season opportunities, the GMUs with the highest deer densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of deer. Some hunters prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if that means there are also very few hunters and provide a backcountry experience.

The information provided in Table 3 provides a quick and general assessment of how GMUs compare with regard to harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. The values presented are the five-year averages for each statistic. Total harvest and hunter numbers were further summarized by the number of deer harvested per hunter and the number of hunters per square mile. This approach was taken because comparing total harvest or hunter numbers is not always a fair comparison since GMUs vary in size. For example, the average number of deer harvested over the past five years during the modern firearm general season in GMUs 149 (Prescott) and 154 (Blue Creek) has been 439 and 265 deer, respectively. Just looking at total harvest suggests deer densities are much higher in GMU 149 than 154. However, when harvest is expressed as deer harvested/mi<sup>2</sup>, the result is an estimate of 0.31 in GMU 149 and 1.23 in GMU 154, which suggests deer densities are probably much higher in GMU 154 than they are in GMU 149. This is further complicated by the amount of actual deer habitat in each GMU. For example, GMU 149 is the largest but is comprised primarily of tilled croplands, and deer are concentrated in CRP fields and along the breaks of the Snake River, so densities in a portion of the GMU are probably higher than the harvest/mi<sup>2</sup> indicates.

Each GMU was ranked from one to 12 (except for ties) for deer harvested/mi<sup>2</sup>, hunters/mi<sup>2</sup>, hunter success rates, and public land access. The ranking values were then summed (public land access excluded) to produce a final rank sum. GMUs are listed by GMU number, not by rank. Comparisons are straightforward because bag limits and seasons are the same for most GMUs. Differences that should be considered include:

- 1 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in WDFW Access programs, such as Feel Free to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, Hunt by Registration, or Hunt by Reservation, and may offer similar access to some GMUs with public land. See the Access section of this document for private land acreage available for public hunting in each GMU.

- 2 Some private land GMUs have extensive acreage in tilled croplands, and actual suitable hunting area may be much smaller, leading to higher than expected hunter densities.

MODERN FIREARM											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Score	
145	355	223	0.63	5	597	1.68	4	37%	2	3	11(2)
149	1409	439	0.31	10	1486	1.05	1	30%	5	3	16(4)
154	216	265	1.23	2	980	4.54	11	27%	6	3	19(6)
162	210	326	1.55	1	1435	6.83	12	23%	7	2	20(7)
163	149	82	0.55	7	373	2.51	9	22%	8	3	24(9)
166	131	51	0.39	8	481	3.67	10	11%	11	1	29(11)
169	161	22	0.14	12	184	1.15	2	12%	10	1	24(10)
172	108	42	0.39	8	192	1.78	5	22%	8	2	21(8)
175	158	32	0.20	11	333	2.11	7	10%	12	1	30(12)
178	275	216	0.79	3	538	1.96	6	40%	1	3	10(1)
181	262	147	0.56	6	394	1.50	3	37%	2	3	11(2)
186	53	37	0.70	4	120	2.27	8	31%	4	2	16(4)



ARCHERY											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	<u>Harvest</u>			<u>Hunter Density</u>			<u>Hunter Success</u>		<u>Public Access</u>	Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	
<b>145</b>	355	13	0.04	8	46	0.13	3	28%	5	<b>3</b>	<b>16(4)</b>
149	1409	49	0.03	9	188	0.13	3	26%	6	<b>3</b>	<b>18(6)</b>
154	216	64	0.30	1	225	1.04	11	30%	4	<b>3</b>	<b>16(4)</b>
162	210	41	0.20	2	209	0.99	10	19%	8	<b>2</b>	<b>20(8)</b>
<b>163</b>	149	21	0.14	3	163	1.09	12	13%	10	<b>3</b>	<b>25(11)</b>
166	131	13	0.10	5	85	0.65	9	15%	9	<b>1</b>	<b>23(9)</b>
169	161	1	0.01	12	14	0.09	1	7%	11	<b>1</b>	<b>24(10)</b>
172	108	10	0.09	6	29	0.27	6	35%	2	<b>2</b>	<b>14(2)</b>
175	158	4	0.03	9	81	0.52	8	5%	12	<b>1</b>	<b>29(12)</b>
<b>178</b>	275	36	0.13	4	112	0.41	7	32%	3	<b>3</b>	<b>14(2)</b>
181	262	8	0.03	9	34	0.13	3	24%	7	<b>3</b>	<b>19(7)</b>
186	53	5	0.09	6	7	0.12	2	76%	1	<b>2</b>	<b>9(1)</b>

MUZZLELOADER											
GMU	Size (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Harvest			Hunter Density			Hunter Success		Public Access	Rank Sum
		Total	Harvest per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Hunters	Hunters per mi <sup>2</sup>	Rank	Success	Rank	Rank	
145	355	17	0.05	4	41	0.12	1	41%	1	3	6(1)
149	1409	61	0.04	5	203	0.14	2	30%	5	3	12(5)
154	216	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
162	210	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
163	149	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
166	131	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
169	161	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>172</b>	108	24	0.22	1	59	0.55	5	41%	1	2	7(2)
175	158	6	0.04	5	50	0.32	4	12%	6	1	15(6)
178	275	N/A	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>181</b>	262	54	0.21	2	143	0.55	5	38%	3	3	10(3)
186	53	5	0.09	3	13	0.25	3	37%	4	2	10(3)

Table 3. Rank sum analysis that provides a quick and general comparison of how total general harvest, hunter numbers, hunter success rates, and access to public land compare among GMUs during general modern, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons. GMUs in **bold type** are open during early and late seasons for the respective weapon type. Data presented are based on a five-year average (2015-2019).

## WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2020 SEASON

Wildfires are always a possibility that may affect hunter access to some hunting areas. Hunters should check the status of wildfires and access restrictions [online](#). In addition, USFS and WDFW have been conducting prescribed burns and forest thinning projects to reduce wildfire risk. Check with the local USFS offices and WDFW district offices for current status on forest treatment projects.

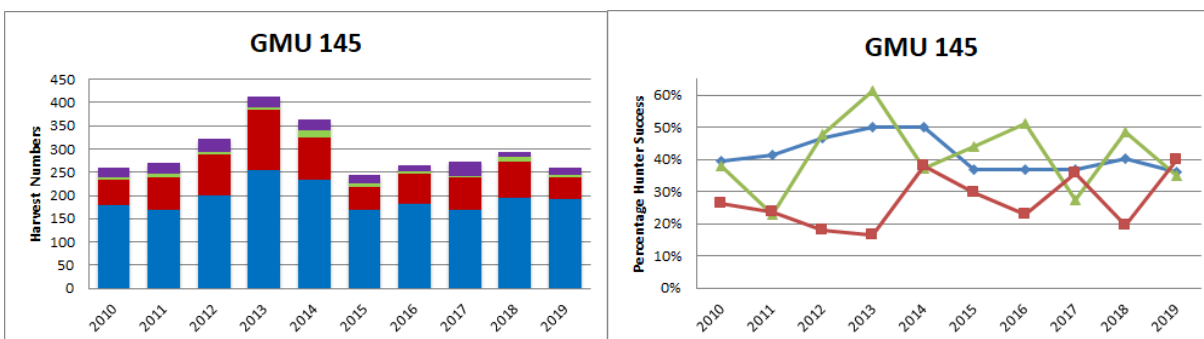
It is typically uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 3 where deer move out of the mountains in winter and weather conditions are generally mild and do not result in large winter die-offs. However, we had very late and heavy snow cover across the district during the winter of 2018/2019, with snow cover persisting well into the usual spring green-up period. Although the deer went through January in presumably good condition, we observed significant winter-kill across the district, with many ranchers along the Snake and Grande Ronde rivers reporting emaciated and dying deer. A

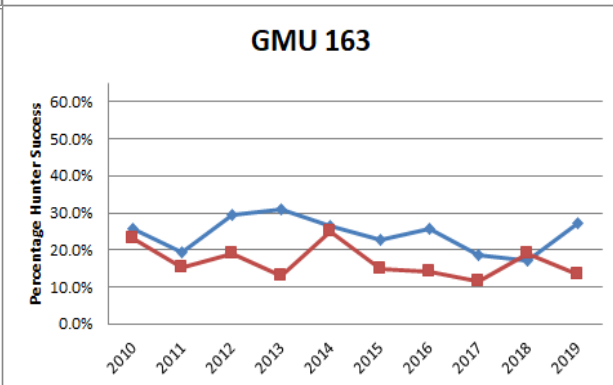
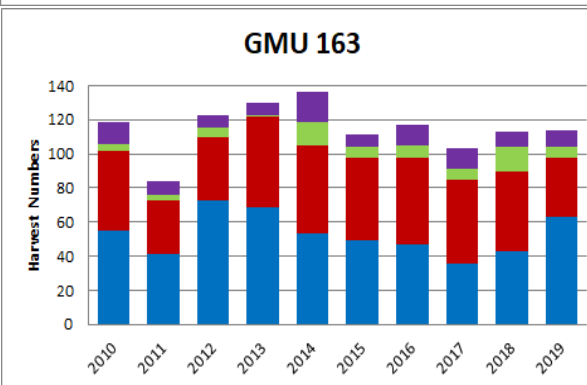
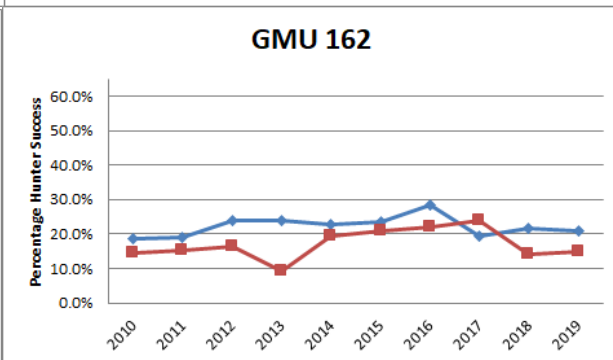
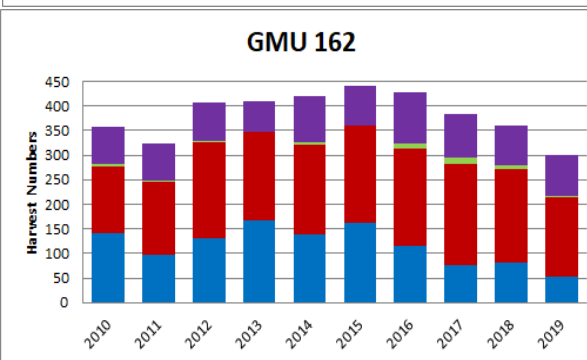
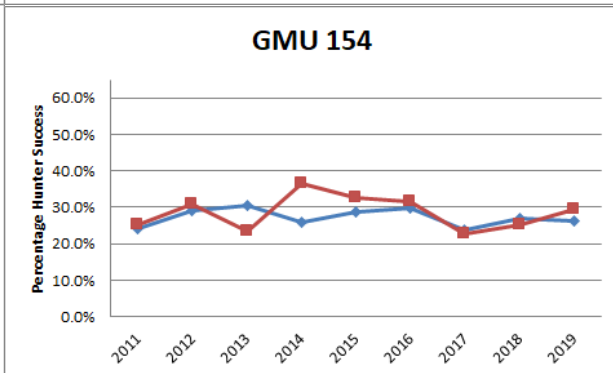
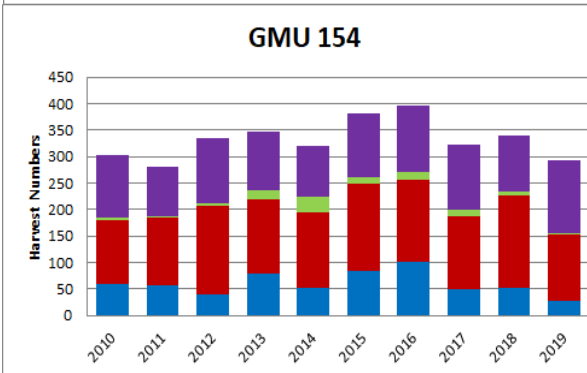
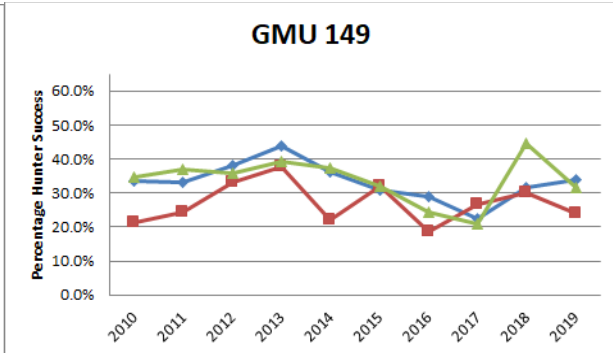
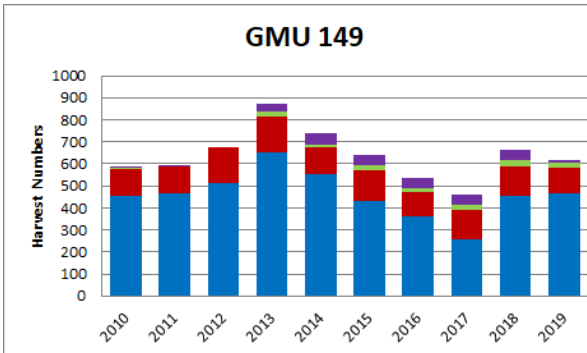
substantial number of the dead deer investigated were yearlings and, with deer herds still recovering from the harsh winter in 2016/2017, the combined effects were seen in the low 2019 harvest and are expected to carry-over into the 2020 hunting season. With an average to mild winter over 2019-2020 and the lag time for bucks to become legal 3-points, we wouldn't expect white-tailed deer harvest to significantly improve until the 2021 season, and mule deer harvest by 2022.

Periodic die-offs have occurred due to epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) and bluetongue, both viral conditions transmitted by a biting midge, which mainly affect white-tailed deer. While WDFW only received a few reports of deer dying during the summer, particularly in portions of GMU 149 and 154, biologists in Oregon reported significant deer die-offs adjacent to WA, with survey declines of up to 70%. We may see some effects of this large die-off in GMUs that border OR. While disease outbreaks are monitored annually, there is nothing feasible to be done to prevent outbreaks of hemorrhagic diseases.

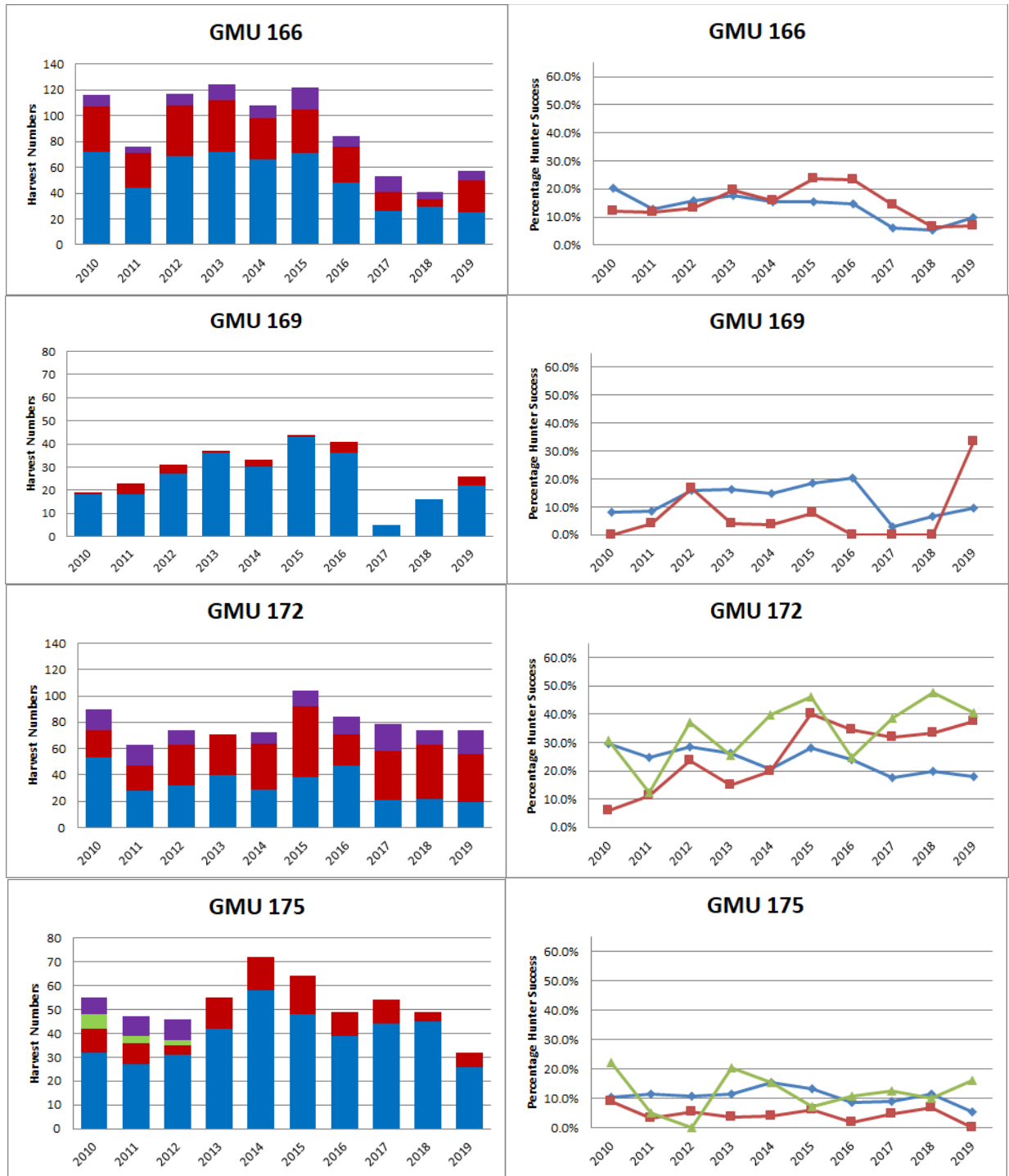
Mule deer populations have experienced long-term declines across much of the west with no definitive cause identified. Habitat loss is suspected to be one possible cause, particularly the loss of winter range. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has probably helped maintain winter range in District 3, and mule deer populations outside of the mountains appear to be stable to increasing. However, decreases in available CRP contracts over the last few years have resulted in more land going into agricultural production and will likely have long-term negative impacts on mule deer populations in the district.

One reference WDFW currently has for future potential harvest during general seasons are recent trends in hunter harvest success and harvest/unit effort. Figure 3 provides trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and is intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 3 and what they can expect to encounter with regard to hunter success and deer numbers.









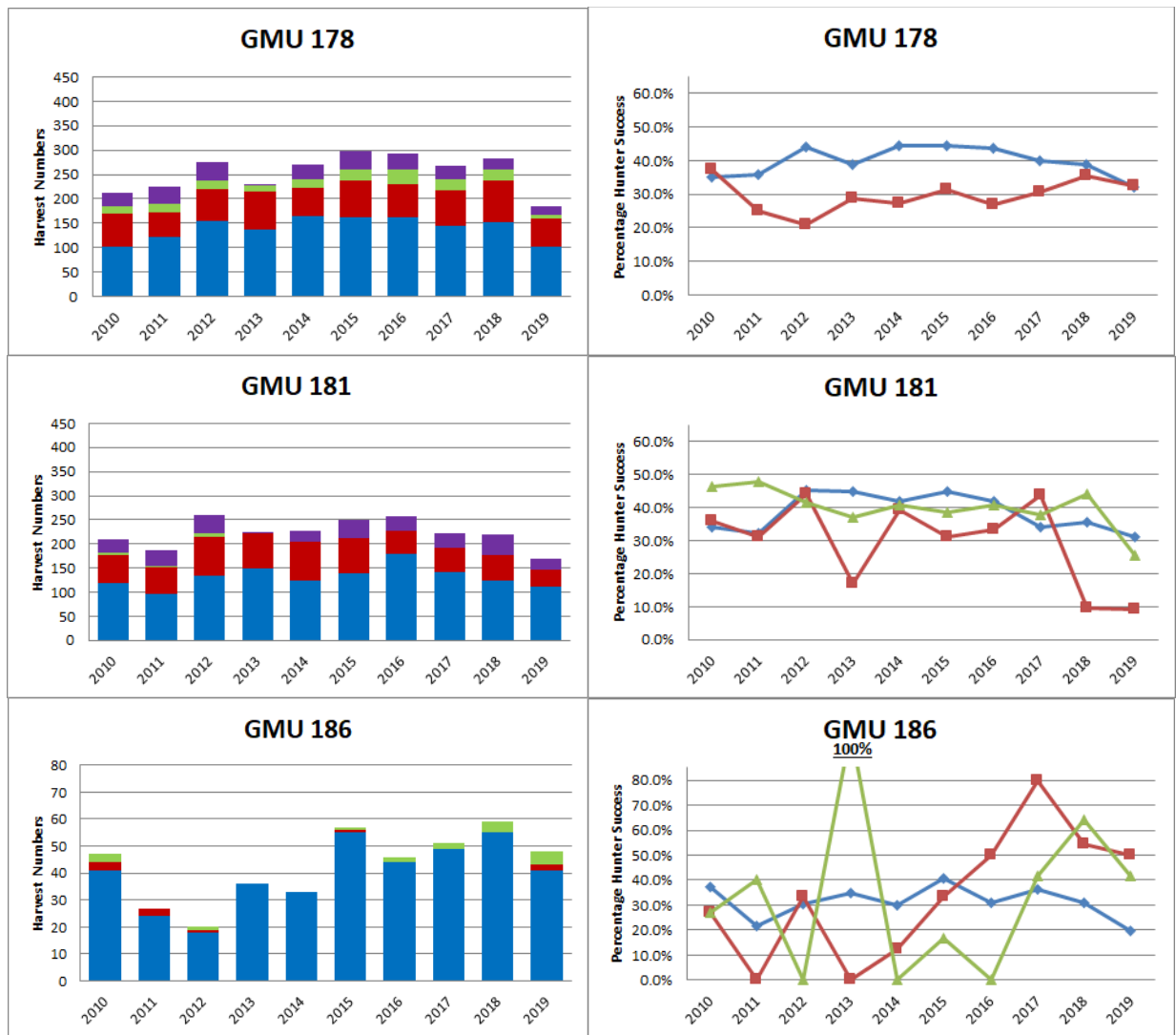


Figure 3. **Left column:** Ten-year trends in total numbers of mule deer bucks (blue) and antlerless deer (green), and white-tailed bucks (red) and antlerless deer (purple) during all general seasons combined from 2010-2019. Totals do not include permit harvest (**note the different scales**, from maximums of 80, 140, 450, and 1,000). **Right column:** Ten-year trends in percentage harvest success for each GMU in District 3 for modern firearm (**blue diamonds**), archery (**red squares**), and muzzleloader (**green triangles**) general season hunters for 2010-2019.

## DEER AREAS

There are five deer areas in District 3 that were created for several purposes. Deer Area 1010 is located within the private land area of GMU 162 and was created to help manage deer damage while limiting antlerless harvest on public land in the GMU. Deer Areas 1008 and 1009 divide GMU 169 and help to manage deer by distributing harvest opportunity across the wilderness area. Deer Area 1021 is in and around the town of Clarkston in GMU 178 and is used to help manage deer in and around the urban area. Deer Area 1040 is located in GMU 172 and consists of the newly purchased 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area. Deer and elk hunting in this area is by permit

only, which helps maintain some quality opportunity in the GMU and also helps keep deer and elk on the wildlife area to limit crop damage on private lands.

### NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. GMU 166 General Season Archery limited to 3 pt. min. white-tailed and mule deer, no antlerless harvest allowed.
2. Deer Area 1040 (4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area) is closed to general season deer and elk hunting. Deer and elk hunting is only allowed by 1040 Deer or Elk Area permit holders.
3. Added Any Deer permits for youth in selected GMUs.

## BLACK BEAR

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears occur mainly in the foothills and forested areas of District 3, but population densities vary among GMUs. The highest densities of bears occur in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton).

District 3 consists of GMUs that are part of the Blue Mountains Black Bear Management Unit 8 (BBMU 8), which is one of nine BBMUs defined by WDFW. Currently, allowing for a general bear season during the fall and controlled permit numbers during the spring has maintained harvest metrics within parameters identified by WDFW as reflective of a healthy bear population. The metrics used to direct black bear harvest include the proportion of harvested female bears (no more than 35-39 percent of harvest), the median age of harvested females (range no younger than 5-6 years), and the median age of harvested males (range no younger than 2-4 years).

WDFW does not conduct surveys to monitor trends in black bear population size. Instead, we use trends in harvest data as surrogates to formal population estimates or indices. Currently, black bear populations are believed to be stable in District 3. Because we use the age of harvest as a management metric, we want to remind hunters that **it is required that a premolar tooth be submitted**. Tooth envelopes can be obtained by calling a regional office or stopping in at one of the district offices (best to call ahead as these offices aren't staffed full-time), which may be available to help with tooth extraction as well.

### WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2020 SEASON

Although there are hunters who specifically target black bears, most bears are harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Consequently, annual harvest can vary quite a bit from one year to the next and overall hunter success is quite low. Since 2001, hunter success in District 3 has averaged just 6 percent and has never been higher than 9 percent. However, hunter success is likely higher for those hunters who specifically hunt bears versus those who buy a bear tag in case they see one while they are deer or elk hunting.

Overall, there has been no trend in annual bear harvest during the general bear season in District 3, with harvest generally fluctuating between 75 and 100 bears, excluding a few outliers. 2011 was a relatively poor year, with 66 bears harvested, but harvest rebounded during the 2012 and 2013 seasons before dropping off again in 2014 to 62 bears (Figure 8). With annual fluctuations in hunter numbers, some index of harvest per unit effort is generally a better indicator of harvest trends. Figure 4 shows the number of hunter days per bear harvested, which also does not show any consistent trend.

At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) (Figure 5). Harvest numbers during 2010, 2014, and 2017 seasons compared to long-term (10-year) and short-term (5-year) averages were lower in both GMUs 154 and 162, but the yearly District harvest does not show any identifiable trends (Figure 4) other than there have been very few low harvest years back-to-back. This was again highlighted by the rebound in 2012 after the low 2011 harvest, in both the 2015 and 2016 harvests after the low 2014 harvest, and again in 2018 after the low 2017 harvest. Based on general long-term stability in District 3 bear harvest, hunters should expect similar harvest and success rates during the 2020 season. We may see some change in the harvest dynamic over time with the new regulation of a 2-bear limit and the increase in spring permits in several GMUs.

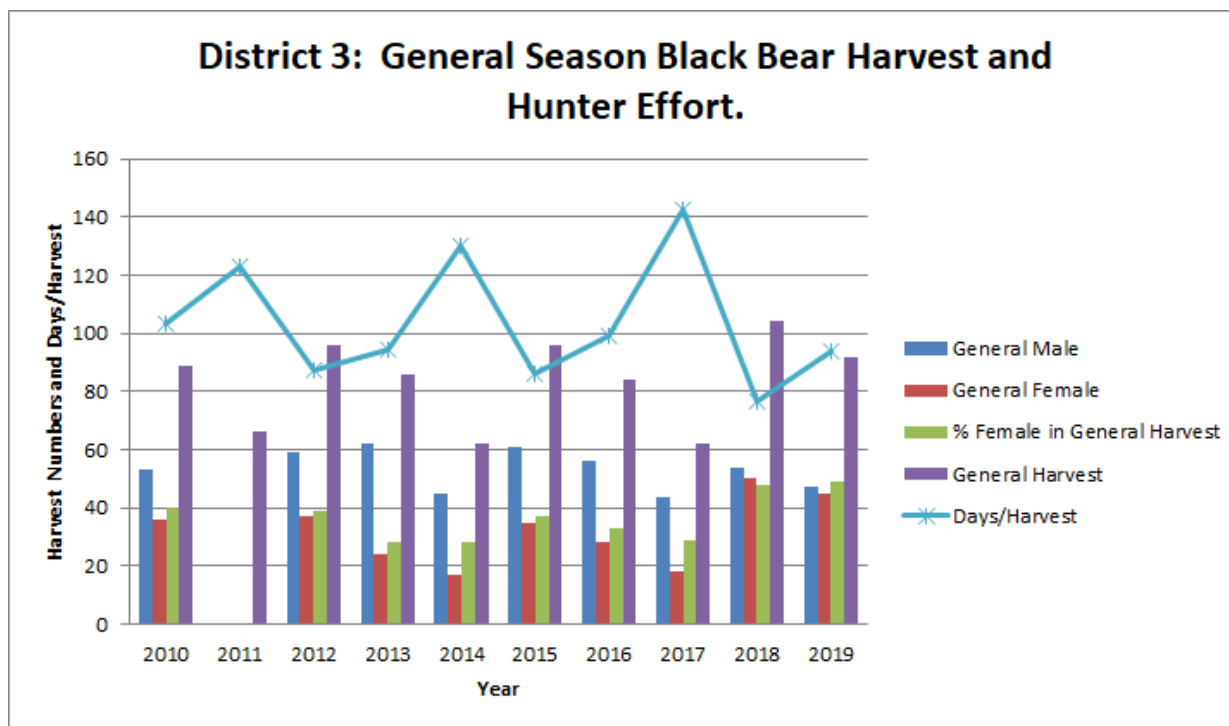


Figure 4. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season, and an index of hunter effort (hunter days/bear harvested) in District 3, 2010–2019 (the sex of harvested bears is not available for 2011).

## **HOW TO LOCATE AND HARVEST A BLACK BEAR**

Scouting is an important factor that hunters should consider when specifically hunting for black bears in District 3. Although black bears are extremely common and occur in some areas at very high densities, they are seen infrequently because they generally limit their time in the open to cooler times of the day and move into thick vegetation in draws and creek bottoms.

Black bears can occur in a variety of habitat types so it can be difficult to narrow down where to search for them. Hunters should focus their efforts early and late in the day in more open terrain (e.g. south-facing slopes). In September, bears can spend a considerable amount of time in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountain foothills in search of fruit that has ripened in the riparian areas and around old homesteads.

Bears can often be located along riparian corridors that contain a large number of berry-producing shrubs, including creeping blackberries and elderberries, or along north-facing slopes with salmonberries, huckleberries, and blackberries. Spring permit holders should look below the snow-line on south-facing slopes that get early green-up of wild onions and other vegetation and near springs or wet areas with green aquatic vegetation. During the fall, hunters will generally find bears foraging across open slopes dissected by shrubby draws early in the day. Also, hunters should check riparian areas that may still have berries or rose hips, and hike through them to see if there is any bear sign. If fresh sign is found, odds are a bear is frequenting that area. If hunters are patient and sit for extended periods of time watching open areas in these riparian patches and corridors, they may get a chance to harvest a bear. Patience is the key.

## **NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS**

Beginning in 2019, bear hunting season dates in District 3 were standardized to an August 1 opener running until November 15 to conform to new statewide standard opening and closing dates. In addition, the 2-bear harvest limit was extended statewide. Hunters are still only allowed one bear on their spring bear permit but can harvest an additional bear during the fall season, or 2 bears in the fall if unsuccessful during a spring hunt.

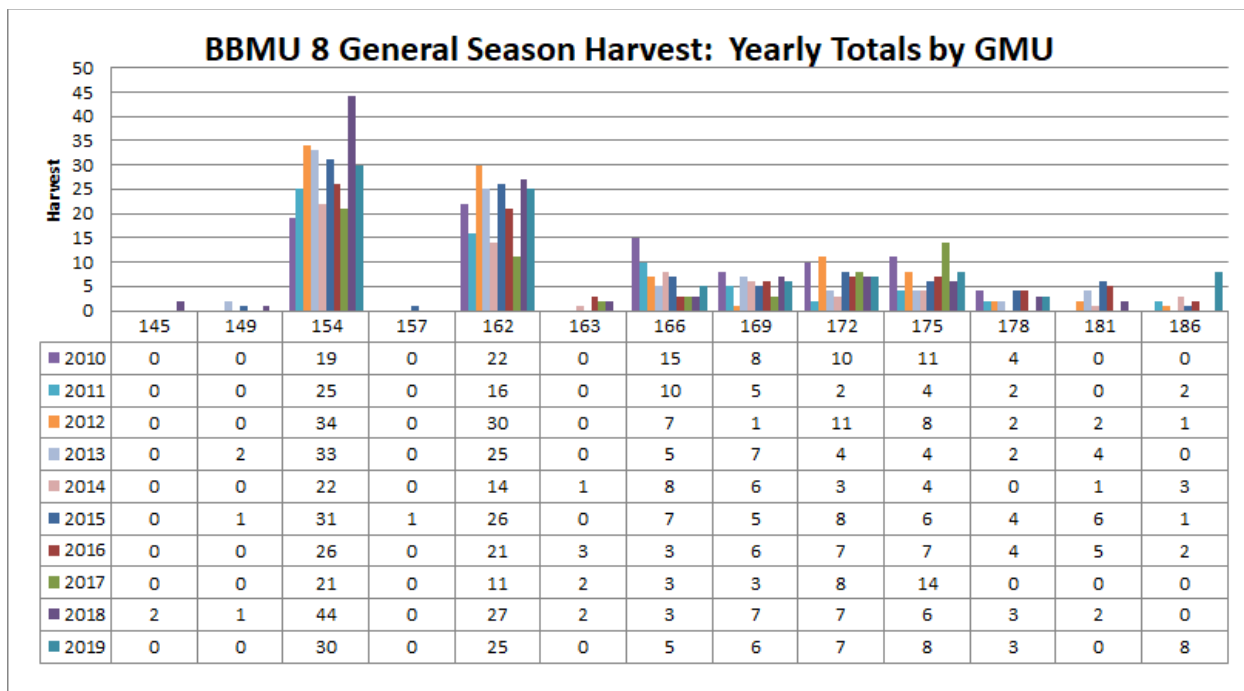


Figure 5. The number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2010-2019 general black bear season in District 3.

## COUGAR

### GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 3, but densities likely vary among GMUs, with higher densities where shrub and forest cover make up a larger portion of the unit. Cougar populations in District 3 are managed with the primary objective of maintaining stable adult territories and population by limiting the harvest of adult cougars to approximately 12-16 percent of the cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW has continually adjusted the way it manages cougar harvest in Washington. The biggest change was shifting away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested, and instead using a standard liberal season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intent was to have a longer season, without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

To accomplish harvest goals, WDFW established a series of hunt areas, each with its own harvest guidelines and with standard season dates of Sept. 1 through April 30. **Harvest guidelines do not affect cougar hunting seasons until harvest numbers are evaluated starting January 1.** At that point, any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed, depending on the age and sex composition of the harvest. If hunters plan on hunting cougar after January 1, they must confirm that the cougar season is open in the area they plan to hunt. Harvest guidelines for each hunt area located in District 3 are provided in Table 4.



In April 2020, the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted higher harvest guidelines for cougars based on local harvest data instead of a Statewide average density estimate to calculate available opportunity, while still meeting the Game Management Plan (GMP) goals. Social stability is one goal stated in the GMP, which is maintained by adult territorial cougars. Based on this, only adult cougars (greater than 24 months of age) will count towards the harvest guideline in the coming years. It is unclear at this time if the harvest will change significantly under these new guidelines. Most harvest occurs during the fall big game seasons during the open season, which was not changed in 2020. The expectation of this change is that the winter season (Jan 1-Apr 30) should remain open in 4 out of every 5 years, allowing for good snow tracking conditions for hunters specifically targeting late-season cougars and potentially resulting in a higher harvest than observed in past years.

For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit [WDFW's website](#).

Table 4. Harvest guidelines and 2019-2020 harvest for the three cougar hunt areas located in District 3. Harvest from 2019-2020 was managed under a lower harvest guideline than will apply in 2020-2021. Under the new guideline, units in the Blue Mountains would not have closed during the late season with the 2019-2020 level of harvest.

Hunt Area	2020-2021 Harvest Guideline	2019-2020 Harvest
145, 166, 175, 178	6-7	5 (closed Jan 1)
149, 154, 162, 163	7-9	6 (closed Jan 17)
169, 172, 181, 186	5-6	1 (Did Not Close)

## WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2020 SEASON

Cougar harvest in District 3 has been variable over the years, with the average since 1990 of 16 cougars and a range between a low of seven and a high of 33. However, in 17 out of the last 25 years, the range has been between 12 and 20 cougars harvested. Since 2001, the number of cougars harvested in District 3 has averaged 14 cougars, and sub-adults typically dominate the harvest. With the yearly variation, it is hard to predict future harvest, but cougar sightings in the District continue to be fairly common and there is no reason to suspect much change in the harvest. Under the new harvest management guidelines, it is much less likely for all hunt areas to close by the January 1 evaluation period, but hunters interested in a cougar harvest in any of these GMUs should still plan on taking advantage of good cougar tracking conditions prior to January.

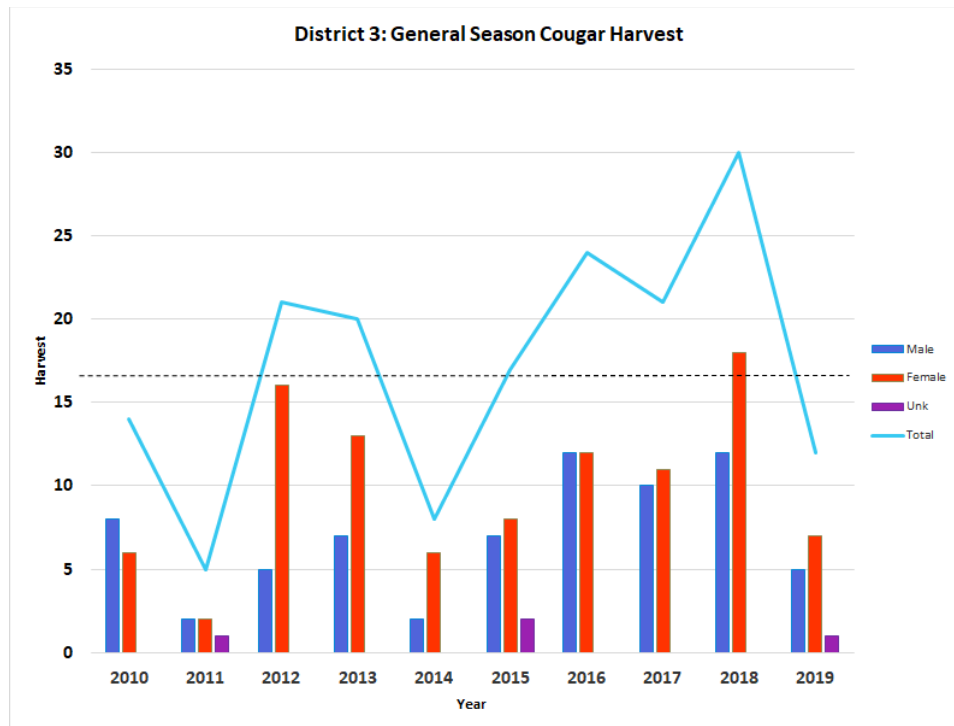


Figure 6. The estimated number of cougars harvested in District 3, 2010–2019. The dashed line represents the upper harvest guideline for all three cougar areas combined, which will be increased for the 2020-2021 season.

## NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. The late season extends from January 1 to April 30, 2019. **Be aware that 2020 licenses expire at the end of March, and a 2021 cougar license is required to hunt cougar after March 31.**
2. The harvest guideline was increased for the 2020-2021 cougar season, and only cougars 24 months of age and greater will be counted towards the harvest guideline.

## DUCKS

### COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 3. Common dabbling ducks include mallard, northern pintail, American widgeon, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, canvasback, and common goldeneye are present along the reservoirs of the Snake and Columbia rivers and can occur in fairly large numbers.

Mallards are the most abundant duck species in Washington and constitute the vast majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically about 50 percent). Mid-winter surveys in the South Columbia Basin segment of District 3 typically yield more than 50 percent of mallards in the dabbling duck count, with goldeneye and canvasback making up 80 percent of the diving ducks.

Hunters should expect harvest opportunities to be mostly mallard and American widgeon, although hunting by boat in the river reservoirs can yield good harvests of diving ducks.

## **MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY**

There are very few ducks in District 3 during late spring and early summer. Beginning in mid to late September, birds will begin migrating south from British Columbia, the Yukon, and Alaska, and numbers will continue to increase until they peak in late October and early November. Although migration patterns have not been intensively studied, it is believed ducks use concentration areas in District 3 as resting and foraging areas and do not stay in the district for long periods of time. Consequently, the number of ducks located in District 3 most likely changes daily but begins to decline sharply as ducks continue their southward migration and there are no more new migrants coming into the area from breeding grounds to the north.

## **CONCENTRATION AREAS**

In general, concentration areas include the wetlands and rivers around McNary National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the Columbia and Snake River valleys. Concentrations within these broader areas are dependent on many factors (e.g. hunting pressure, weather, food, etc.), and have the potential to change daily. The agricultural areas around McNary NWR attract large numbers of foraging ducks and geese, but most of these lands are closed to hunting or leased by private hunting outfitters and access can be difficult to obtain or expensive for a private guide.

## **POPULATION STATUS**

The number of ducks in District 3 during established hunting seasons is most strongly related to the status of breeding duck populations in Alaska and Canada. The following are the trends from USFW/Canadian WS monitoring data over the six-year period from 2014-2019: the 2014 breeding survey estimated the breeding population in Alaska at 3.5 million ducks, a 6 percent increase over 2013 values, but still well below the 2012 estimate of 4.4 million. The mallard estimate recovered from 2013 lows of 338,000 to an estimate of 501,000 for 2014, a 48 percent increase, and similar to the 2012 estimate (USFWS, Trends in Duck Breeding Populations, 1955-2015). In 2015, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats traditional survey area was 3.4 million, a 3 percent decrease from 2014 estimates, and 8 percent below the long-term average. The mallard breeding population estimate was 471,000, a decrease of 6 percent from 2014 levels, but still 24 percent above the long-term average. In 2016, the total estimate for the Alaska-Yukon Territory-Old Crow Flats area was 4.3 million, a 28 percent increase over 2015 estimates, and 17 percent above the long-term trends. The mallard breeding population estimate was 584,000, 24 percent above the 2015 estimates, and 54 percent above the long-term trend. In 2017, the total estimate for the AK-Yukon area was 3.99 million, an 8 percent decline from the previous year, but 8 percent higher than the long-term average. The 2017 estimate for mallards was 538,000, an 8 percent decline from the 2016 estimate but 40 percent above the long-term average. In 2018, the total estimate for the AK-Yukon area was 3.38 million, 15 percent below 2017 estimates, and 9 percent below the long-term average. The 2018 harvest in District 3 mirrored the population estimates, with a 15 percent decline in harvest over the 2017 duck harvest. In 2018, the mallard population estimate was 451,000, a 16 percent decline over 2017 estimates but still 17 percent above the long-term average. In 2019, the total estimate for the AK-Yukon area was 2.61 million, a 23% decline over 2018 estimates, and the

third year in a row of population declines. 2019 also saw a continued decline in mallard breeding population numbers, with an estimate of 361,000, 20% below 2018 and 7% below the long-term average.

## HARVEST TRENDS AND 2020 PROSPECTS

Although we do not have the 2019 harvest data, recent harvests have mirrored the breeding estimates, with 2018 duck harvest being down 15 percent overall from 2017, marking the third year in a row of decreased harvest, mirroring decreased breeding estimates for two out of the last three years from the breeding grounds in Alaska and Canada. We expect 2020 harvest numbers to show a continued decline. The 2018 harvest was also 15 percent below the five-year average. The district saw the largest decreases in Asotin and Walla Walla counties, with Columbia and Garfield counties showing average harvest; however, overall harvest declines were partially due to lower hunter effort, although the average harvest/day was also lower in 2018. Generally, the waterfowl breeding surveys track well with hunter success. Although hunter numbers have remained relatively stable, the number of hunter days has declined in three out of the last five years and 2018 hunter days were well below both the five- and 10-year averages (Figure 8). The 2020 Waterfowl Population Status Report was not available at the time of this writing, but hunters should check the report at the [USFWS page](#) for insight into the 2020 population estimates for waterfowl hunting prospects.

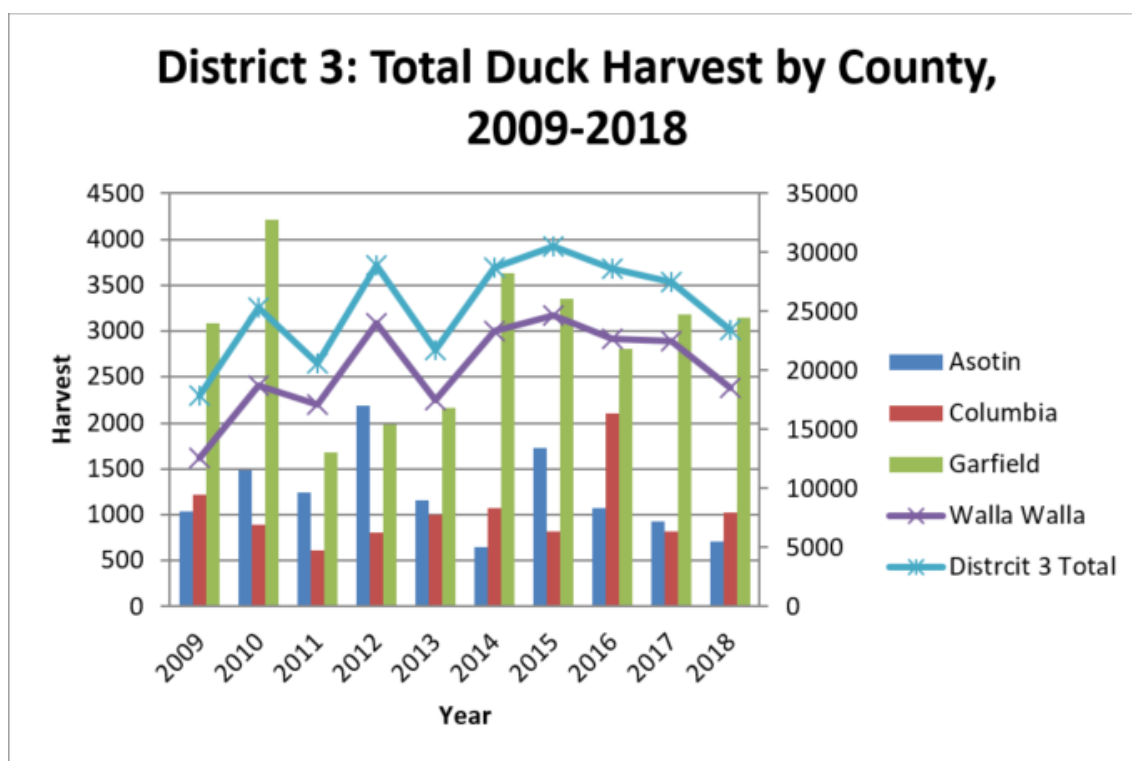


Figure 7. Trends in the total number of ducks harvested (blue line, right axis), and totals by county in Walla Walla (purple line, right axis), Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties (bars, left axis), 2009–2018.

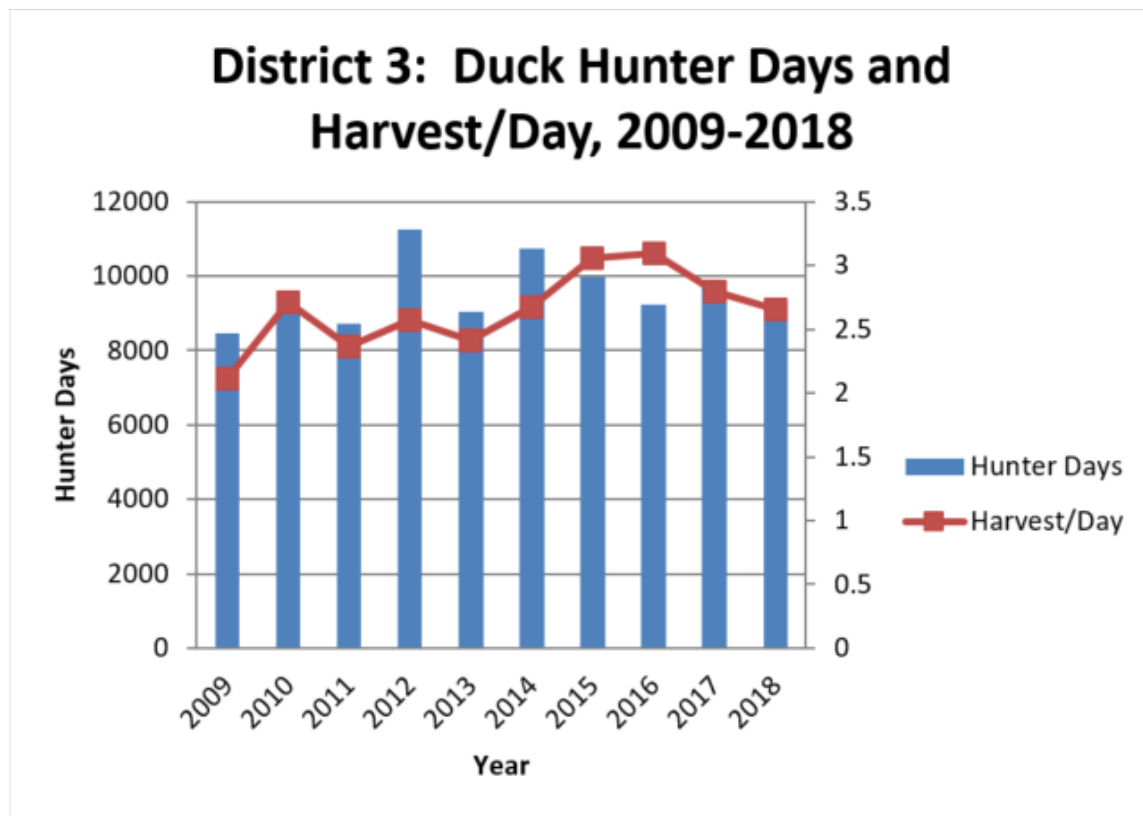


Figure 8. Trends in the total duck hunter days (left axis), and ducks harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2009–2018.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES

How hunters go about hunting ducks is largely dependent on where they choose to hunt. When hunting inland waters associated with ponds and rivers, or feeding areas, traditional decoy setups work the best. Birds are most active during early morning and late afternoon as they move from resting areas to feeding areas. See the [WDFW waterfowl page](#) for more information on hunting ducks.

## PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

There are several U.S. Army Corp of Engineer (USACE) Habitat Management Units along the Snake River in District 3 that offer good waterfowl hunting opportunities, and McNary NWR along the Columbia River offers some of the premier hunting opportunities in the district. WDFW Wildlife Areas in District 3 are primarily big game habitat and do not offer much waterfowl hunting opportunity, but hunters should see the [WDFW waterfowl hunting page](#) for more detailed information related to their location, current waterfowl management activities, and common species.

## GEESE

### COMMON SPECIES

Canada geese are the only goose species available for harvest in District 3 during the early September season, while Canada, snow, Ross, and white-fronted geese may all be taken during the late season.

### MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

The migration chronology of geese in District 3 is nearly identical to that described for ducks, with very few geese occurring in the district until migrants begin showing up from Alaska in September. However, one distinct difference between ducks and geese is goose numbers do not decline as sharply as duck numbers do around the latter half of November. Instead, many geese choose to over-winter in the agricultural areas of the district as long as snow cover does not become excessive.

### POPULATION STATUS

Few geese breed in District 3, so WDFW does not conduct breeding goose surveys in this part of the state. Urban goose populations can be problematic at times but offer limited hunting opportunities.

### HARVEST TRENDS AND 2020 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 3 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most goose harvest will occur in Walla Walla County during the late season, where twice as many geese are harvested each year compared to Asotin, Columbia, and Garfield counties combined. Although harvest is low in the three eastern counties of the district, creative hunters can find opportunities along the Touchet, Tucannon, and Snake rivers by requesting access from farmers who have geese feeding daily in their crop fields, particularly alfalfa.



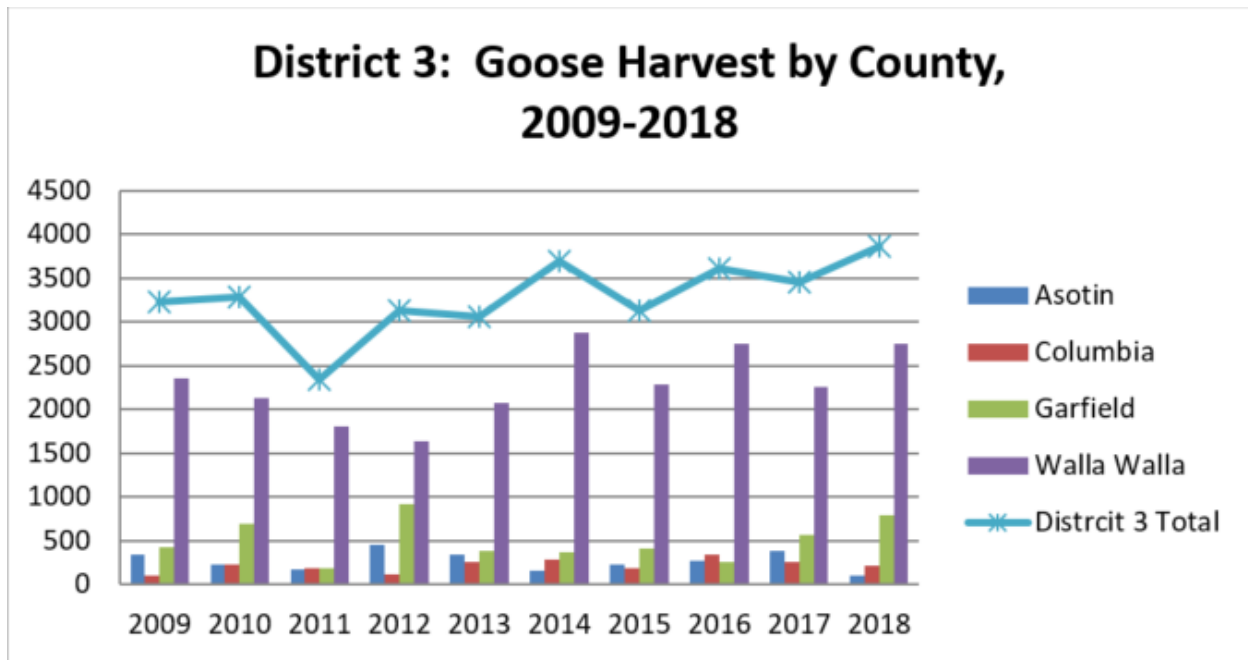


Figure 9. Trends in the total number of geese harvested (pale blue line), and totals by county in Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, and Walla Walla counties, 2009–2018.

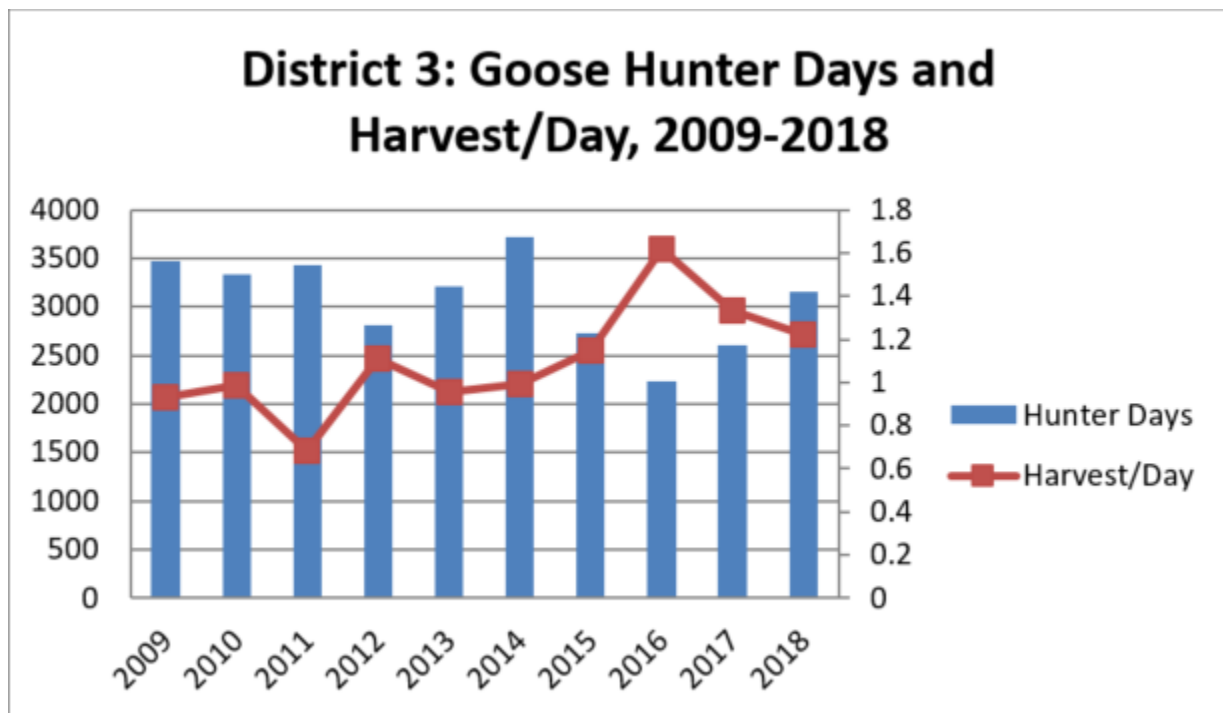


Figure 10. Trends in the total goose hunter days (left axis), and geese harvested per hunter day (right axis) in District 3, 2009–2018.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES

The standard techniques employed to harvest geese include finding agricultural areas where geese are feeding and setting up a decoy spread well before daylight in parts of the fields where geese are expected to concentrate. In District 3, agricultural areas where feeding geese congregate are dryland and irrigated agricultural fields relatively close to the Snake or Columbia rivers. Because of this, goose hunting opportunities most often occur on private property and require hunters to gain permission before hunting. There are multiple guide services available for hunters willing to pay for access and experience.

## SPECIAL REGULATIONS

It is strongly recommended that hunters review the most recent Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to ensure they are in compliance, as there are specific daily regulations. Pamphlets are available at any retailer that sells hunting licenses or they can be downloaded from [WDFW's website](#).

# FOREST GROUSE

## SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Two species of grouse occur in District 3 -- ruffed grouse and dusky grouse (formerly called blue grouse). Ruffed grouse are the most abundant grouse in the Blue Mountains and generally occur at lower elevations and along shrubby draws and riparian areas where hardwoods are present. Dusky grouse can be located in upper elevation timbered slopes and mountain meadows, often near springs or some other water source. Both species will be attracted to berry-producing vegetation, such as chokecherry, currant, elderberry, and snowberry, with aspen stands also being an attractive habitat for both cover and forage.

## POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not conduct any standardized surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 3. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor the general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, grouse populations appeared to be at least stable if not increasing until the 2016 season, as CPUE has slowly increased from a low in 2011 until a drop in 2016. While both harvest numbers and hunter days have been decreasing, the increase in CPUE suggests grouse populations have been stable (Figure 11) but were likely impacted by difficult winters in 2016 and 2018. The correlation between harvest numbers and the number of hunter days is fairly robust, with more days generally equating to more grouse harvested, which also suggests the Blue Mountains grouse population is stable (Figure 12).

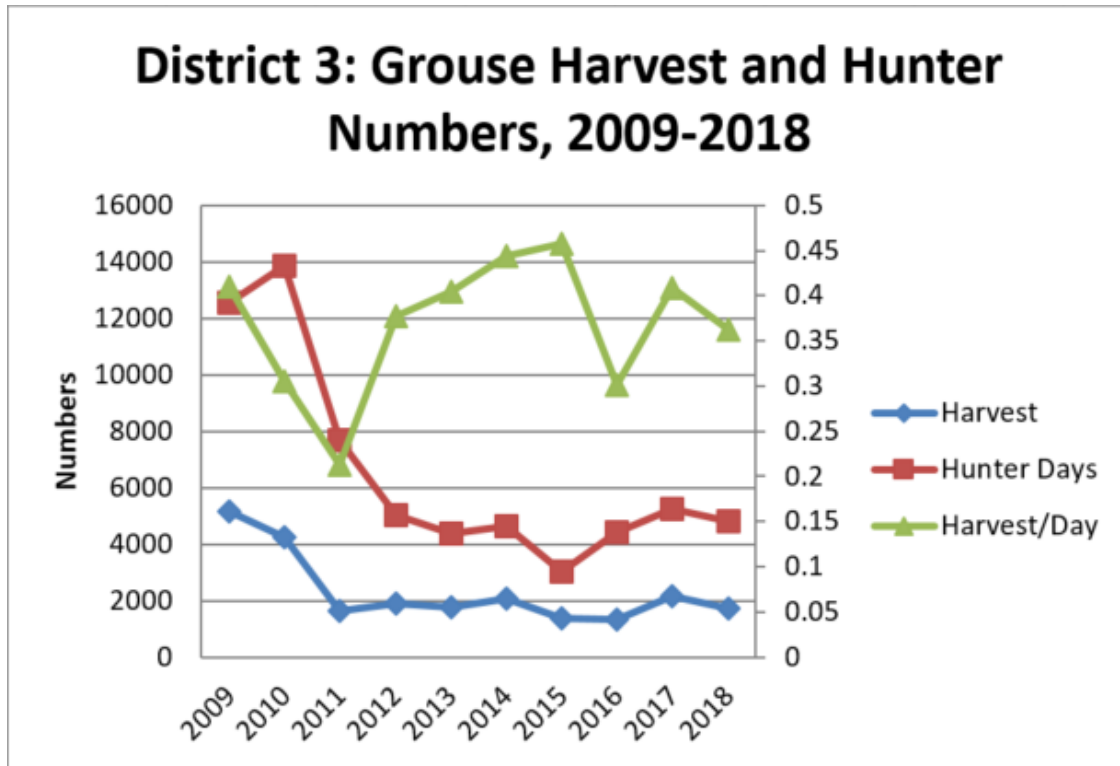


Figure 11. Number of grouse harvested, number of hunter days (right axis), and grouse harvested per hunter day (left axis), 2009-2018.

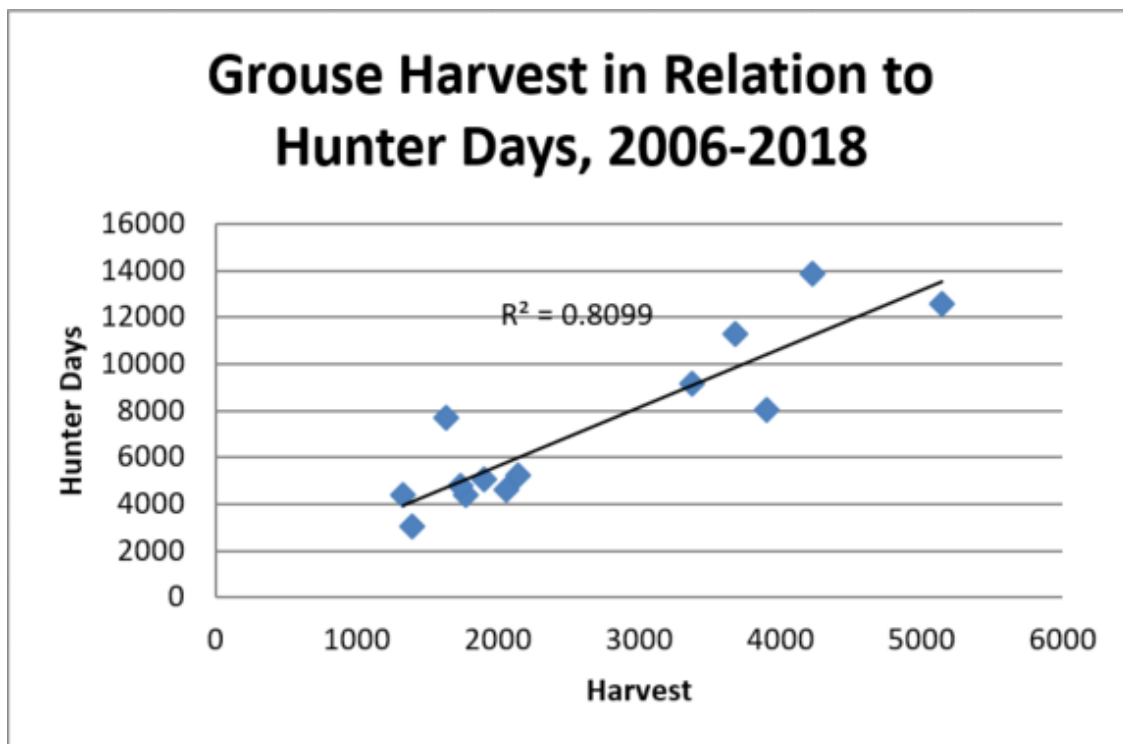


Figure 12. Number of grouse harvested in relation to hunter days, 2006-2018.

## HARVEST TRENDS AND 2020 PROSPECTS

The total number of grouse harvested in District 3 has declined significantly since 2009 when 5,147 grouse were estimated to be harvested. This is compared to 2,143 in 2017 and just under 2,000 in 2018. However, hunter numbers have declined as well, with a dramatic decrease in 2010 followed by a slow decline since then. Despite the sharp declines in harvest, the strong correlation between hunter days and total grouse harvested suggests hunters should expect on average to harvest one grouse for every two to three days hunting. Typically, a hunter may go a few days without seeing birds or getting a shot at any but will harvest multiple birds on a given day, once they find good habitat and encounter birds still in family groups.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt grouse in District 3 is by walking roads and shooting them as they flush or flushing after they roost in a nearby tree. Dusky grouse tend to occur in higher densities in the higher elevations of the Blue Mountains and can occasionally be found in good numbers along grassy open ridges mixed with conifer forests. Ruffed grouse are closely associated with riparian areas throughout all elevations of the forested portions of the Blue Mountains. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's grouse species, see WDFW's [upland bird hunting webpage](#).

## PHEASANTS

The best pheasant hunting opportunities in District 3 are associated with the Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program. Each year, approximately 3,500 pheasants are released in Region 1, and many of these are destined for release sites in District 3. Nine sites are located throughout the district. Four of those sites (Hollebeke HMU, Mill Creek HMU, Rice Bar HMU, and Willow Bar HMU) are owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, two sites (Asotin WLA and the Hartsock Unit of the Wooten WLA) are WDFW-owned, and the rest are on private lands open to the public under WDFW's Feel Free to Hunt access program. Releases take place for the youth season on most of the sites in mid-September, and the remaining releases happen sporadically throughout the pheasant hunting season. **Be aware that only non-toxic shot is allowed at any pheasant release site, regardless of public or private land ownership.**

Hunters should be mindful of the regulation, and if they are using lead shot at other hunting sites but hunting multiple sites, be careful to leave lead shot in their vehicles when visiting a WDFW pheasant release site.

## SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Pheasants are closely associated with agricultural and grassland habitats throughout the northern and western portions of the district. The best pheasant hunting is located in areas of permanent cover, usually associated with riparian or shrubby habitats. There is no question that the district has lost pheasants and pheasant habitat over the past 30-40 years, due in part to changes in farming practices, increase in invasive weed species, and potentially due to long-term changes in precipitation across the region. However, the district still offers many good hunting opportunities for both wild and planted birds.

## POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not currently generate population estimates for pheasants. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor the general population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which track birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, pheasant CPUE has remained relatively stable over the past decade. CPUE in 2018 was 0.73 birds harvested per hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 0.69. Other WDFW information implies that populations have declined during the past few decades but appear to have recently stabilized. For the period from 2006-2018, there is a strong correlation between the number of pheasants harvested and the number of hunter days, which also suggests a stable population over the same period.

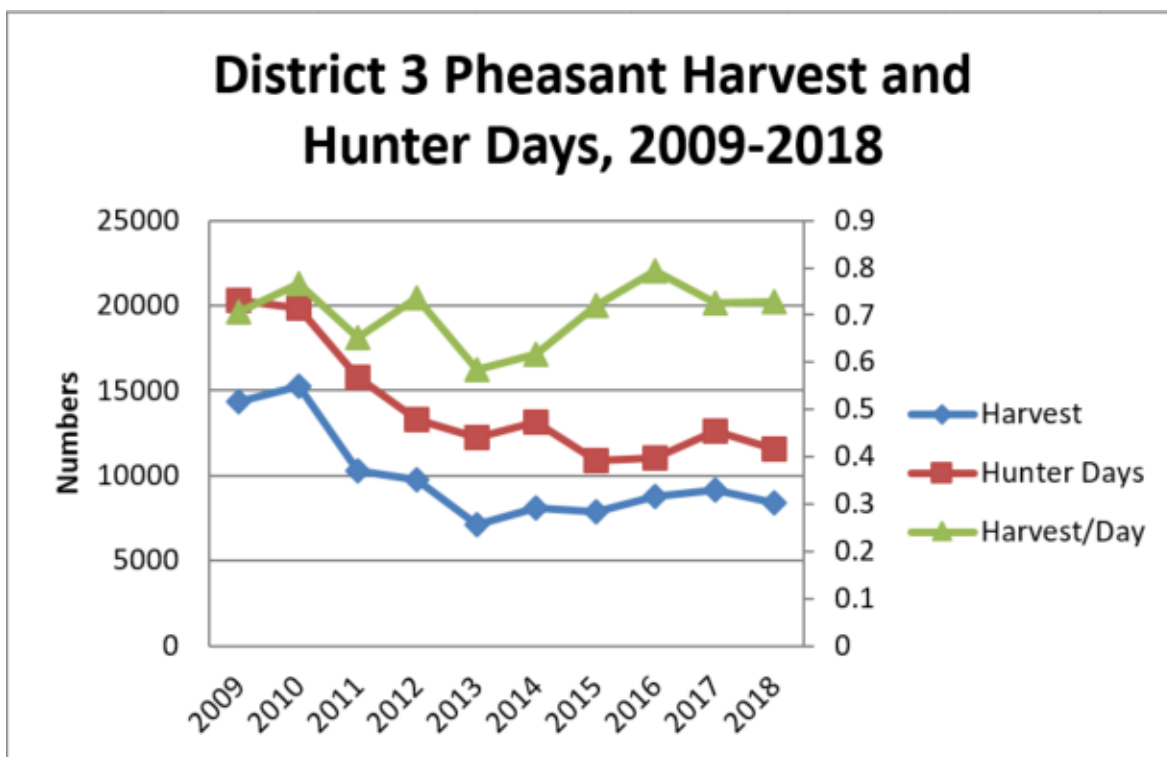


Figure 13. Total pheasant harvest, hunter days, and harvest per day in District 3, 2009-2018.

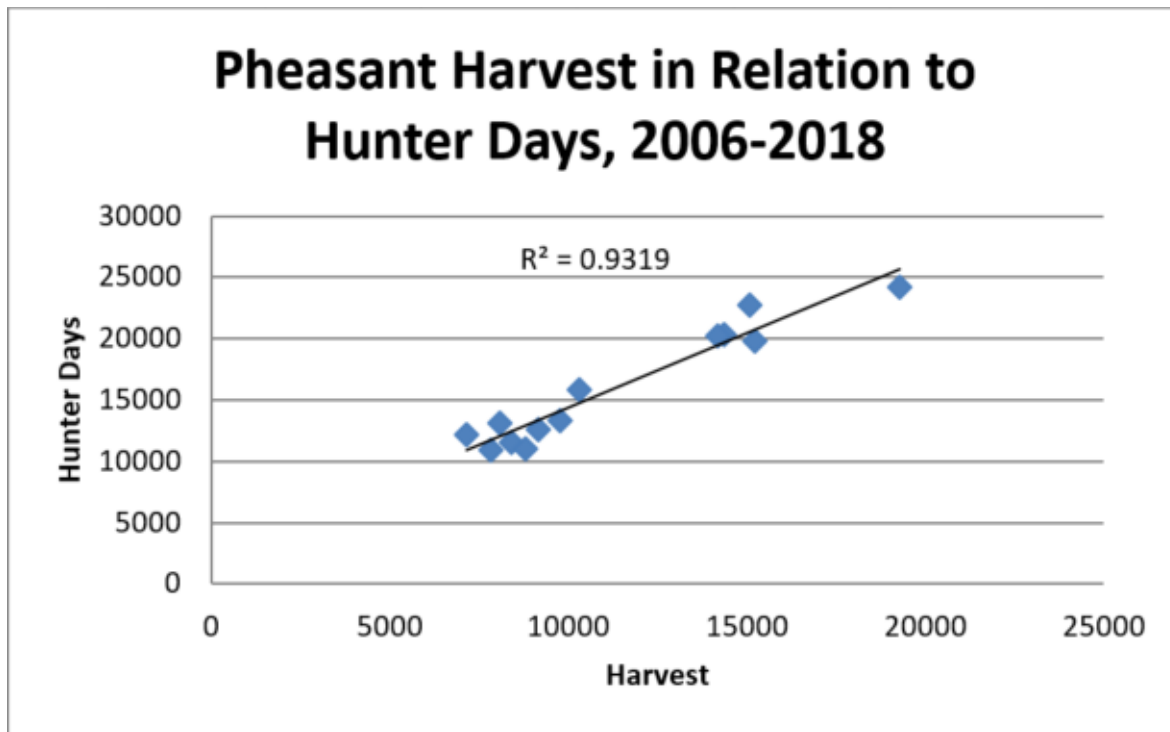


Figure 14. Number of pheasants harvested in relation to number of hunter days, 2006-2018.

## HARVEST TRENDS AND 2020 PROSPECTS

The total number of pheasants harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season and is also buffered by the pheasant release program. Although the winter/early spring conditions in 2020 have been fairly mild and we should have good adult bird survival, late spring rains, and cool temperatures likely negatively impacted early nesting birds, which may cause a decline in pheasant populations. Weather conditions for successful second brood production were likely more positive and may help stabilize population numbers. Garfield County has also been raising and releases pheasants in an effort to bolster the pheasant population. While WDFW pheasant releases support a put-and-take hunt of male pheasants, Garfield County is releasing both male and female pheasants in appropriate habitat to encourage the expansion of declining populations. You can read more about the program here ([Garfield County pheasants](#)), which includes information on how to support the project.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt pheasants in District 3 is with the use of a bird dog. Pheasants are usually located in thicker cover and often require a dog to flush them if they do not run in front of hunters. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's pheasants, please visit WDFW's [upland bird hunting webpage](#).

Hunters should be aware that special regulations apply when hunting on eastern Washington pheasant release sites. Most notably, hunters are required to use nontoxic shot. To locate maps



for the Mill Creek, Hollebeke, Rice Bar, and Willow Bar HMUs, as well as the Asotin and Hartsock WMA release sites, and to learn more about the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#), visit the WDFW website.

## QUAIL

### SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

California quail are common in the lower elevation draws and drainages across the foothills of the Blue Mountains, and suitable pockets of habitat across the prairie areas and breaks of the Grande Ronde and Snake rivers. Mountain quail occur in District 3, but there are no sizable populations and sightings are uncommon. When they do occur, it is usually along the Asotin Creek drainage and tributaries that have abundant shrub cover, and hunters looking for California quail in this area should be careful to identify their target, as mountain quail are protected in eastern Washington.

### POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for quail. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, recent quail CPUE has improved significantly from low levels in 2013, likely due to weather during the nesting period. CPUE in 2014 was 1.23 birds harvested per hunter day and remained stable through the 2016 season at 1.38 birds harvested per hunter day but dropped drastically in 2017 to 0.64 birds/hunter day, with the previous five-year average being 1.14 birds/day. An expected improvement in quail harvest did not materialize in 2018, with another low harvest of only 0.62 birds/hunter day. Conditions this year have not been as favorable as last, so there may be another low harvest in 2020.

### HARVEST TRENDS AND 2020 PROSPECTS

The total number of quail harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. The breeding conditions during spring and early summer of 2020 have been poor but improved over the summer and may have a positive effect on second brood rearing for quail. Biologists predict that 2020 quail harvest numbers will continue their recent slide and hope for a rebound during the 2021 season.

### HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

In general, the most effective way to hunt quail in District 3 is with the use of a bird dog. Quail are usually located in thicker cover and often require a dog to flush. To learn more about how to hunt Washington's quail, please visit WDFW's upland bird hunting webpage.

## TURKEYS

Wild turkeys of the Rio Grande subspecies have been introduced into southeast Washington and have become very common. Turkeys are found in the lower elevation draws and drainages across the foothills of the Blue Mountains and in suitable pockets of habitat across the prairie areas and

breaks of the Grande Ronde and Snake rivers. Turkeys can be found in all GMUs but tend to be concentrated along riparian areas in the lower elevations of the Blue Mountains and often near farmsteads and towns.

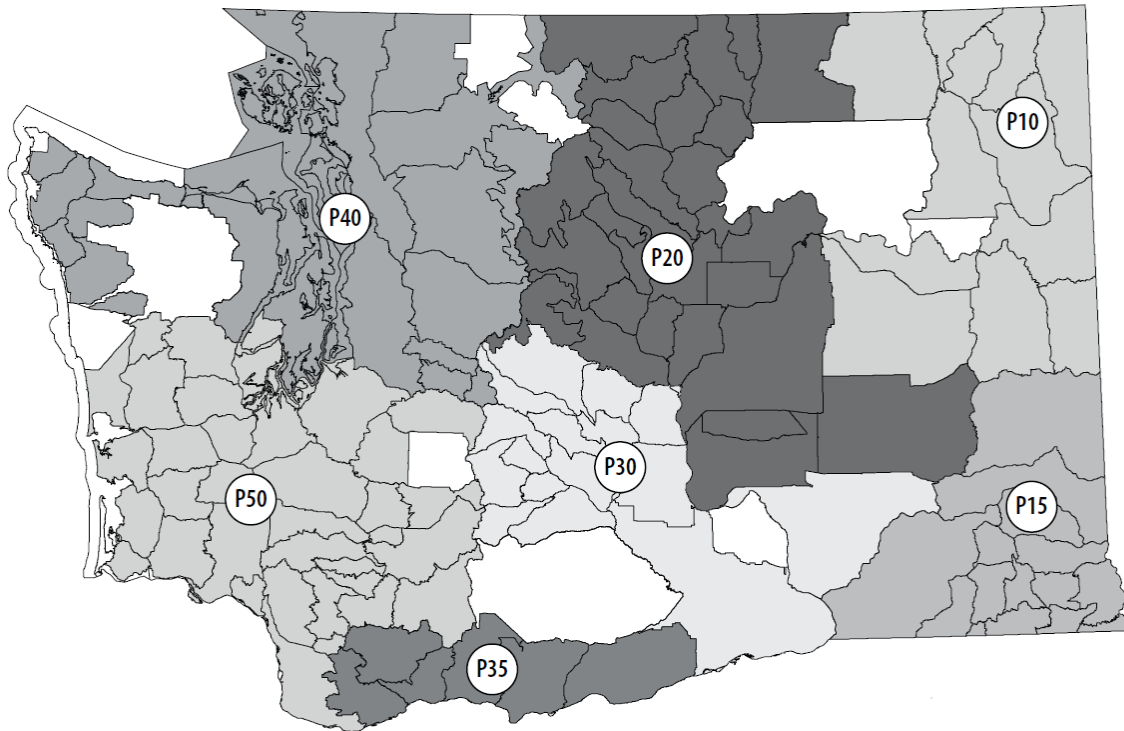


Figure 15. Map depicting WDFW's seven wild turkey population management units.

## POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not estimate population size for turkeys. Instead, harvest data trends are used to monitor population status. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers so catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE), which tracks birds harvested per hunter day, is the best indicator of population trends. In District 3, turkey CPUE rebounded from a below-average year in 2013 to a CPUE of 0.10 in 2014, 0.09 in 2015, and 0.11 in 2016, similar to the previous five-year average of 0.10 turkeys per hunter day. 2017 was another below-average year, with CPUE of 0.077, likely attributed to turkeys experiencing high winter mortality. The fall season was much better with a CPUE of 0.12 birds/hunter day, indicating good brood survival over the spring and summer. The 2019 harvest continued the improving trend from 2018, with a CPUE of 0.11 during the spring season, dropping a bit at 0.09 for the fall.

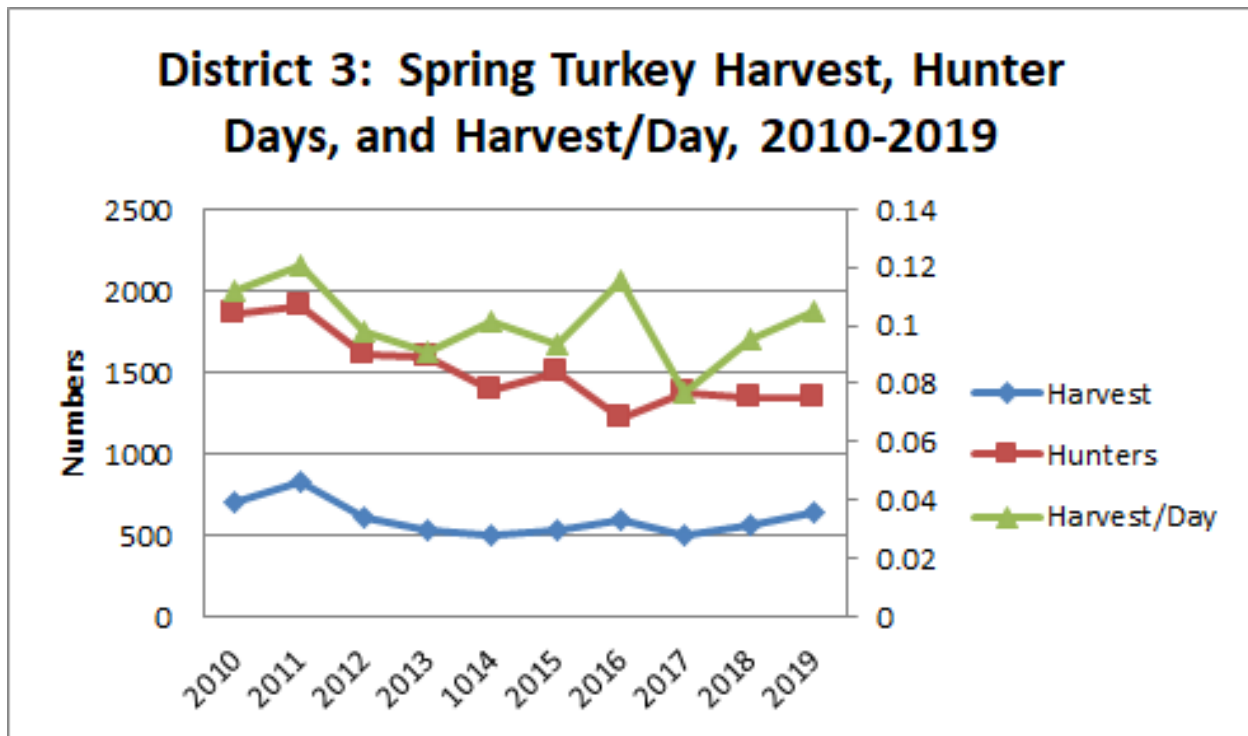


Figure 16. Spring turkey harvest numbers and number of hunter days (left axis), and harvest/day (right axis), 2010-2019.

## HARVEST TRENDS AND 2020 PROSPECTS

The total number of turkeys harvested in District 3 is dependent upon habitat and weather conditions during the breeding season. The total harvest of 742 in 2014 was nearly average, followed by average harvests of 770 in 2015, 773 in 2016, and 769 in 2017. With more liberal bag limits, 2018 saw a jump in harvest to 1,053 birds combined for spring and fall seasons, with a similar harvest of 1,048 in 2019, both years being well above the five-year average of 821 birds. Most of the increase was due to high fall harvest, probably due to the new regulations increasing the bag limit to four turkeys during the fall season. The spring season limit remains at 2 bearded turkeys in Eastern WA. Based on long-term harvest trends, turkey populations in southeast Washington appear to have stabilized after years of increasing harvest, and future harvest is likely to be most impacted by spring weather conditions on brood survival and the occasional hard winter impacting adult birds. The spring and early summer of 2020 have had fair conditions for nesting and brood-rearing for turkeys, with cool temperatures and wet weather potentially hampering brood survival. Biologists predict that turkey numbers will show a slight decline and expect the Fall 2020 harvest to be at or below the 5-year average.

## HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

Most turkey hunters target gobblers in the spring when males are displaying and readily come to box slate, and mouth calls that mimic hen groups. Setting a blind or using camouflage clothing near meadows or small forest openings used as strutting grounds can be very effective. Often only minimal calling is needed to bring turkeys within range. Identifying roost areas and setting up nearby can also be effective, but efficient calling will be needed to attract birds. Gobble calls

should only be used infrequently, and hunters generally should not stalk or approach gobble calls, as it may be another hunter.

GMUs 154 (Blue Creek) and 162 (Dayton) have the highest turkey harvests. The highest densities are often found on private land in the lower foothill areas that have a mix of forest, grassland, and agricultural fields, and flocks can frequently be seen from roadways along the creek drainages in these areas. Some of these flocks have become nuisance birds, and landowners are often willing to grant permission to thin turkey numbers. Be respectful of private land and always ask for permission to hunt. Although densities are lower, good numbers of birds can be found on National Forest lands and local wildlife areas, including the Wooten Wildlife Area in GMU 166 (Tucannon), Asotin Creek Wildlife Area in GMU 175 (Lick Creek), and the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area in GMU 186 (Grande Ronde). Don't overlook the hidden gem of the George Creek Unit (GMU 181) of the Asotin Wildlife Area.

## OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 3 but were not covered in detail include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, bobcats, beaver, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional game birds with significant harvests in District 3 include chukar and gray partridge, and migratory birds including mourning doves, snipe, and coot. Asotin County accounts for the majority of the chukar and gray partridge harvest, with Columbia and Garfield counties having localized pockets of good hunting for these species. Walla Walla County accounts for the majority of the mourning dove harvest, and the introduced Eurasian collared dove, which can be hunted anytime with a small game license, has become common in the developed areas of all four counties.

## NOTABLE HUNTING ALERTS

1. Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2) is a fatal disease in rabbits affecting both domestic and wild populations. To date, the disease has been detected across the Southwest in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. Although RHDV2 **does not impact human health**, the disease is highly contagious among rabbits and can easily be spread by rabbit hunters who contact infected rabbits. Rabbit hunters should be cautious with all harvested rabbits to avoid the possible spread of the virus by keeping carcasses contained in an area that can easily be disinfected with a 10% bleach solution. It would also be good practice to disinfect boots and wash all clothing before hunting in a new area or visiting anywhere that has domestic rabbits. Hunters should report any incidence of multiple dead wild rabbits they encounter to Federal or State officials (<http://pacific.fws.gov/visitor/washington.html>, <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>).

## MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

District 3 does offer considerable public land and Feel Free to Hunt access opportunities. Public land opportunities within the district are comprised of U.S. Forest Service (Umatilla National Forest), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, WA Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Land Management, and WDFW, while the Rainwater Wildlife Area of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is in the Feel Free to Hunt Access Program.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include GMU 157 (Mill Creek Watershed, closed to entry except by permit), GMU 162 (Dayton), GMU 166 (Tucannon), GMU 169 (Wenaha), GMU 172 (Mountain View), GMU 175 (Lick Creek), GMU 181 (Couse), and GMU 186 (Grande Ronde).

For more information related to the location of WDFW wildlife areas and other public lands, visit WDFW's [hunting regulations web map](#).

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

One of the most common questions from hunters is, “What is hunter access like in particular GMUs?” Generally, this question is referring to the amount of public land in each GMU, and the following ratings reflect that assumption. Please refer to the Private Land Access Program section of this document to determine which GMUs have significant amounts of additional lands available for public hunting.

The following rating system was developed for District 3 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they want to hunt. For the purposes of this exercise, access ratings are specific to the level of public land available. Each GMU was given a rating of excellent, good, or poor, with the level of access associated with each rating as follows:

- **Excellent** – A majority of the GMU is in public ownership.
- **Good** – There is a mix of public land within the GMU.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is privately owned.

The information provided is a brief description of major ownership. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Eastern Region (Region 1) office in Spokane Valley (509-892-1001) with other questions related to hunter access.

### GMU 145 - MAYVIEW

Access rating – Poor

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) owns the shorelines of the Snake River. In many places, the USACE lands only extend a couple of hundred yards above the waterlines, but there are a few large habitat management units that provide considerable recreational opportunity. There is significant acreage from this unit enrolled in WDFW's Access Program.

### GMU 149 – PRESCOTT

Access rating – Poor

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although USACE owns the shorelines of the Snake River. In many places, the USACE lands only extend a couple of hundred yards above the waterlines, but there are a few large habitat management units that provide considerable recreational opportunity. There is significant acreage from this unit enrolled WDFW's Access

Program, and the Tucannon Wind Resource area managed by Portland General Electric has limited hunting (see GMU 163 for information and links).

### **GMU 154 – BLUE CREEK**

Access Rating – Poor/good

The majority of this GMU is in private ownership, although several large landowners participate in the department's private land access program. Hunters wishing to hunt in this GMU are highly encouraged to contact landowners long before their season opens to secure access. Hunters applying for special permits in this GMU are encouraged to secure access before applying.

### **GMU 157 – MILL CREEK WATERSHED**

Access rating – No entry without permit

Although this GMU is 99 percent public lands, access is restricted to special permit holders. The Mill Creek Watershed has regulated public access because it is the source of drinking water for the City of Walla Walla. Currently, there are only elk permit opportunities within this GMU.

### **GMU 162 - DAYTON**

Access rating – Good/poor

Approximately half of this GMU is in public ownership, primarily USFS and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Private land access can be difficult to obtain within this GMU, although a few landowners participate in the department's private land access program.

### **GMU 163 - MARENGO**

Access rating – Poor

A majority of this GMU is in private ownership. This GMU has a large percentage of the land developed for wind power. Special rules are in place to ensure the safety of hunters, residents, wind project workers, and equipment. More information is available through the wind project [hunting video](#). Remember, hunting on private lands is a privilege and, as with all hunting activities, rules and prohibitions are enforced by state game agents and local law enforcement. Access to PacifiCorp's Marengo wind facility, Puget Sound Energy's adjacent Hopkins Ridge wind facility, and Portland General Electric's Tucannon River wind farm is jointly administered by the utilities. With this shared access program, hunters only need to register with one utility to hunt at any of these wind facilities.



Written permission for access to these lands may be obtained by completing the online registration form. Forms are also available at:

The General Store  
426 Main Street  
Dayton, Washington,  
99328  
509-382-1042  
[tgsdayton@gmail.com](mailto:tgsdayton@gmail.com)

The Last Resort  
Kampstore  
2005 Tucannon Rd.  
Pomeroy, WA 99347  
[www.thelastresortrv.com](http://www.thelastresortrv.com)

Four Star Supply  
2255 Villard St  
Pomeroy, WA 99347  
509-843-3693  
[pomeroyfourstarsupply@hotmail.com](mailto:pomeroyfourstarsupply@hotmail.com)

### **GMU 166 - TUCANNON**

Access rating – Excellent

A majority of this GMU is owned by WDFW and USFS. Access is good throughout most of the unit, with a portion of the unit being located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness.

### **GMU 169 - WENAHA**

Access rating = Excellent

This GMU is 100 percent public lands, with 95 percent of it located within the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. This is a very rugged wilderness topographically and access can be physically challenging.

### **GMU 172 – MOUNTAIN VIEW**

Access rating – Good

Approximately 50 percent of this GMU is in public ownership. Access to private lands can be difficult to obtain. This GMU also has the 4-0 Ranch Wildlife Area located within it, where deer and elk hunting are permitted by special draw only.

### **GMU 175 – LICK CREEK**

Access rating – Excellent

A majority of this GMU is in public ownership, administered by the USFS, WDFW, and DNR. Access is excellent and this GMU has the highest road density of any of the District 3 GMUs.

### **GMU 178 - PEOLA**

Access rating – Poor

This GMU is predominantly private land, with the public land (DNR sections) often being landlocked from public access. Landowners tend to allow significant access throughout the GMU, and numerous landowners participate in WDFW private lands access program.

### **GMU 181 - COUSE**

Access rating – Good/poor

This GMU is mostly private land, but WDFW does own a considerable amount of land. See the WDFW wildlife area webpage.

### GMU 186 – GRANDE RONDE

Access rating – Good/poor

Approximately half of this GMU is in public ownership. Access to the private land in this GMU has not been available to the public in recent years.

## PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

There are a multitude of private landowners in District 3 who are enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, cooperative agreements with some of these landowners have not been finalized. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Eastern Region (Region 1) office in Spokane Valley (509-892-1001) or periodically check for updated information in this document or on WDFW's [Hunter Access website](#).

The following is a summary of anticipated private land acres available through the department's Private Lands Access program in 2020.

District 3 Access Acres										
GMU	Hunting Only BY Written Permission (HOBWP)		Feel Free To Hunt (FFTH)		Register To Hunt (RTH)		Hunt By Reservation (HBR)		Landowner Hunting Permit (LHP)	
	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres	Cooperators	Acres
145 Mayview	3	5,697	8	5,781	1	1,837	1	480		
149 Prescott	11	28,407	17	40,065			4	11,563		
154 Blue Creek	9	4,615	21	22,636						
162 Dayton	1	620	4	16,272						
163 Marengo	7	8,946	9	10,050						
166 Tucannon			1	368						
172 Mountain View										
175 Lick Creek	2	2,525								
178 Peola	11	13,503	4	3,604	1	2,602	2	940		
181 Couse	6	7,235	2	3,420	1	1,617				
186 Grande Ronde										
Total	50	71,548	66	102,196	3	6,056	7	12,983	0	0
Total Private Lands Access Acres	192,783									

## ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 3 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be extremely difficult to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. However, there are several online tools and resources many hunters do not know about that provide valuable information that helps solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources available to the general public.

## **DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS**

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands is DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than \$10 on [DNR's website](#).

## **ONLINE PARCEL DATABASES**

Technology has come a long way and has made it much easier for the general public to identify tax parcel boundaries and the associated landowner. However, because this technology has not been readily available in the past, there are several hunters who are not aware it exists.

Walla Walla County tax parcels can be searched using the county GIS site, which is a user-friendly mapping program that allows users to zoom in to their area of interest, click on a parcel, and identify who the owner of that parcel is. The [Walla Walla County GIS tool](#) can be accessed online.

## **WDFW'S MAPPING TOOL**

WDFW's GoHunt tool has been revamped as the new [Hunt Regulations Web map](#) and provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU. The web map can be accessed by clicking the above link or going to WDFW's hunting website.