

2024 District 5 Hunting Prospects

Grant and Adams counties



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WILDLIFE**

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District 5 general overview

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)'s District 5 encompassing Grant and Adams Counties, provides abundant opportunities to hunt waterfowl, upland bird, and mule deer. Ring-necked pheasants and California quail continue to be the most abundant and popular upland game birds in District 5, and Grant County is one of the top-producing counties for both species. Elsewhere in the district, hunters can find mourning doves, bobcats, cougars, chukar, gray partridge, cottontail rabbits, coyotes, and both general season and permit opportunities for mule deer. Hunters can harvest elk in Game Management Units (GMUs) 272, 278 and 284, but elk populations are small and dispersed.

WDFW manages the [Columbia Basin Wildlife Area](#) that boasts approximately 190,000 acres of public land (Figure 5). There are additional public lands in District 5 managed by the [Washington Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\)](#), [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#), Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Habitat in District 5 consists primarily of agricultural fields, shrubsteppe, and wetlands in Grant County and dryland crop fields, rangelands, and shrubsteppe in Adams County. The district's shrubsteppe habitat is dominated by native upland vegetation like big sagebrush, bitterbrush, rabbitbrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, Sandberg's bluegrass, great basin wildrye, needle-and-thread, and Indian ricegrass. Cheatgrass is the most common non-native species in District 5 habitats.

Riparian areas and wetlands are abundant in Grant County and mostly associated with the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project (CBIP). Coyote willow, golden currant, and Woods' rose are the dominant native shrubs associated with riparian habitats. Non-native riparian species include Russian olive, which is found throughout CBIP. There are many important crops for wildlife within the CBIP, including corn, wheat, hay, and orchards. Within the CBIP, hunters can expect to find abundant waterfowl as well as pheasants, quail, and mourning doves.

Fragmented shrubsteppe, dryland wheat, coulees, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands surround the CBIP. In these areas, hunters can expect to find gray partridge, mule deer, and chukar in the steepest portions of the district (Sun Lakes, Quincy Lakes, and Banks Lake units). Learn more about [WDFW wildlife area units](#).

Public Lands in District 5 GMUs

Figure 1. Public Lands in GMU 272.

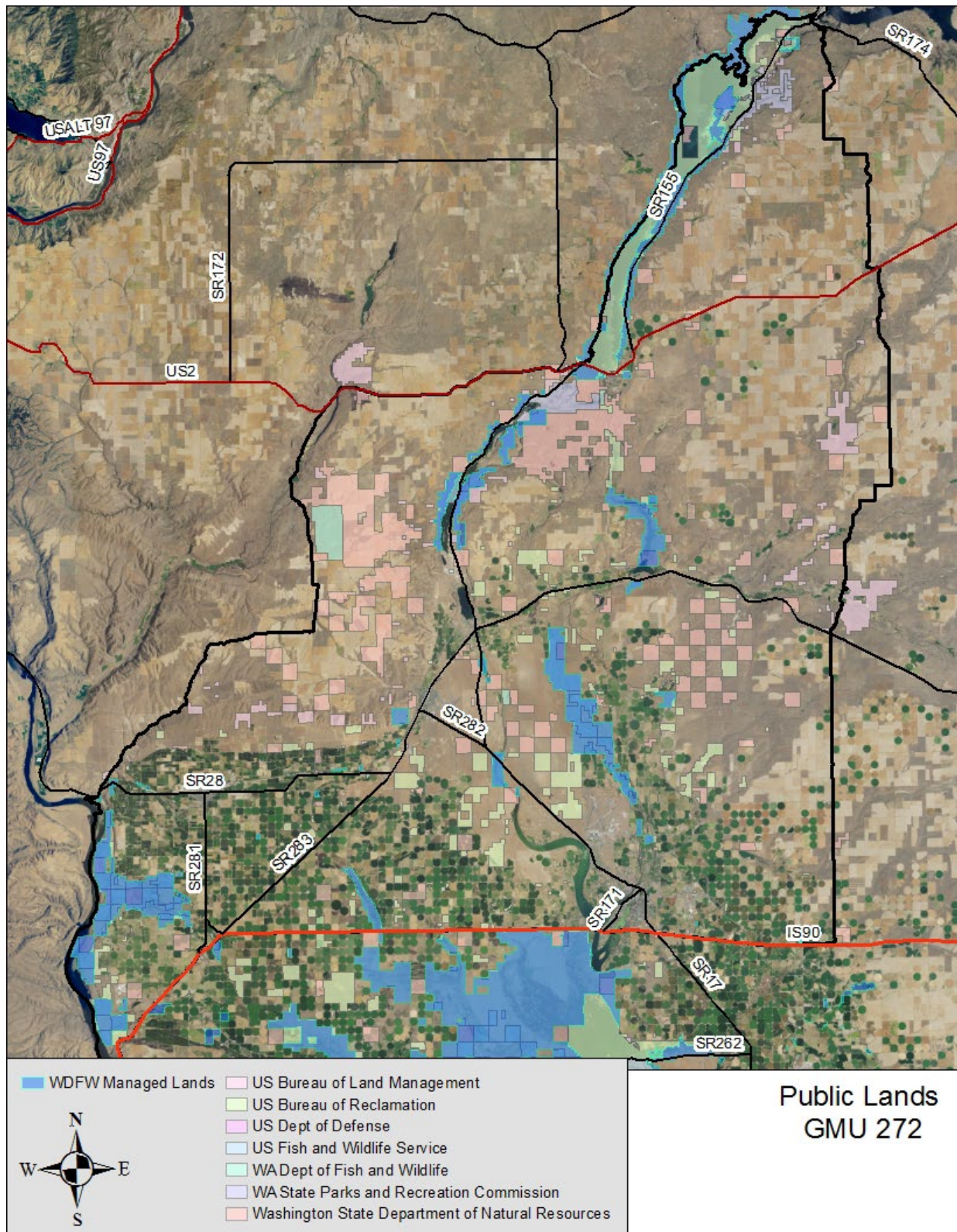


Figure 2. Public Lands in GMU 278.

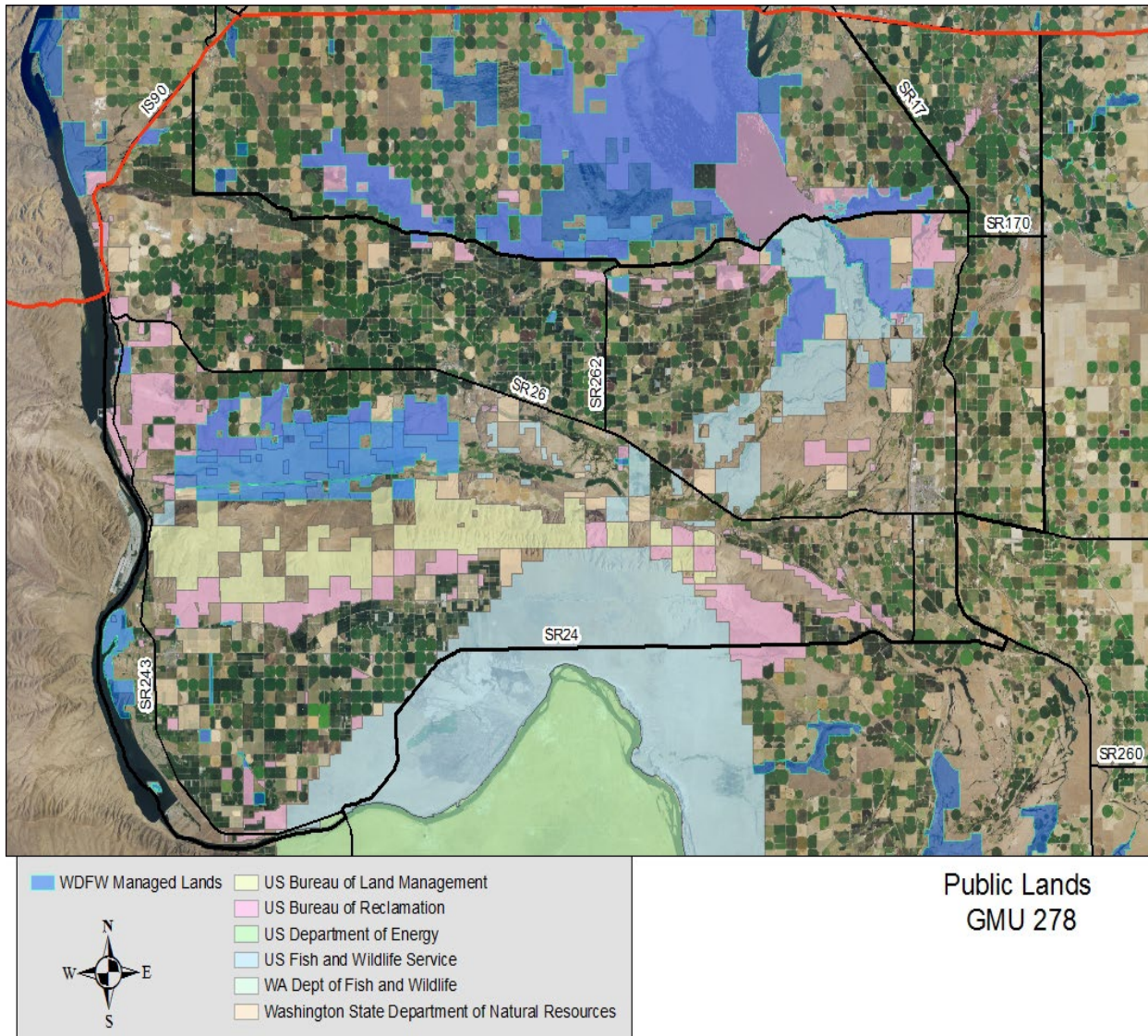


Figure 3. Public Lands in GMU 284.

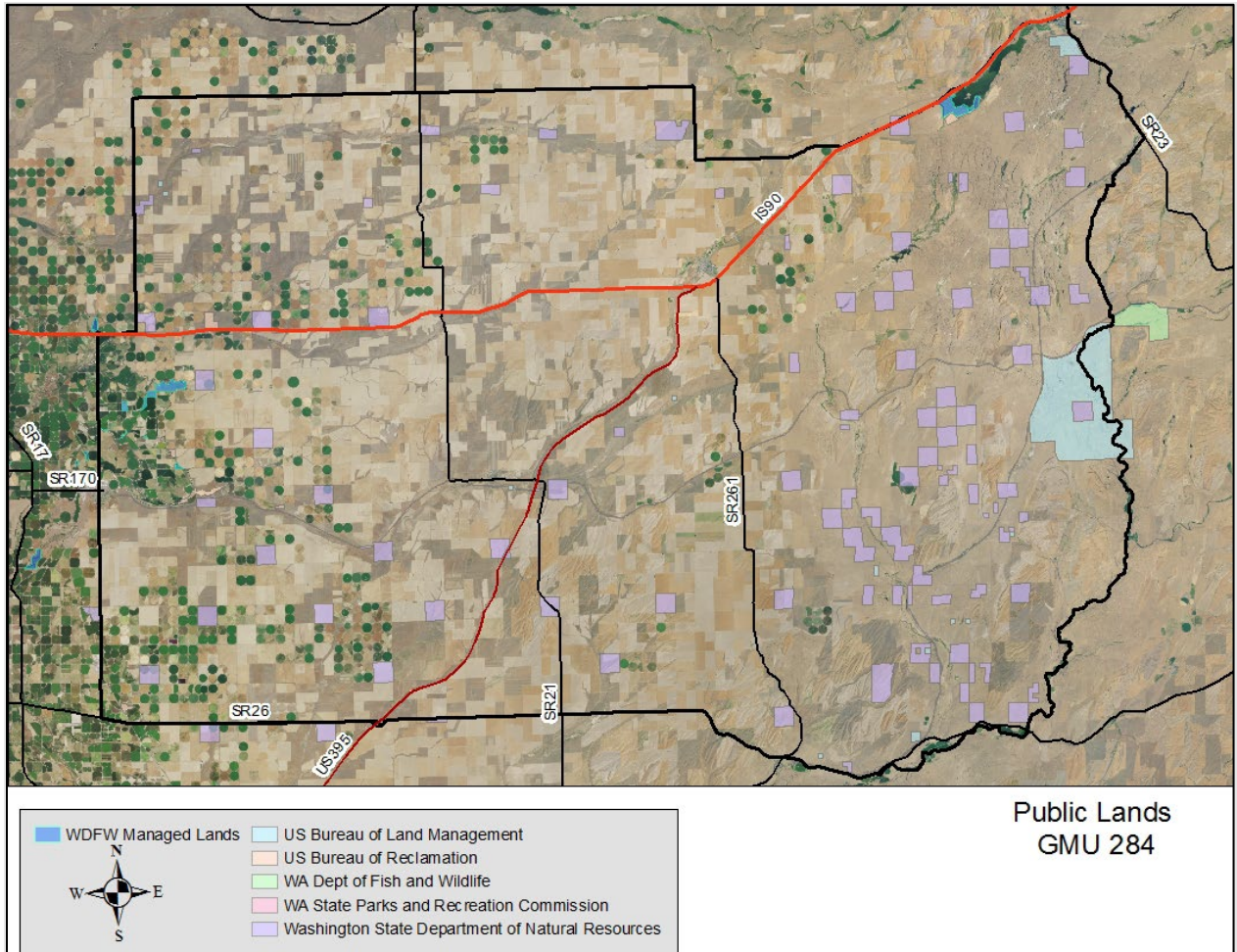


Figure 4. Public Lands in GMU 290.

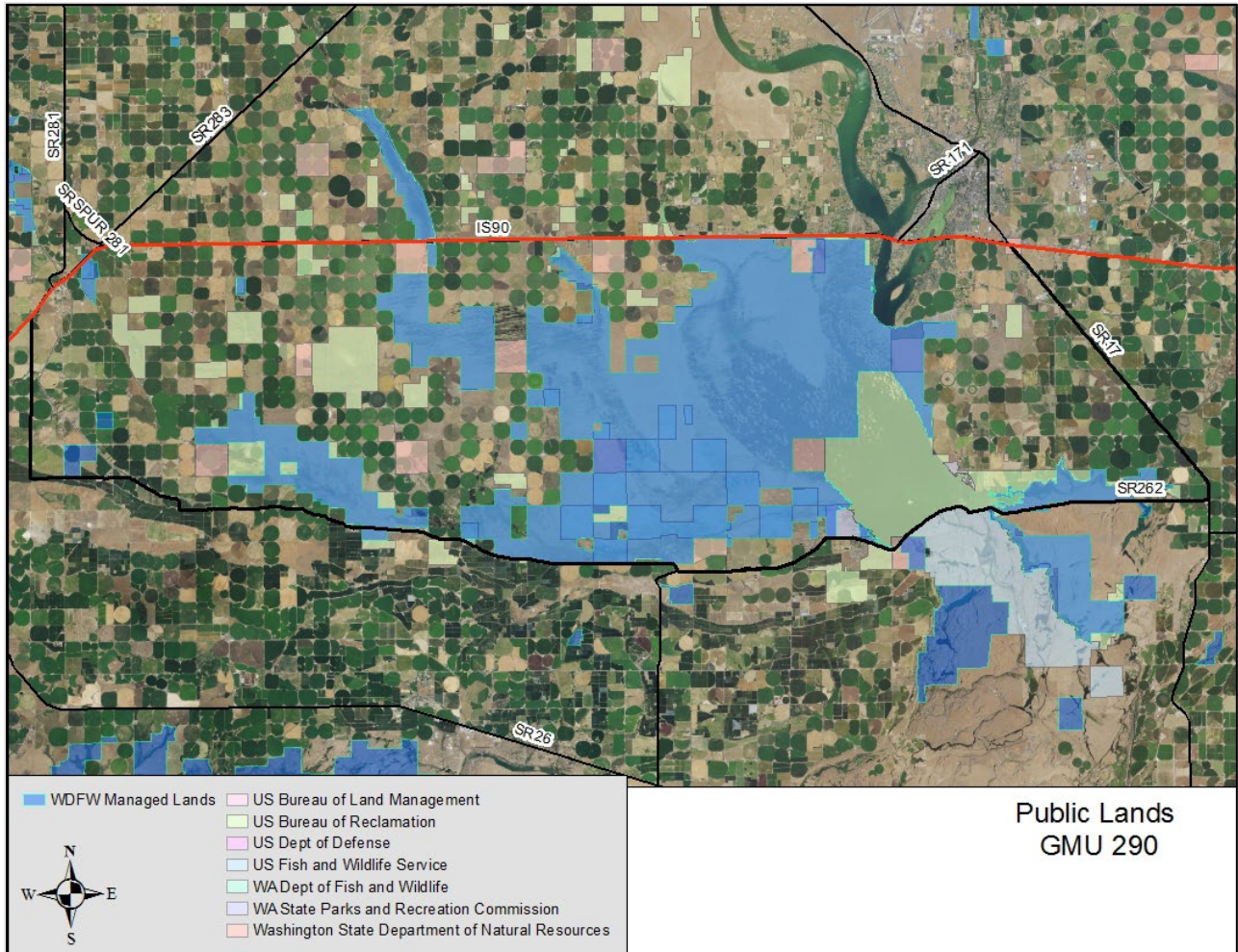


Figure 5. WDFW Columbia Basin Wildlife Area units available for hunting highlighted green.



Table 1. Chance of locating species of interest.

Species	Banks Lake	Sun Lakes	Gloyd Seeps	Quincey Lakes	Winchester Lake	Desert	Potholes Reservoir	Seep Lakes	Goose Lakes	Lower Crab Cr.	Priest Rapids	Billy Clapp	Sprague Lake
Mule deer	G	F	L	VL	N	VG*	VG*	L	L	F	L	N	N
Bear	VL	VL	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Elk	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	VL	N	N	N
Cougar	VL	VL	N	VL	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Coyote	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	F	L	F
Bobcat	L	L	VL	VL	N	N	N	N	N	VL	N	N	N
Rabbit	L	L	F	F	L	VL	VL	L	L	F	L	L	L
Chukar	G	F	N	L	N	N	N	N	N	F	L	F	N
Gray Partridge	F	L	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	VL	N	N	VL	L
Pheasant (Wild)	L	VL	G	L	F	G	G	VL	VL	G	VL	VL	L
Pheasant (Released)	G	N	VG**	N	N	N	N	N	N	G	G	N	N
California Quail	G	G	G	F	F	VG	VG	F	F	VG	L	F	L
Ducks	G	F	F	F	VG	VG	VG	F	F	G	F	N	N
Geese	F	F	L	L	L	F	F	F	F	F	L	N	N
Mourning Dove	F	L	G	F	F	G	G	F	F	F	L	L	L
Bullfrog	L	VL	F	L	F	VG	VG	F	F	F	L	VL	L

VG = Very good; G = Good; F = Fair; L = Limited; VL = Very limited; N = none.

Game reserves

Hunting, trapping, and wildlife disturbance is prohibited within game reserve boundaries. These reserves provide undisturbed areas for waterfowl and improve hunting opportunities in other nearby locations during hunting season. Hunters can find game reserve boundaries in the [WDFW Hunt Planner](#).

Figure 6. Location of game reserves and closed federal refuge units (in red) throughout and adjacent to District 5.

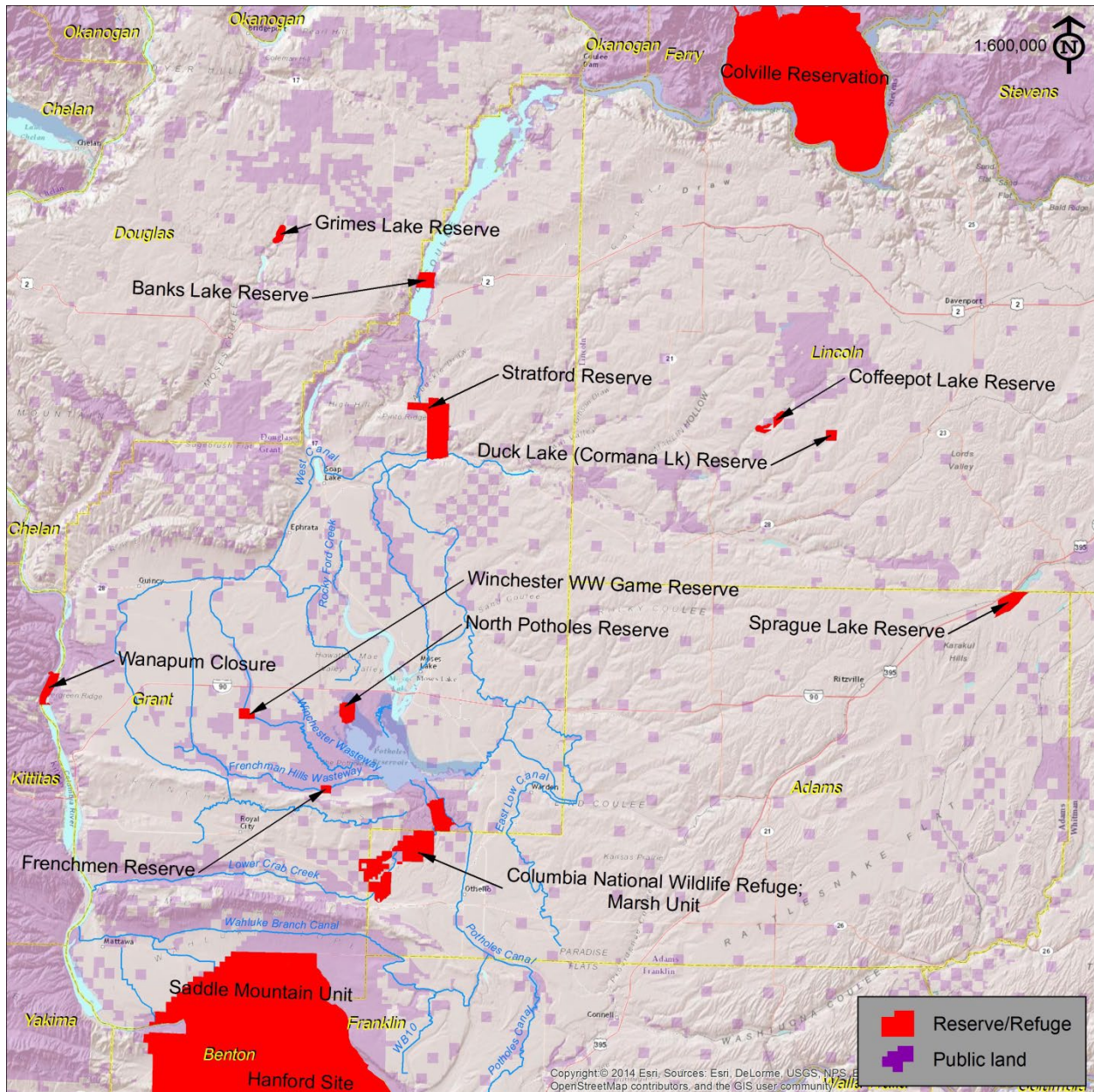


Figure 7. Stratford Game Reserve (Billy Clapp Lake Unit).

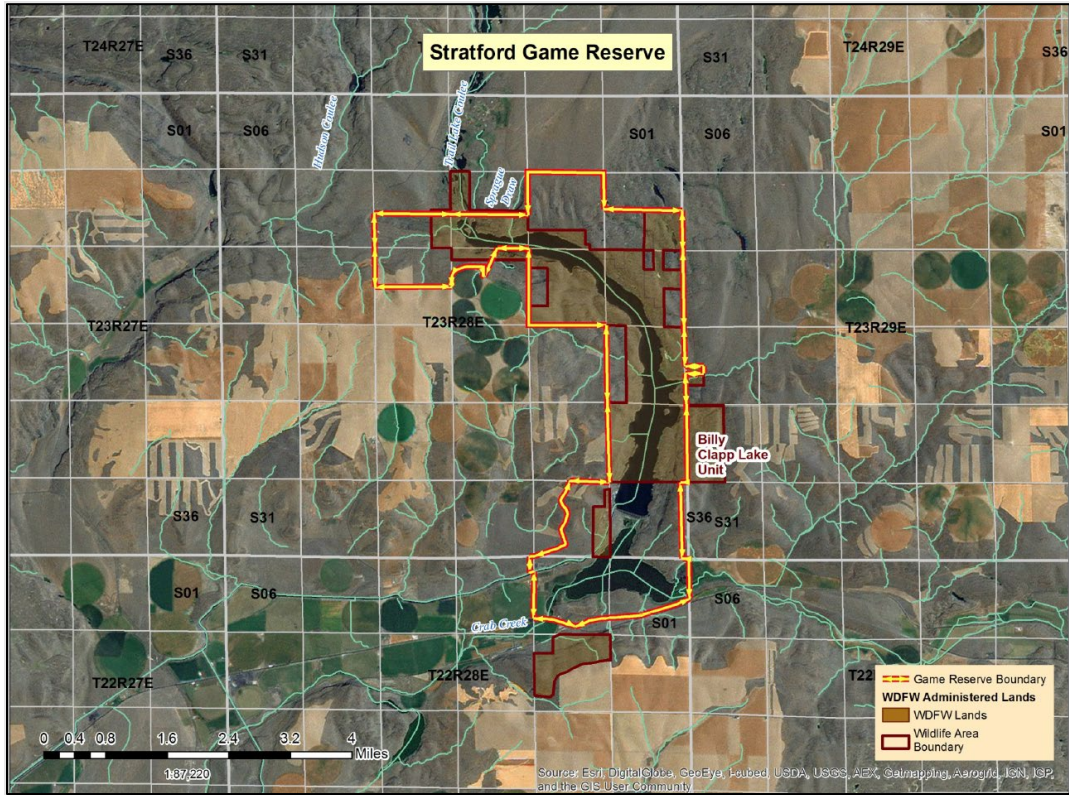


Figure 8. Banks Lake Game Reserve (Banks Lake Unit).

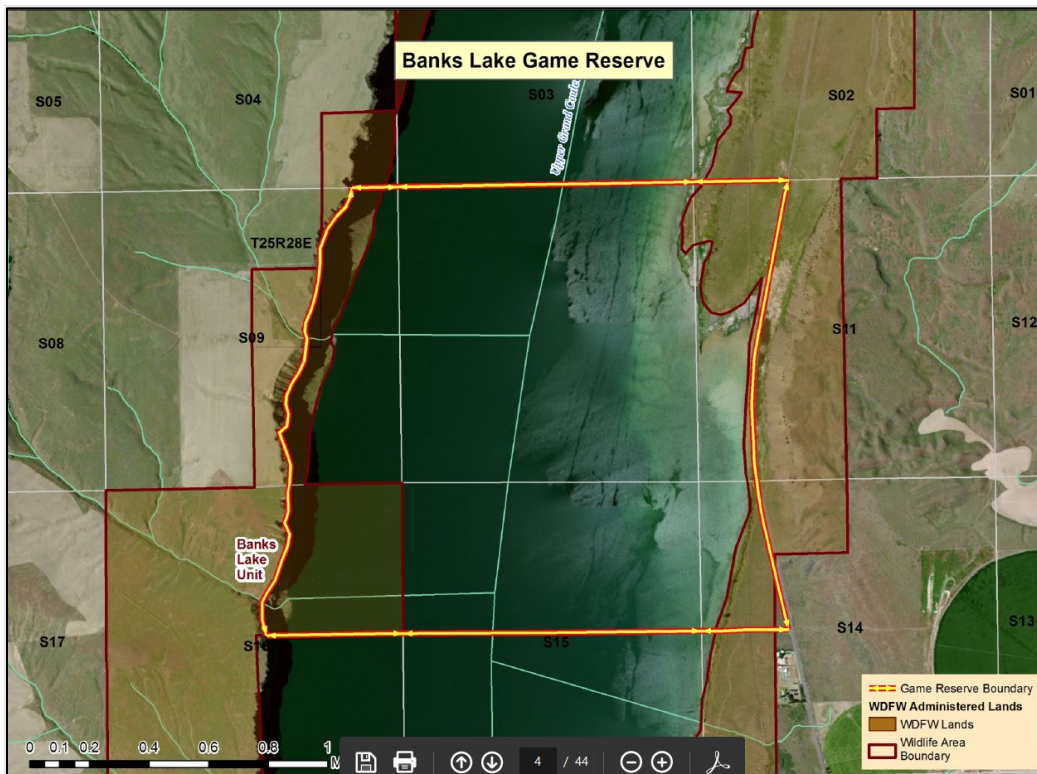


Figure 9. North Potholes Game Reserve (Potholes Reservoir Unit).

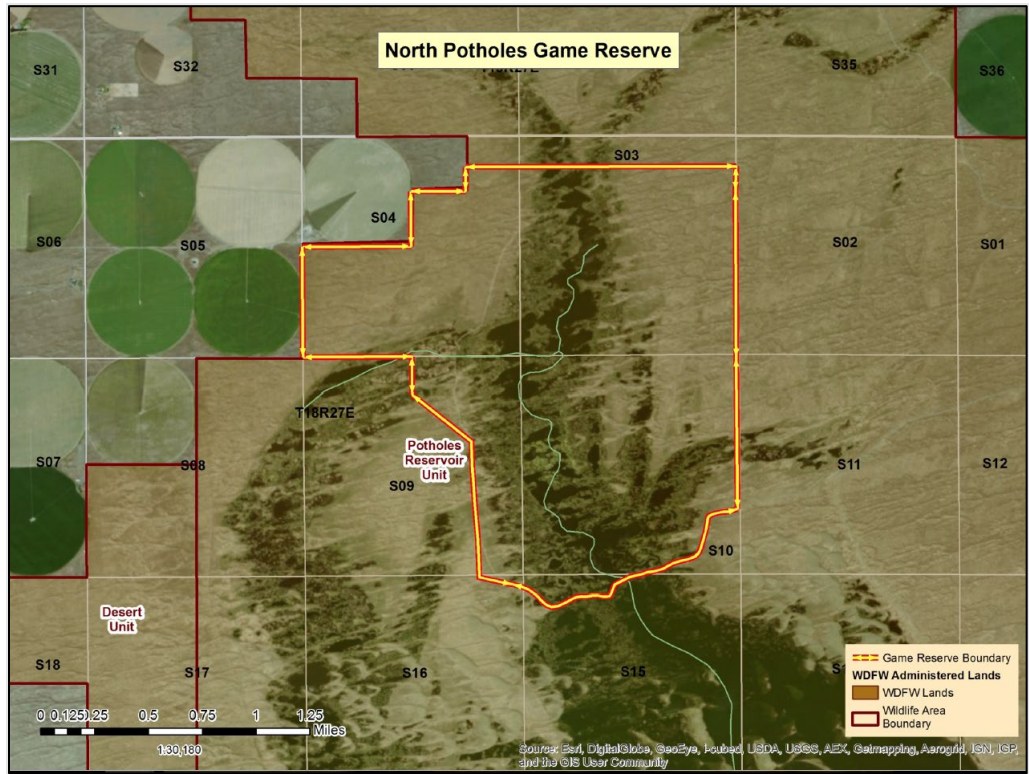


Figure 10. Frenchman Game Reserve (Desert Unit).



Figure 11. Winchester Game Reserve (Desert Unit).

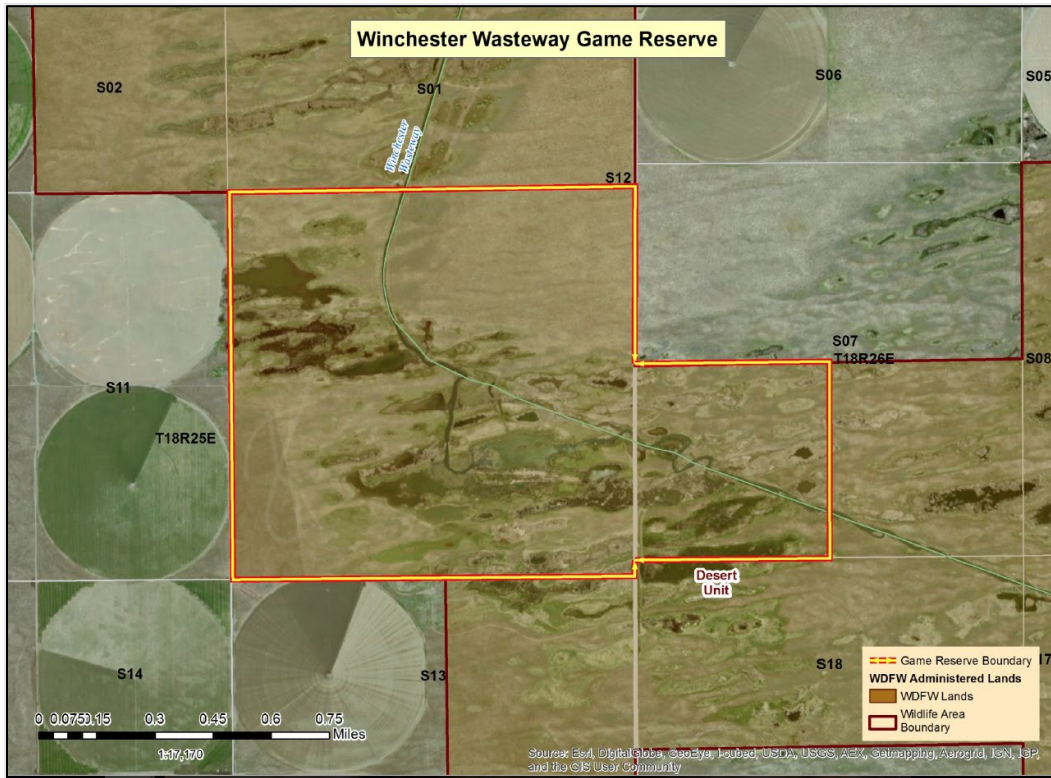
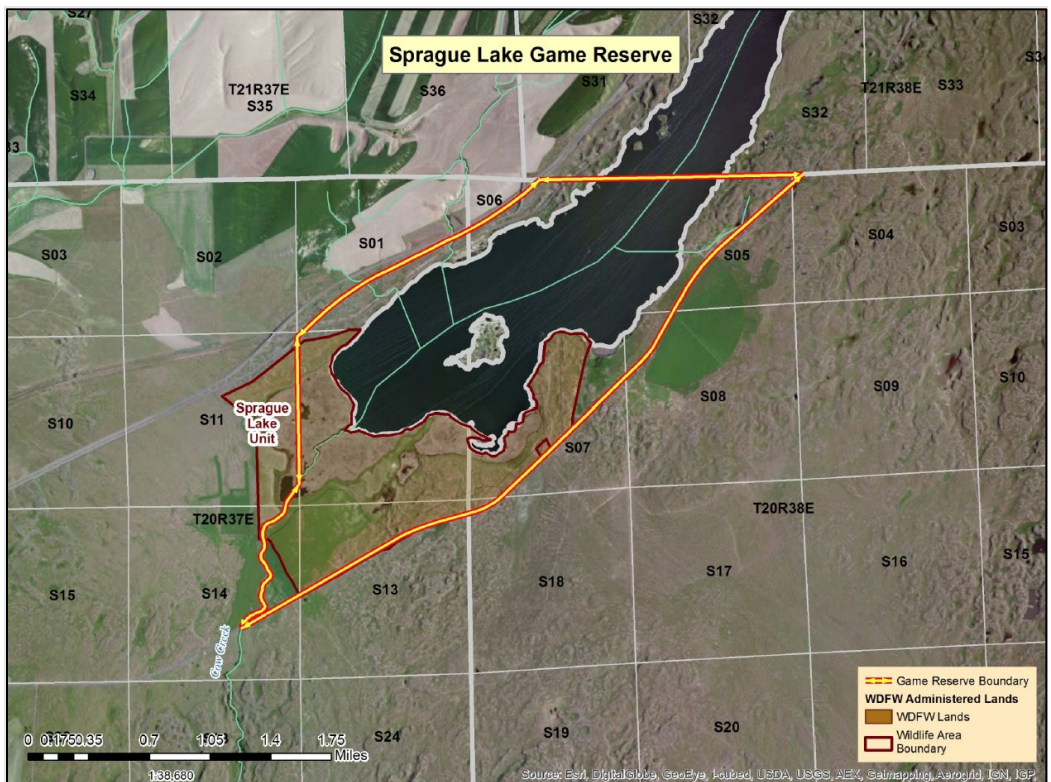


Figure 12. Sprague Game Reserve (Sprague Lake Unit).



Elk

General information, management goals, and population status

Elk are rare in District 5. There are no resident elk herds in game management unit (GMU) 272, 278, or 290. WDFW provides *any elk* hunting opportunities during the general archery, modern firearm, and muzzleloader seasons.

GMU 284 is near the Hangman Creek sub-herd of the Selkirk elk herd. This herd of approximately 300-500 elk is typically found approximately 16 miles northeast at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge (GMU 130). These elk enter GMU 284, where hunters may harvest them.

Hunters harvested 39 elk in District 5 in 2023. There were 23 elk harvested in GMU 284, 6 elk in GMU 278, and 10 in GMU 272.

What to expect during the 2024 season

If hunters wish to hunt elk in District 5 during the 2024 season, they should seek access on private lands in the eastern portions of GMU 284. Public land opportunities for elk hunting are very limited in District 5.

Deer



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

General information, management goals, and population status

GMU 272

GMU 272 includes approximately 53,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Gloyd Seeps, Banks Lake, Sun Lakes, Billy Clapp, and Quincy Lakes units), most of which is open to hunting. The number of deer hunters that hunt general seasons (including multi-weapon permits) within GMU 272 ranges from about 1,000 to 1,700. The reported success rate of antlerless permits for disabled hunters was 50% in 2023. The success rates for youth permits was 59% in 2023.

GMU 278

GMU 278 includes approximately 36,000 acres of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (Lower Crab Creek Unit), which is predominantly shrubsteppe habitat with some interspersed wetlands along Crab Creek. Numerous parcels within DNR and federal ownership also exist in this GMU. The number of general season deer hunters within GMU 278, including multi-weapon permits, ranges from about 100-310 and harvest ranges between 20 – 90 deer. WDFW does not perform formal surveys in GMU 278, but harvest data indicates a stable deer population.

GMU 284

GMU 284 is predominately private property, so hunters should plan to get permission to access private lands and/or plan on hunting lands enrolled in the WDFW Access Program. There are some small parcels (<640 acres) of public lands scattered throughout this GMU. The number of deer general season hunters within GMU 284 ranges from 650-1,100.

GMU 290

GMU 290 is a special-permit Quality Deer Hunt Unit, with restrictions that reduce hunter density and encourages older deer. The unit is also open for various upland hunting and contains three Regulated Access Areas for waterfowl. Buck-doe ratios have remained consistent at approximately 50 bucks:100 does, with most bucks classified as greater than 2.5 years old during aerial surveys.

Harvest success for bucks varies greatly by hunt choice. Hunts listed in order from highest to lowest success rates are: late modern, early modern, muzzleloader, late archery, and early archery. This GMU contains very few access roads, and scouting is **strongly recommended** to increase success. 41% of the land in GMU 290 is part of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and managed by WDFW, so public opportunity is widely available. Public land in this unit consists of riparian and wetland areas associated with the Winchester and Frenchman waste ways and is surrounded by sandy dunes with varying densities of shrub cover. Most of the private agricultural land in this unit is in the western half. Hunters with permits will experience much greater success by hiking further away from access roads and scouting the area. Other hunting takes place on this unit during almost all permit hunts, with waterfowl and upland birds being the most popular.

Table 2. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 272 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Archery	35	17	52	281	19%
Modern Firearm	0	186	186	947	20%
Multi-season	6	32	38	161	24%
Muzzleloader	0	13	13	75	17%
TOTALS:	41	248	289	1464	n/a

Table 3. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 278 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Archery	2	16	18	85	21%
Modern Firearm	0	40	40	178	22%
Multi-season	2	21	23	51	45%
Muzzleloader	0	0	0	22	0%
TOTALS:	4	77	81	336	n/a

Table 4. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 284 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Archery	6	14	20	84	24%
Modern Firearm	0	229	229	739	31%
Multi-season	5	35	50	94	43%
Muzzleloader	0	26	26	91	29%
TOTALS:	11	304	325	1008	n/a

Table 5. Mule deer harvest summary for GMU 290 by weapon type.

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Modern – Early	n/a	14	14	16	88%
Modern – Late	n/a	5	5	5	100%
Archery – Early	n/a	3	3	7	43%
Archery – Late	n/a	1	1	6	17%
Muzzleloader	n/a	1	1	2	50%

Weapon	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	Number of Hunters	% Success
Second Deer	16	n/a	16	19	84%
Youth	7	n/a	7	8	88%
Totals	23	24	47	63	n/a

Data are based only on hunter reports; not all hunters reported effort or harvest.

For additional information, please refer to the [Adams and Grant counties Deer Harvest Statistics](#).

What to expect during the 2024 season

Most deer harvest occurs in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284 (Ritzville). In both GMUs, post-hunt buck:doe ratios from ground surveys in 2022 were within advised management objectives (20:100 bucks:does). Fawns were abundant during the surveys, implying that the deer numbers are stable. Hunters should expect another good year for mule deer hunting throughout the district. Hunters should note that the during the Archery general seasons for both GMUs 272 and 278 antlerless deer opportunities have been removed and have been included in the Antlerless permit category.

Deer areas

There are localized deer concentration areas in District 5 where deer have the potential to cause crop damage during harsh or prolonged winters. WDFW provides limited, permit-only opportunities to harvest antlerless deer near these areas to discourage congregations of mule deer that can cause crop damage. District 5 Deer Areas include Deer Area 2010 (Lakeview) in GMU 272 and Deer Area 2011 (Benge) in GMU 284. Refer to the most recent [Big Game Hunting Seasons and Regulations pamphlet](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions.

Figure 13. Lakeview Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow).

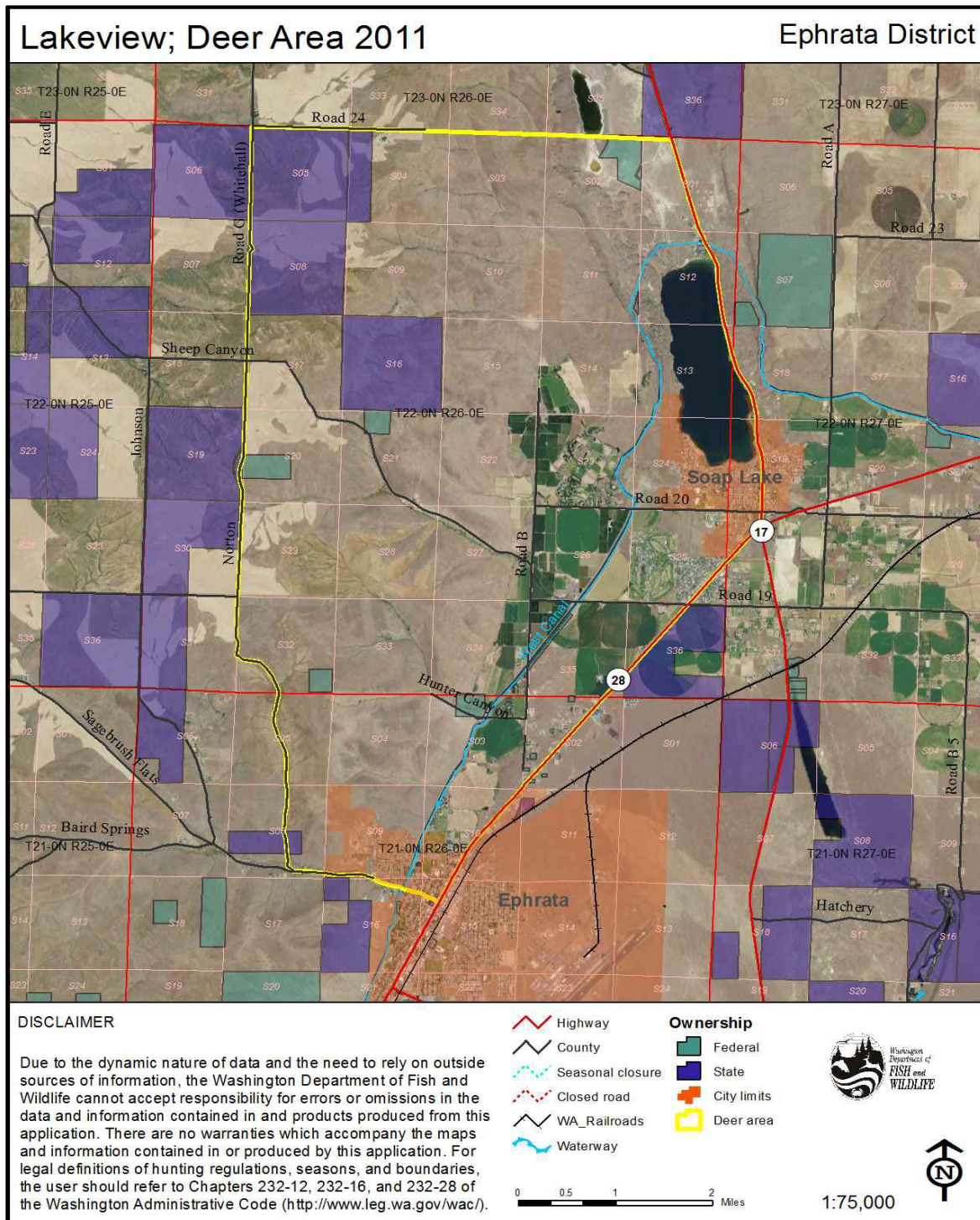
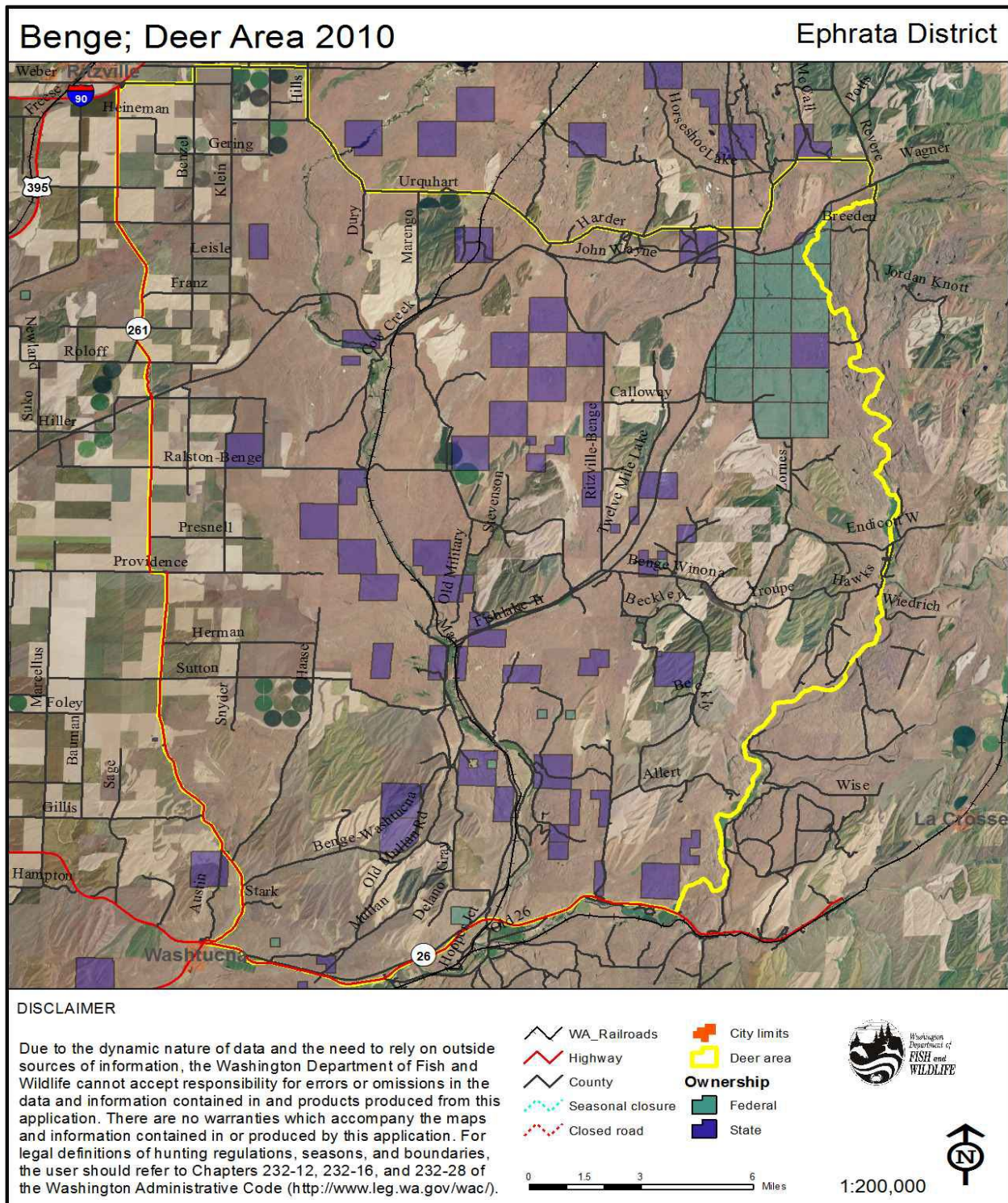


Figure 14. Benge Deer Area (boundary highlighted in yellow).



Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

District 5 does not have a resident black bear population and it is unlikely that one would become established.

What to expect during the 2024 season

District 5 is not an optimal area to target black bears. Occasionally, bears may disperse through this district, especially near the Beezley Hills and areas surrounding Banks Lake.

Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status

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

What to expect during the 2024 season

District 5 is not an optimal area to target cougars. However, the most likely places to encounter cougars are Beezley Hills, Moses Coulee, and along the Crab Creek drainage upstream from the town of Stratford.

Pheasant

Since 2006, the highest number of pheasants in Washington have been harvested annually from Grant County. In 2023, hunters harvested 5,527 birds in Grant County and 1,171 in Adams County for a total harvest of 6,698 pheasants in District 5. Refer to [Adams and Grant counties Pheasant Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information and the most recent harvest information.

The largest concentrations of wild pheasants on WDFW lands in District 5 are found within GMU 290 (Desert Unit) between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George, although private lands can host good populations. Both wild and released birds can be found in the Lower Crab Creek and Gloyd Seeps units, whereas hunters will likely only find released birds in the Dry Falls, Steamboat Rock, Quincy, and Buckshot sites. Hunters can find directions to pheasant release sites in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) pamphlet.

Nontoxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites. Please note that pheasant release dates are not made public to reduce overcrowding at release sites and ensure the safety of WDFW staff members during releases. Hunters can count on pheasants being released before the youth upland season (Sept. 14-15) and before the general season opening day (Oct. 21), with two additional releases taking place before the end of November.

Hunters looking for wild birds should focus their efforts on areas of dense cover. Thickets of Russian olive, cattail, roses are preferred by pheasants, as well as weedy areas associated with irrigation ditches, canals, and ponds. Hunters should be prepared to do some walking when pursuing wild pheasants, as they tend to flush well in advance of hunters and are just about as likely to run as flush. Hunters can increase their odds of both finding and retrieving the birds in dense cover by hunting with a dog. Be aware - porcupines are often seen in many of these areas.

Hunters can anticipate seeing many pheasants in District 5. Most hunters who invest effort and cover ground will find wild birds. Hunters can increase their chances for a productive hunt by selecting nontoxic shot and diversifying the game bag with waterfowl and other upland birds.

Quail

Grant County is typically one of the best producers for quail. In 2023, hunters in Grant County harvested 4,520 birds and hunters in Adams County harvested 1,118 birds. Refer to [Adams and Grant counties Quail Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information.

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

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

Quail hunting is expected to be good again this year with reports from the field painting an optimistic picture. Hunters can increase their chance of a successful hunting trip by using nontoxic shot and targeting multiple species.

Chukar and partridge

During the 2023 season, hunters harvested 48 Hungarian partridges and 82 chukars in Grant County. In Adams County hunters, harvested 12 Hungarian partridges and 113 chukars. The harvest success rates for both species in District 5 fluctuates dramatically from year to year, in part because both species are widely dispersed. Refer to [Adams and Grant counties Chukar Harvest Statistics](#) for additional information.

District 5 is not a popular destination for chukar or gray partridge hunters due to relatively small populations, but hunters can still find birds throughout much of the district. Most chukar hunting in the district occurs in the Coulee Corridor areas around Banks and Lenore lakes and along the Columbia River breaks north of Vantage. Gray partridges occur in low densities throughout the Columbia Basin. Hunters rarely target them, but they are harvested opportunistically by those hunting chukars, quail, or pheasants. Most gray partridges occur in private agricultural fields, particularly in the dryland wheat portions of Adams County and, to a lesser degree, Grant County. Reports from the field paint a very good picture for both chukars and gray partridge.



Chukar brood. Photo by Eric Braaten.

Dove



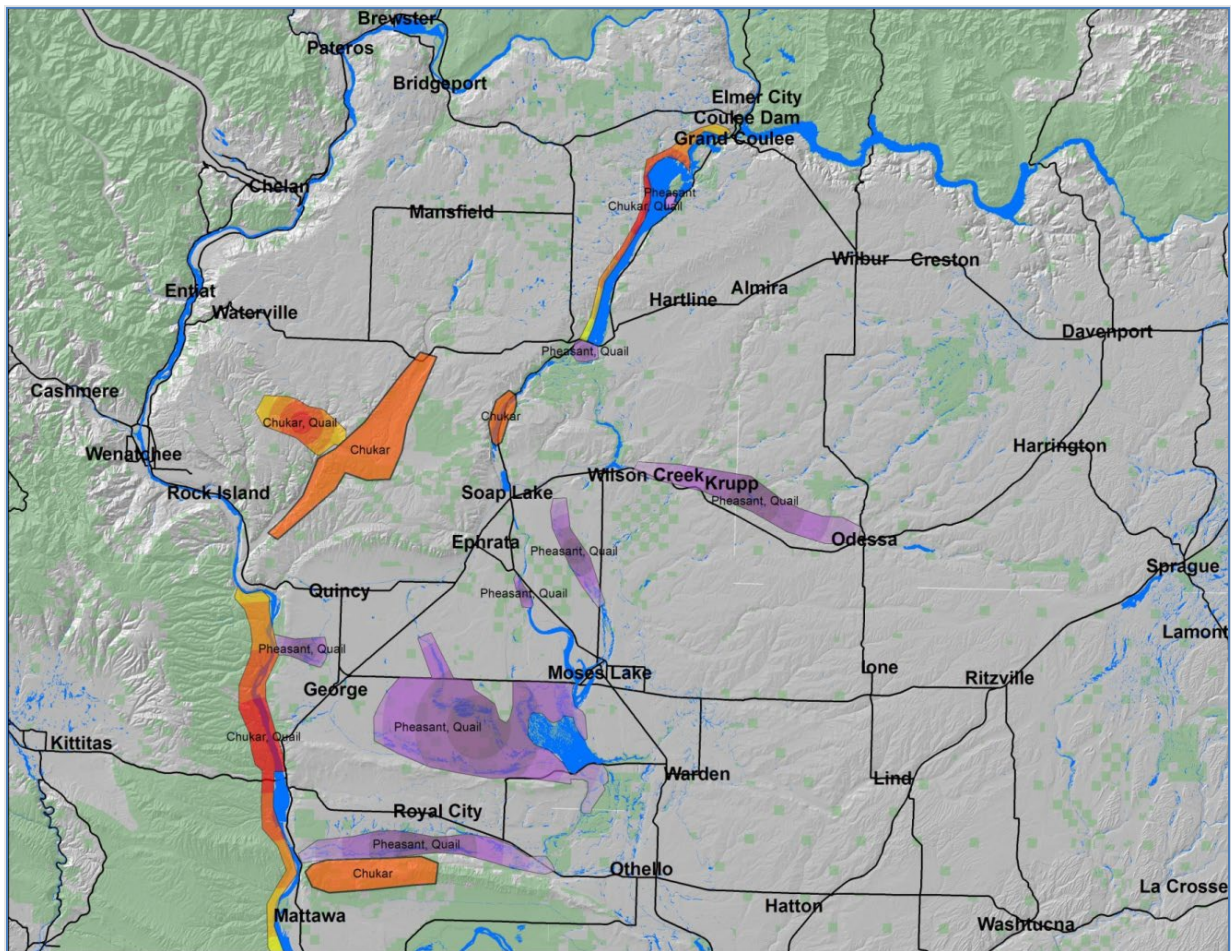
Banded mourning dove. Photo by Paula Clements.

Grant County is consistently one of the Washington's top destinations for mourning dove hunting, with hunters harvesting 8,938 birds in 2023. Hunters harvested 1,078 doves in Adams County in 2023. Dove hunting has been extended through Oct. 30, and dove hunting is expected to be similar to last year. If weather remains stable through the season, the birds found during scouting trips will likely be there during the hunting season, but unstable weather conditions often redistribute birds. Hunters may improve their success by securing access to agricultural fields. Evening hunts can be productive in wheat fields or traditional roosting areas. Look for large stands of trees (ideally with dead limbs) near water and surrounded by agriculture for the best roost hunt results. Hunters can find roost site hunting along the north and west sides of Potholes Reservoir, east side of Winchester Lake, and throughout the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area.

Hunters should remember that Eurasian collared doves can be found in the same areas as mourning doves and **do not** count towards daily bag limits. Eurasian collared doves are classified as a *Deleterious Species* in Washington and have few regulations governing harvest, so be sure to take a few when the opportunity arises.

Upland bird management

Figure 15. Generalized upland bird concentrations (pheasant, quail, and chukar) throughout the Ephrata District.



Waterfowl

Grant County is typically one of Washington’s top destinations for duck and goose hunting. In 2023, hunters harvested 64,364 ducks in Grant County and 7,707 in Adams County. Hunters can find additional information at [WDFW’s game harvest statistics webpage](#).

In 2023, hunters harvested 16,428 geese in Grant County, and Adams County hunters added 2,857. Hunters can find additional information at [WDFW’s game harvest statistics webpage](#).



A breeding pair of cinnamon teal. Photo by Paula Clements.

Hunting tips

Scouting

Scouting is the key to success when waterfowl hunting. There are many places in District 5 where the public can go waterfowl hunting, but hunters should first identify general flight paths to determine feeding and roosting locations. Duck feeding flights usually occur early in the morning and near dusk - outside legal shooting hours.

Select areas to hunt based on the species you want to target. Dabbling ducks are more common on the Columbia Plateau, where grain corn and wheat fields attract mallards and pintails and shallow wetlands attract teal, American wigeon, and gadwall. Canada geese feed primarily in wheat and alfalfa fields, so requesting permission from private landowners is often necessary to secure field goose hunting.

Diving ducks are typically hunted along the Columbia River, particularly at Wells Pool, Wanapum Pool, and Priest Rapids Pool. They forage over beds of submerged aquatic vegetation such as pondweeds and milfoil. Knowing when and where ducks are feeding will help hunters determine the best locations to intercept the ducks with decoy spreads. Setting up a decoy spread on waters between the feeding and roosting sites will generally yield good hunting opportunities, particularly during periods of wind, snow, or fog. Typically, the larger roosting sites will be the Wanapum Closure (Columbia River), Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, and Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Marsh units.

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

Early and late season goose hunting

Goose bag limits are still separated by species, giving hunters the potential to harvest more birds. The changes will not affect where to go, but goose hunters in mid-October could increase their focus on white-fronted geese around Moses Lake, Winchester Lake, and along the Winchester Wasteway. There is no guarantee that those birds will be around during hunting season, but in typical years, there are 500 - 1,000 white-fronted geese for the first few weeks of the waterfowl season.

During the later parts of the waterfowl season, there have been increasing numbers of snow geese observed around Potholes Reservoir, Moses Lake, and even Othello area. Hunters pursuing those birds should focus efforts on the grain fields surrounding reservoirs south of Interstate 90. In recent years, the number of snow geese that have been observed wintering in the area have been upwards of 20,000.

Where to hunt

Regulated Access Areas

Dogs are often necessary for retrieving throughout most of District 5, but Regulated Access Areas (RAAs) have some shallow ponds that can be effectively hunted with only chest waders. Hunters can find time restrictions and the number of vehicles allowed for the RAA in the hunting pamphlet and Table 3 (below). These sites are *Register to Hunt*, so be sure to register at the box provided in the parking areas. WDFW collects hunter information from these sites to inform management decisions and justify further habitat improvements. Each RAA is discussed in more detail below.

Figure 16. Regulated Access Area locations adjacent to game reserves closed to hunting.

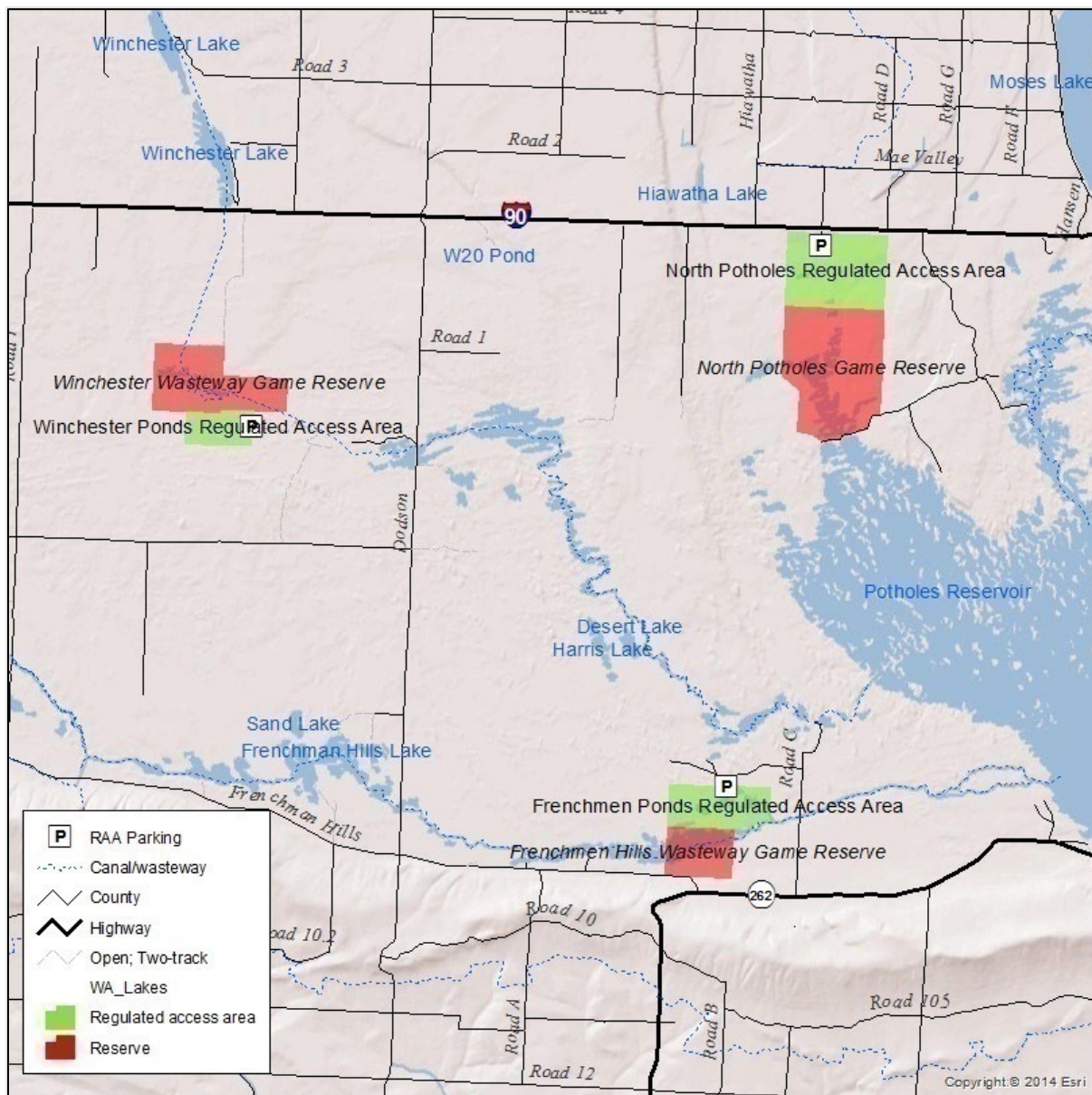
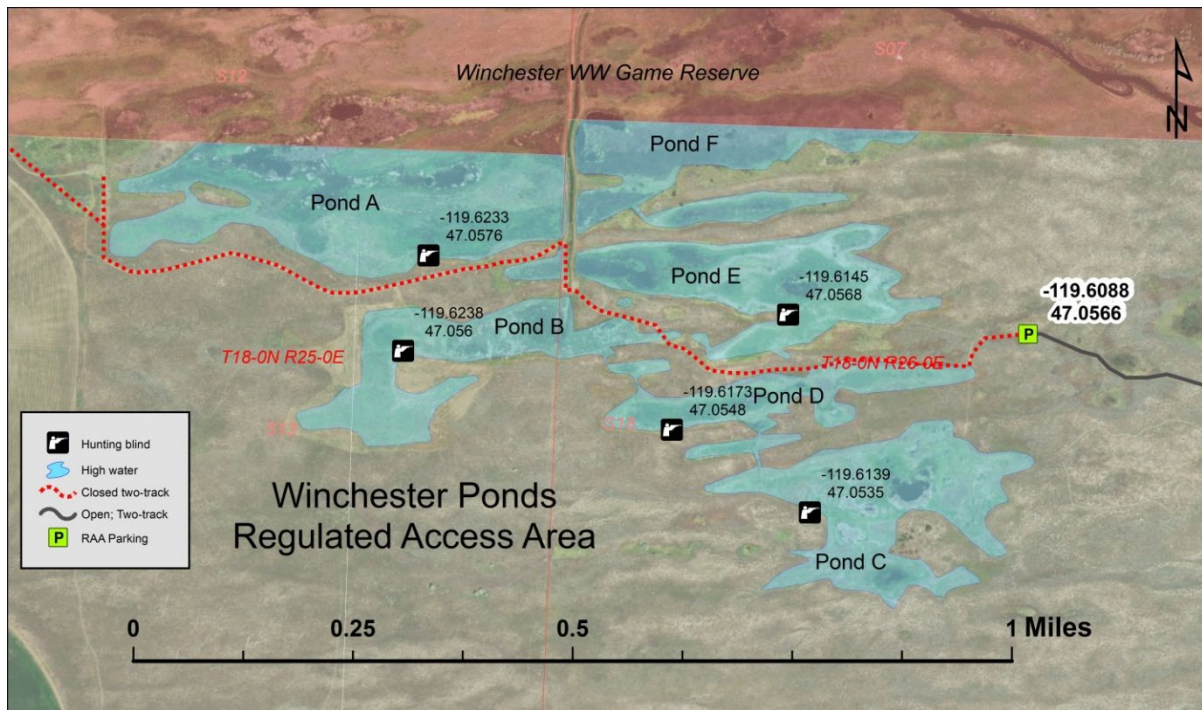


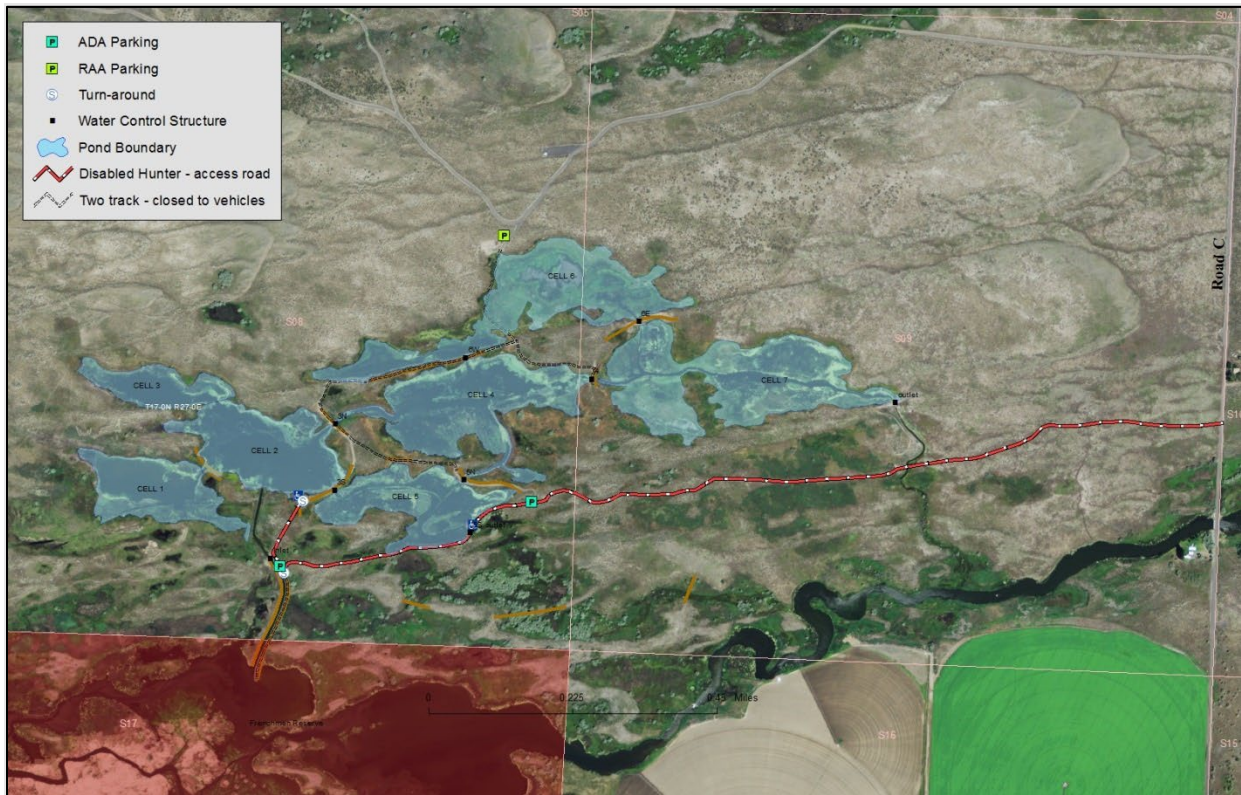
Figure 17. Winchester Ponds Regulated Access Area.



Winchester Ponds RAA

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

Figure 18. Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area.

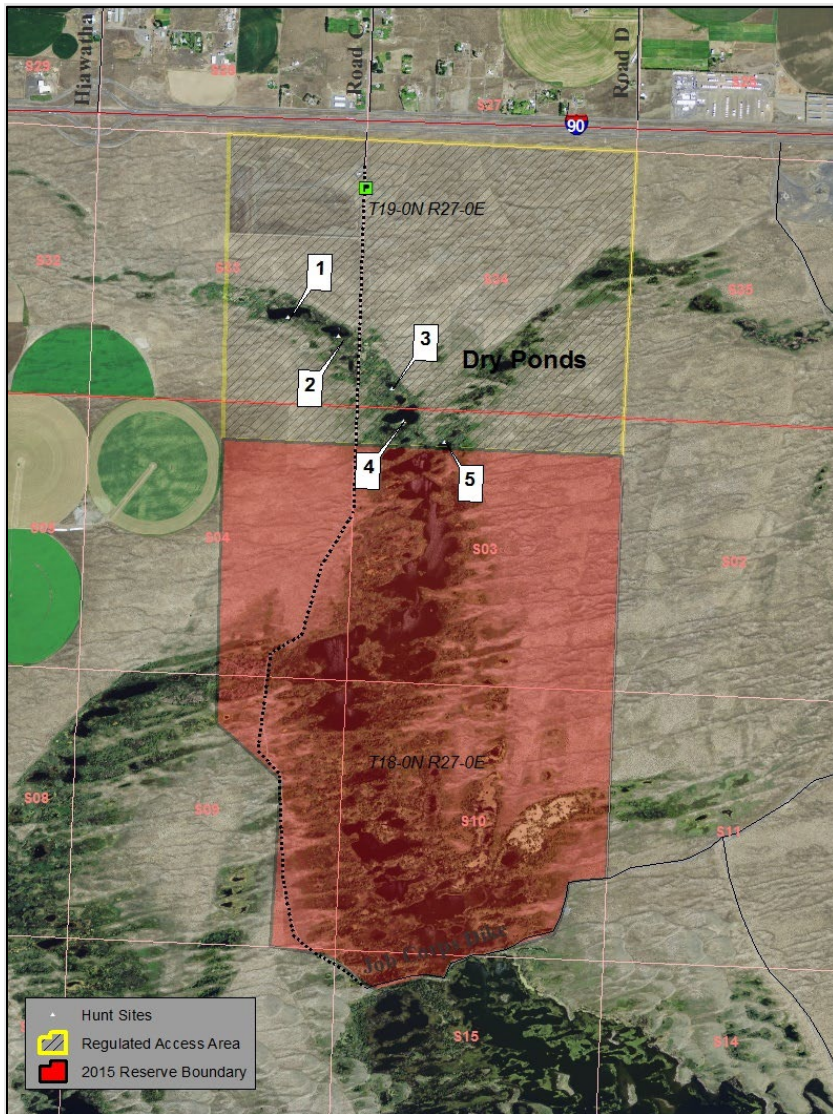


Frenchman Ponds RAA

Frenchman Ponds had extensive restoration work performed in the past few years and will hold good numbers of waterfowl throughout the hunting season. The area is open to free-roam and allows for both upland and waterfowl hunting. Two wheelchair-accessible hunting blinds are open to all hunters but must be forfeited by non-disabled hunters if a disabled hunter requests the site. Disabled hunters will be able to drive to the blinds and park relatively close, but those hunters will need to contact the regional office at 509-754-4624 for details.

This area is open seven days a week throughout all hunting seasons.

Figure 19. North Potholes Regulated Access Area.



North Potholes RAA

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

This area is open seven days a week throughout all hunting seasons.

Table 6. Details about three Regulated Access Areas in District 5.

Regulated Access Area	Parking Spots	Register to Hunt	Hunt days	Other
Winchester	5	On site	Wed., Sat., Sun.; Management Area 4 goose hunting days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.
Frenchman	5, plus 2 ADA	On site	All huntable days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.
North Potholes	5	On site	All huntable days	No vehicles before 4 a.m.

Table 7. Data collected from hunters in the Winchester Ponds RAA in District 5.

Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2013-2014	507	26
2014-2015	1067	34
2015-2016	597	12
2016-2017	249	27
2017-2018	165	5
2018-2019	454	17
2019-2020	890	33
2020-2021	602	5
2021-2022	390	12
2022-2023	599	22
2023-2024	846	6
Average	637	20

Table 8. Data collected from hunters in the Frenchman Ponds RAA in District 5.

Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2013-2014	149	3
2014-2015	281	4
2015-2016	461	9
2016-2017	368	7

Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2017-2018	394	25
2018-2019	336	7
2019-2020	382	9
2020-2021	407	4
2021-2022	387	1
2022-2023	614	11
2023-2024	684	4
Average	446	8

Table 9. Data collected from hunters in the North Potholes RAA in District 5.

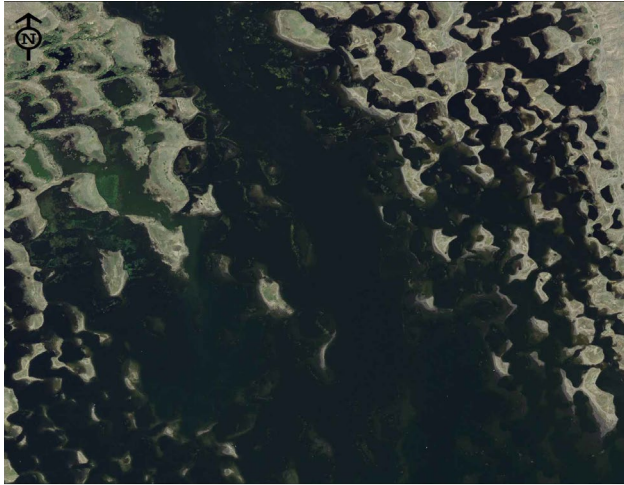
Year	Duck Harvest	Goose Harvest
2015-2016	110	11
2016-2017	268	35
2017-2018	297	25
2018-2019	108	9
2019-2020	94	14
2020-2021	24	5
2021-2022	94	7
2022-2023	4	8
2023-2024	285	6
Average	143	13

Other public lands

Many hunters consider the previously discussed RAAs to be the best option in District 5 for public waterfowl hunting. While this may be true under the right circumstances, it is not always the case. When migrant waterfowl are in the area, just about any suitable site can be productive. Many places throughout the Columbia Basin provide excellent hunting opportunities.

One of the more popular waterfowl hunting areas is Potholes Reservoir. The abundance of small dune islands provides excellent cover for hunters, making this an attractive area. Most hunters use the northern portion of the reservoir, where they find shallow water and numerous islands. New hunters should be aware that Potholes Reservoir water levels do increase dramatically through the hunting season. Hunters looking for less hunting pressure should choose weekdays.

Figure 20. Aerial imagery showing difference between high water (June) and low water (September) levels on Potholes Reservoir.

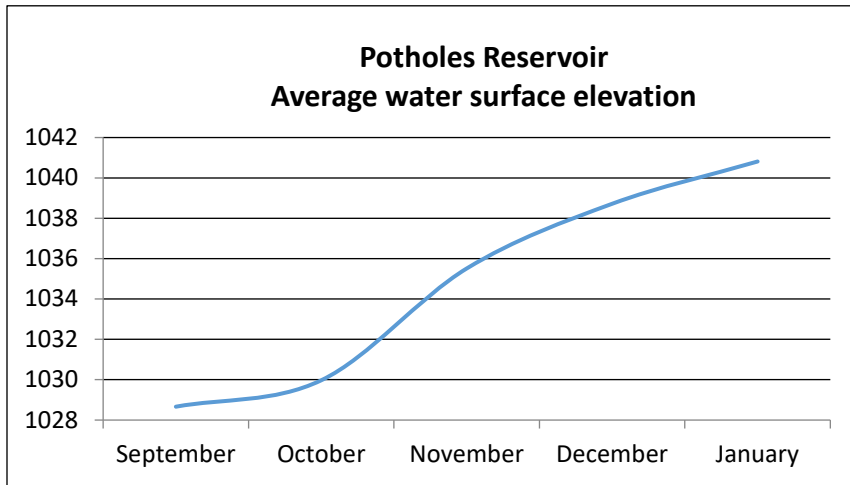


High water (June)



Low water (September)

Figure 21. Potholes Reservoir water surface elevation (in feet) during waterfowl season.



Note that water surface elevation is measured at the O’Sullivan dam and some lag in flooding will occur in the upper portions of the reservoir.

Winchester Lake is another location where hunters can expect to see good numbers of ducks, but hunting pressure can be relatively high there, too. Winchester Lake sits in a prime location, getting traffic from mallards that feed on grain corn in the surrounding area. Ducks typically come from Winchester Game Reserve, Potholes Game Reserve, Moses Lake, and/or the Wanapum Closure to feed in fields, and they occasionally attempt to shorten their commute to the roost by stopping at Winchester Lake.

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

Small game

Distribution and population status

The most common small game species targeted in District 5 is bobcats, raccoons, foxes, crows, coyotes, and cottontail rabbits. There are no sizeable populations of forest grouse, but there is a small population of turkeys in the northern portions of GMU 272. WDFW does not conduct formal surveys to assess the population status of small game species.

Bobcats occur in small numbers, and harvest is relatively low.

Raccoons occur in fair numbers in association with wetlands and residential developments when adequate habitat exists.

Fox farms occurred adjacent to the Columbia Plateau during the early 1900s but declines in fur prices during the 1950s resulted in foxes being released into the wild. Descendants of these individuals can still be found in the area; however, these introduced foxes are still considered relatively uncommon.

Crows are typically hunted in areas where damage occurs on private property. Local hunting opportunities for crows are limited.

Coyotes are a common and wide-spread small game species within the district. Hunters interested in pursuing coyotes should be sure to spend time refining their tactics and be patient when making calling sets. There are many resources available to interested hunters, and many landowners are willing to allow access for hunters who ask permission.

Cottontail rabbits are widespread and common throughout District 5 in areas of optimal habitat. In native landscapes, hunters should look for rock outcrops, greasewood patches, or other brushy thickets where suitable escape cover occurs. These rabbits are often found along habitat edges. Therefore, focusing efforts in areas near two or more of their preferred habitats will produce the best results, particularly if green forage is nearby. On private lands, cottontails can be found within and around equipment storage areas or rock piles. To be successful hunting rabbits, hunters should cover lots of ground while “kicking” brush. Stopping periodically will cause nearby rabbits to become nervous, and they will oftentimes flee when you resume walking, providing a brief shooting window. Another popular way to hunt rabbits is using trained beagles. Hunters targeting cottontails must be able to differentiate between cottontails and pygmy rabbits, which are a federally endangered species. Pygmy rabbits look like cottontails but have a brown tail. Pygmy rabbits are found in small pockets of shrubsteppe and CRP habitat. Hunters would likely only encounter pygmy rabbits north and northwest of Ephrata.

Public lands

WDFW-managed land

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area (approximately 190,000 acres) provides essential or critical habitat for hundreds of species. These lands exist to allow for sustainable wildlife populations while providing compatible recreational opportunities. For more information on this wildlife area, please visit the WDFW [Wildlife Areas webpage](#). A Discover Pass or Vehicle Access Pass is required to access all WDFW lands.

Department of Natural Resources

The Washington Department of Natural Resources maintains lands that are open to the public for compatible recreational purposes. A Discover Pass is required for access. More information is available on [DNR's website](#).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages land to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Columbia and Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuges, Hanford Reach National Monument, and lands owned by the Department of Energy are managed by the USFWS in District 5. Hunting regulations for these lands can be found on the [USFWS website](#).

National Forest

There are no National Forest System lands in District 5.

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management manages land to sustain its health, diversity, and productivity for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Some BLM land is found in District 5 and is open to public hunting and other compatible uses. For more information regarding BLM property, please visit the [BLM website](#).

Bureau of Reclamation

The Bureau of Reclamation manages, develops, and protects water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public. Their land is open to public use for compatible recreational purposes. Much, but not all, of the Reclamation property in District 5 is managed by WDFW. More information about recreational opportunities on Reclamation lands can be found on the [Reclamation website](#).

Private lands

Land ownership

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

Private Lands Program

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners statewide to provide public access through negotiated agreements. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection under [RCW 4.24.210](#). Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases monetary compensation. Lands under the agreement are well-known by WDFW Enforcement.

Currently, the Private Lands Access Program includes four basic access agreement types: Feel Free to Hunt, Register to Hunt, Hunt by Written Permission, and Hunt by Reservation. For more information, visit [WDFW's private lands webpage](#). There are approximately 179,000 acres of private property in District 5 that are accessible to hunters through these agreements. When accessing these lands, hunters should obey all posted rules and respect the property. Most complaints received from hunting access cooperators concern hunters not following rules and being disrespectful. Many hunters are not aware of the tremendous opportunities that are available on these private properties. With a little scouting and planning, hunters could improve their odds of success. To learn more about these opportunities, use [WDFW's private lands search](#) online or the [Mobile Hunting Regulations](#) mapping feature.

Table 10. Approximate acreage of access available by access type.

Private Lands Access Program	Grant County	Adams County
Feel Free to Hunt	10,511	5,085
Hunt by Written Permission	46,618	84,604
Hunt by Reservation (Online)	18,877	2,034
Total Acres	76,006	91,723

ADA access

The Ephrata District maintains sites accessible to people with disabilities at Rocky Ford Creek (Drumheller Pond), Buckshot Ranch, and the Frenchman Ponds Regulated Access Area. Hunters must have a Disabled Hunter Permit to access hunting areas behind locked gates.

Additional opportunities may be available to those seeking accommodations. Please contact WDFW's Civil Rights Team at 833-885-1012 or email CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

Directions

Rocky Ford Creek: Travel south from Ephrata on SR 282 for 7.2 miles. Turn right onto Neppel Road (Old Moses Lake Highway). Go 0.1 miles and turn right at the public fishing sign. Continue 0.5 miles to the access site. The access duck blind is on a small pond off the creek. A vehicle can be used to drop off a

disabled hunter next to the blind. The ground around the blind is rough and access into the water is best with a small hand launch boat or raft. An accessible vault toilet is in the parking lot located nearby for walk-in anglers. The use of the blind is by reservation only. Hunters can obtain a key from the Ephrata Regional Office by calling 509-754-4624.

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

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

Additional Information

Youth waterfowl hunting opportunities

There are youth hunts scheduled for Sept. 28, 2024 and Feb. 1, 2025. Both dates will provide tremendous opportunities to get kids out hunting. Additionally, the Feb. 1 hunt day is **after** the general waterfowl season, meaning there will likely be more ducks in the area. Those ducks will be widely distributed and will have become habituated with no hunting pressure.

Bird dog training

District 5 does not currently have any areas designated for bird dog training, although work is underway to develop a dog training area. Any training on WDFW land must be within the established bird dog training season, which runs from August 1 – March 31. Please refer to the [website and regulations booklet](#) for more details.

Target shooting

Per [WAC 220-500-140](#), target shooting is allowed on WDFW-managed lands. Shooters should review regulations and other information available on the [WDFW website](#).

Table 11. information for shooting range facilities.

County	Facility	Contact
Adams	Lind Golf & Gun Club	509-671-3314
Adams	Othello Gun Club	509-488-3768
Adams	Ritzville Gun Club	Gub Club Road, Ritzville
Adams	Washtucna Gun Club	509-646-3263
Grant	Boyd Mordhorst Memorial Range, Ephrata	509-345-2550
Grant	Coulee City Sportsmen	509-632-5137
Grant	Marlin Trap Club	509-982-2445
Grant	Moses Lake Gun Club	509-765-1382
Grant	Quincy Gun Club	509-787-5506

Tools and technology

Numerous resources are available to help hunters find hunting opportunities and improve their experiences. WDFW has created numerous mapping tools that identify public and private lands and their associated regulations. WDFW also provides the public with access to our Status and Trends Reports, Management Plans for species, and harvest statistics. These can all be found on the [WDFW website](#).

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

Be a wildlife steward - get involved

WDFW and other agencies are always looking for good volunteers to improve habitat for wildlife. Find time to help with wildlife-related projects and encourage kids to learn about nature and our wildlife heritage through our [WDFW Volunteer Program](#).

Hunter tutorials and resources

If pages won't open on your browser, try a different browser (e.g., Google Chrome rather than Internet Explorer)

Share the Land and Clean Up After Yourself: Healthy, connected habitat is necessary to ensure the persistence of wildlife species with healthy and sustainable populations. Respect and share the land -

clean up after yourself and reduce your impact on the environment. Pick up your shotgun shells, carry out your garbage, and tread lightly.

Hunting ethics and fair chase:

- [Pope & Youth](#)
- [Boone & Crockett](#)
- [WDFW Ethics and Safety](#)

How to hunt

Hunter Education: Many links to resources about specific topics.

- [WDFW Hunting Requirements](#)

Hunting Clinics and Publications: Thorough explanations about the basics of hunting, from wildlife behavior to hunting tips and tactics.

- [WDFW Hunting Clinics](#)

How to Prepare for the Season:

- [WDFW Preparing to Hunt](#)

First Hunt Foundation (mentored hunt):

- [Mentored Hunt](#)

Many Additional Resources: WDFW's website has many documents and plans that give details on the history of wildlife, management harvest statistics, and other items of interest. They can be found here:

- [WDFW Hunting Resources](#)

Where to hunt

WDFW maintains a web map tool that allows you to zoom into different areas and indicate the hunt-type of interest. You can view different land ownerships and regulations on different parcels:

- [WDFW Hunt Planner Map](#)

WDFW Public Lands: Be aware there are some closed areas and Game Reserves where hunting and trapping are prohibited. Read the Regulations Pamphlet and read and obey signs.

- [WDFW Hunting Locations](#)
- [About WDFW Lands](#)
- [WDFW Pheasant Enhancement Program](#)

Other Government Lands: Washington Department of Natural Resources and federal public lands are generally available for hunting. Read the agency's regulations, read and obey signs, and do not cross fences without permission.

- [DNR](#)
- [Bureau of Reclamation](#)
- [USFWS Refuges](#)

Private Lands: Many private landowners allow hunting on their property, although permission requirements vary. Each landowner's parcel indicates the permission type required, species that can be found there, and specifics about the parcel.

- [WDFW Private Lands](#)

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- Rabenberg, M. J. 1982. Ecology and population dynamics of mallards wintering in the Columbia Basin. M.S. Thesis, University of Montana, Missoula. 135 pp.
- Munro, R. E., and C. F. Kimball. 1982. Population ecology of the mallard: VII. Distribution and derivation of the harvest. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Resource Publication 147.