

2024 District 6 Hunting Prospects

Okanogan County



Washington
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**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

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Okanogan County

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Cover photo: Crater Lake. Photo by WDFW.

Title page photo: Mule deer. Photo by WDFW.

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Fire and road conditions update

As of August 19, 2024, no major fires are burning in District 6; however, the Pioneer Fire on the east side of Lake Chelan and the Easy Fire in far eastern Skagit County Have burned to the western borders of GMU 242 and GMU 218 respectively. Access closures are currently in place for both fires including a periodic closure of State Hwy 20 north of Rainy Pass. Continued activity on both fires is expected and additional expansion is possible. Access closures in some form are likely to continue into the fall. Always check with fire information sites for an update on current conditions. Good sites for current status information include [InciWeb](#), [NASA | LANCE | FIRMS US/Canada](#), and [Watch Duty](#). Perimeter maps of past fires can be found at [CalTopo](#) and [Washington Large Fires 1973-2023 | WADNR](#).

For updated information on access and road closure status visit:

- [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest - Home \(usda.gov\)](#)
- [Colville National Forest - Home \(usda.gov\)](#)



Mule deer in a burned area. Photo by WDFW.

District 6 general overview

District 6 is located along the Canadian border in north central Washington and encompasses 10 game management units (GMUs): 203 (Pasayten), 204 (Okanogan East), 209 (Wannacut), 215 (Sinlahekin), 218 (Chewuch), 224 (Perrygin), 231 (Gardner), 233 (Pogue), 239 (Chiliwist), and 242 (Alta).

The western two-thirds of the district, stretching from the Okanogan River to the Pacific Crest, lies on the east slope of the Cascade Range and is dominated by mountainous terrain that gets more rugged as you move from east to west. Vegetation in this portion of the district ranges from desert/shrubsteppe at the lowest elevations to various types of conifer forests, culminating in alpine tundra on the higher peaks, which top out at almost 9,000 feet. More than three-quarters of the land base in this portion of the county is in public ownership, offering extensive hunting access. Game is plentiful and dispersed throughout the area for most of the year, concentrating in the lower elevations in winter when deep snow covers much of the landscape.

GMU 204 includes the eastern third of the district, from the Okanogan River east to the Okanogan County boundary, and features moderately rolling terrain, generally rising in elevation as you move east. The vegetation changes from shrubsteppe near the Okanogan River to a mix of tall grass and conifer forest throughout the remainder of the unit. This portion of the district is a near-equal patchwork of

public and private land, with the public lands generally being higher in elevation. Again, game is plentiful and dispersed throughout.

Weather in the Okanogan District can be quite variable and capable of changing quickly in the fall. Be prepared for everything from warm, sunny days to the possibility of winter temperatures and significant snow at higher elevations by the second week of October.

Agency biologists are no longer running the biological check and information station at the Red Barn in Winthrop. Instead, efforts will be focused on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) monitoring farther east in the state following recent positive detections in northwest Idaho. Hunters bringing cervid carcasses from other states are required to comply with current CWD restrictions. Information on CWD including state regulations is at WDFW's [CWD webpage](#).

Customizable map products are available on the [WDFW Hunt Planner webpage](#).

Please be respectful of private land and treat landowners and their property the way you would want to be treated.



Methow Wildlife Area. Photo by WDFW.



Pasayten Wilderness. Photo by WDFW.

Elk

General information, management goals, and population status

Overall, elk numbers are low in District 6. However, conditions vary noticeably between the east and west portions of Okanogan County.

The western two-thirds of the district are not currently covered under a WDFW elk herd management plan, and the existing harvest strategy (any elk general season) is designed to minimize elk numbers to prevent agricultural damage. As such, elk west of the Okanogan River are very difficult to find without extensive local knowledge. Hunters harvested six elk in the nine western Okanogan County GMUs combined in 2023.

The eastern portion of the district (GMU 204) is covered by the Selkirk Elk Herd Plan and supports part of the Pend Oreille subherd population. The area's current management objective is to gradually increase elk numbers, as a result, general season antlerless opportunity is only available during the early archery season. Elk are not currently abundant enough to warrant a survey effort in District 6, but observations suggest numbers continue to increase in GMU 204 and improve harvest opportunity accordingly. Even so, harvest remains modest with 27 animals taken in 2023.

For specific harvest information see the [District 6 General Season Elk Harvest - 2023](#).

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

GMU 204 is the only GMU in District 6 with a significant number of elk. Within this unit, elk tend to be most numerous in the area from Havillah north through the Molson and east to the Chesaw Wildlife Area; the Waconda Summit/Mount Annie area, and USFS lands bordering the Colville Reservation. In the rest of the district, finding elk is extremely difficult unless you have up-to-date knowledge on one of the few small bands of elk that travel in and out of the western portion of the county.

Deer

General information, management goals, and population status

District 6 supports one of the largest migratory mule deer herds in the state, and Okanogan County has long been prized by hunters for its mule deer hunting opportunity. The district also supports significant numbers of white-tailed deer, particularly in GMUs 204 and 215. The current District 6 deer management objective is to grow deer herds following recent declines due to drought, fire, disease, and harsh winter weather.



Mule deer. Photo by WDFW.

Observed post-season fawn:doe ratios (productivity) this past fall of 77:100 increased significantly from the previous season, climbing above the ten-year average of 72:100. In addition, overwinter fawn survivorship (recruitment) this spring was the best it's been in 10 years. These survey results indicate the herd has likely grown over the past year. Fortunately, the winter range has recovered significantly since the 2014-15 fires and all wildfire scars on the district are producing good summer forage. As a result, the population is poised to recover nicely; however, this summer's extreme temperatures and dryness will likely hamper growth in the short-term. Blue tongue and epizootic hemorrhagic disease were not documented in 2023 and have not been documented in 2024 as of mid-summer, but the extreme conditions are increasing the chances of an outbreak later in the season.

What to expect during the 2024 season

Slightly lower-than-average estimated fawn recruitment in 2023 likely means a modest decrease in the 2.5-year-old buck cohort in 2024. Similarly, last December's observed post-season mule deer buck:doe ratio of 17:100 is below the 10-year average of 21:100. Overall, total general season harvest and success rates are anticipated to be a little below the five-year averages.

Despite a cool damp start to summer, temperatures have flipped to record setting levels in July with little relief in sight, and in addition, the landscape is extremely dry at all elevations. If this pattern continues into the fall, record dryness could result in nontypical movements of animals searching for water and palatable forage. How that may affect deer distribution on the landscape is unknown.

Which GMU should deer hunters hunt?

All units in District 6 support significant numbers of deer and large blocks of accessible public land, typically offering good to excellent deer hunting opportunity. Mule deer are distributed throughout the county, with the highest densities in the western two-thirds of the district.

Overall, white-tailed deer are less numerous than mule deer in Okanogan County, and in contrast to mule deer, white-tailed deer abundance generally increases as you move east in the district. The largest population is in GMU 204, where white-tailed deer comprise about half of the overall deer population. Although white-tailed deer numbers are less abundant in the western portion of the district, you can still find them in most drainages up to mid-elevations, particularly those with significant riparian vegetation. The highest concentrations in this area are in the Sinlahekin Valley and surrounding drainages. In many areas west of GMU 204 and outside of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, white-tailed deer frequent private lands. Prospective hunters wishing to target white-tailed deer may want to seek permission before hunting season to access private land.

Hunters harvested 1,926 deer (1,763 bucks, 163 antlerless) in District 6 during the 2023 general seasons. This total is up a bit from last year but still a little below the five-year average of 2,106. Similarly, general season success rates dipped noticeably across all weapon types. The success breakdown across all GMUs by weapon is as follows: Modern 13 %, Muzzleloader 17 %, Archery 23 %, and Multiple 22%. As

expected, GMU 204 (the district's largest unit) yielded the greatest overall general season harvest of 627 deer. In the western portion of District 6, GMU 215 produced the most harvest with 271 deer.

For specific harvest information, please visit [District 6 2023 General Season Deer Harvest](#) and [District 6 2023 Special Permit Harvest](#).

Maps for specific GMUs can be found on WDFW's [Game Management Units \(GMUs\) webpage](#) The [WDFW Hunt Planner](#) is an interactive tool that allows hunters to create a customize map.

Figure 1. District 6 2023 general season hunter success by weapon type and GMU.

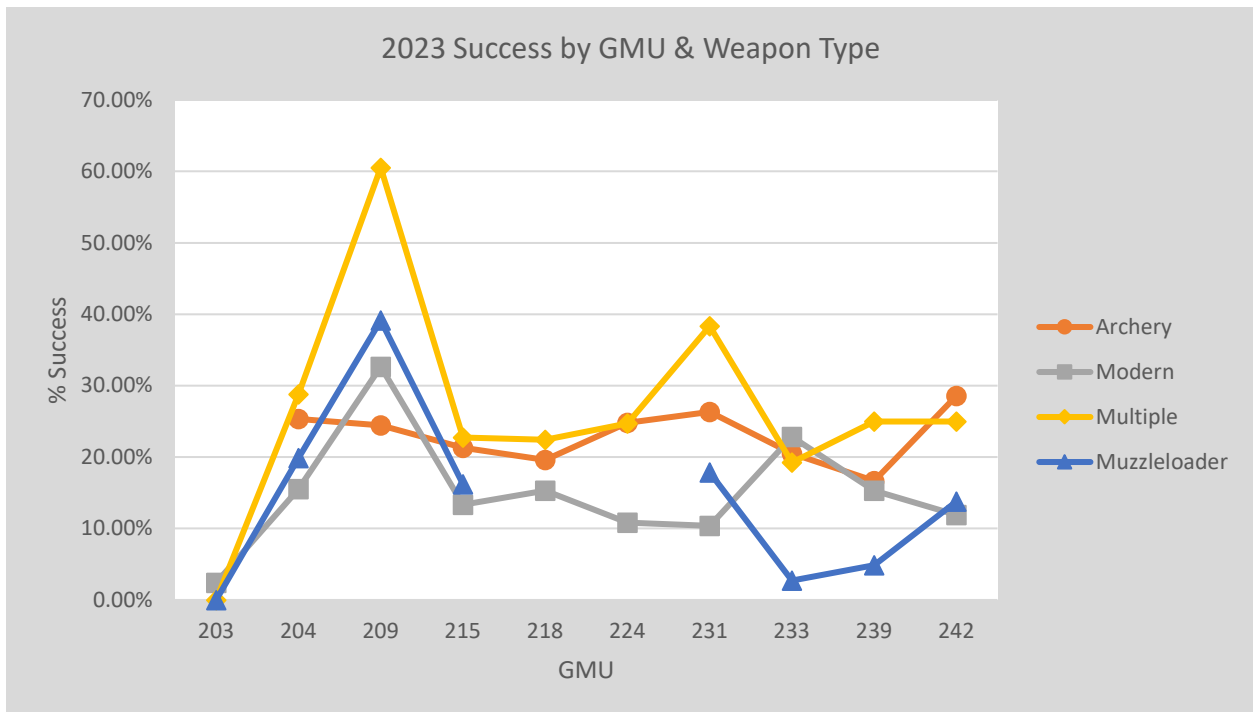


Figure 2. District 6 5-year average general season hunter success by weapon type and GMU.

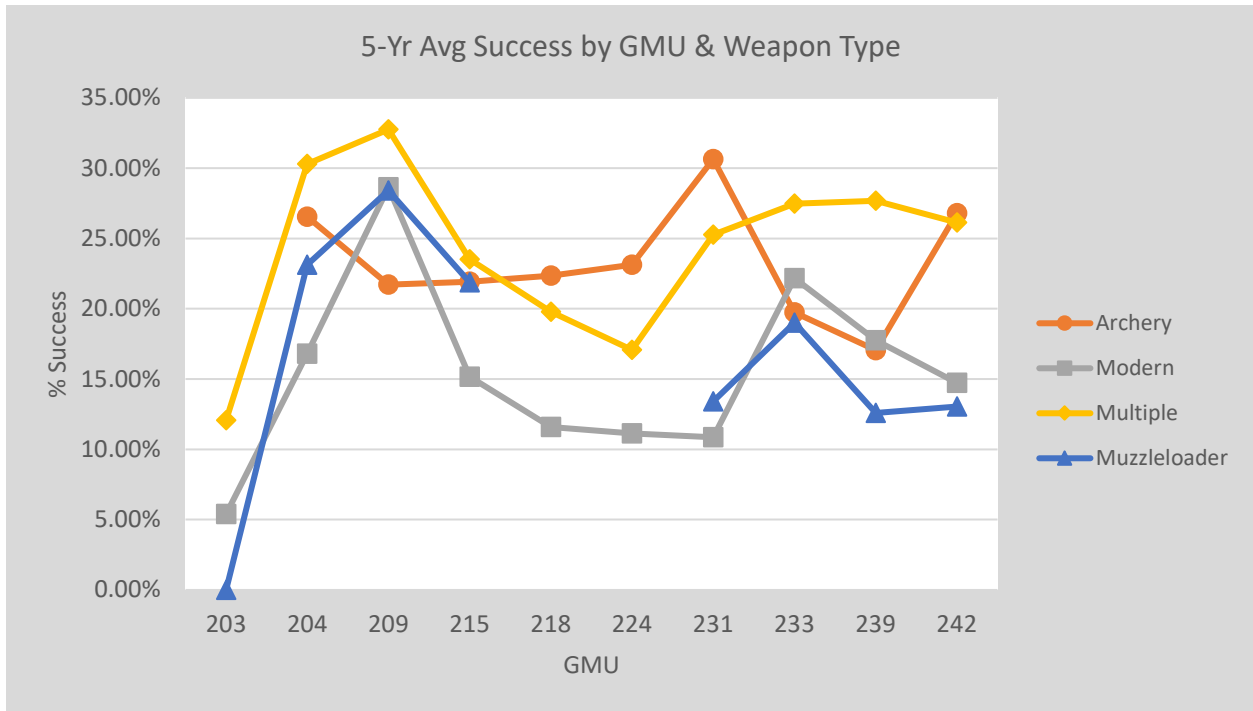
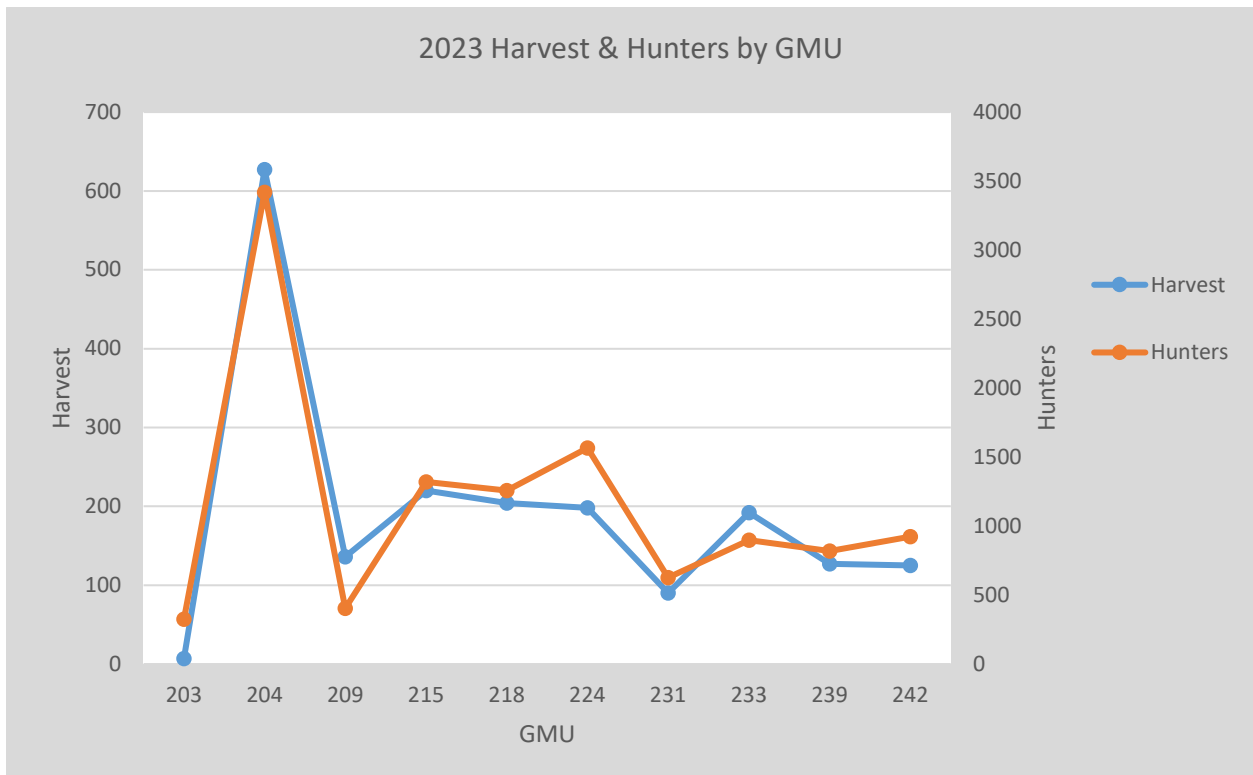


Figure 3. District 6 2023 general season harvest and hunter numbers and GMU.



How to find and hunt mule deer

During the early general seasons, deer will typically be widely distributed on the landscape and not yet concentrated in migration areas or on the winter range. Mature bucks are often at high elevations in remote locations, particularly if succulent vegetation is available. Many of the burn scars from wildfires since 2001 are producing high-quality summer forage, especially at middle and upper elevations. Hunters have high probability of finding significant deer activity in these areas. Although mule deer will use a variety of habitat types, they will often forage well into open environments, particularly at dawn and dusk. As a result, they can often be glassed and stalked from a considerable distance.

During the high hunt, deer will still be spread across the landscape and are found in good numbers throughout the Pasayten Wilderness all the way to the tree line. At this time of year bucks are often more concerned with security than forage and will often bed in tree clumps with commanding views. Hunters on foot can find easier access to higher, more open country via the Harts Pass and Iron Gate trailheads at the western and eastern ends of the Wilderness, respectively. For those with horses, the Andrews Creek and Billy Goat trailheads offer access to good deer terrain further in.

During the late permit seasons, most deer will move to winter range areas at lower elevations for the breeding season, often on more southern-facing slopes. In District 6, there is likelihood of high deer numbers at WDFW wildlife areas and immediately adjacent federal lands in late fall. In years with lesser snowfall, some mature bucks may linger at higher elevations. In exceptionally mild years, hunters may have to travel a bit higher than usual to find deer concentrations.

GMU-specific recommendations for late mule deer permit holders:

GMU 215: Look for deer on south-facing slopes in the Toats Coulee drainage, open portions of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and south-facing slopes of the major drainages to the west of the Sinlahekin, including Cecil, Sarsapkin, and Sinlahekin creeks and their tributaries.

GMU 218: The Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and the Cub Creek, Buck Lake, and Lower Boulder Creek area of the Okanogan National Forest often have late season concentrations of mule deer.

GMU 224: Common locations for mule deer include portions of the Methow Wildlife Area and adjacent Okanogan National Forest lands in the southern portion of the unit. This includes more open habitat in drainages such as Pearrygin, Ramsay, Bear, Blue Buck, Beaver, and Frazier creeks.

GMU 231: Check out the Big Buck portion of the MWA, as well as the Virginia Ridge, Thompson Ridge, and Little Bridge Creek areas of the Okanogan National Forest.

GMU 233: The main unit and Pogue Mountain Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, the Carter Mountain Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and public land in the Salmon Creek Drainage are good places to start.

GMU 239: The Texas Creek Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, along with the adjacent Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land, offer good opportunities. Upper portions of Finley, Benson, and Texas creeks on the Okanogan National Forest are also worth a look.

GMU 242: Look for deer on the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area and south-facing slopes on public land in the Libby Creek and Gold Creek drainages.

How to find and hunt white-tailed deer

White-tailed deer in Okanogan County typically migrate less than mule deer and generally favor brushier country with denser cover at lower and middle elevations. Look for white-tailed deer along stream drainages and in other areas where riparian vegetation or thick cover are adjacent. Like mule deer, white-tailed deer are most active at dawn and dusk, but white-tailed deer often won't venture as far into larger openings unless under the cover of darkness. Look for white-tailed deer in edge habitats where denser cover abruptly transitions into more open meadows. Many white-tailed deer hunters will wait patiently at a stationary position along an obvious game trail or the forest edge, often employing the use of a blind or tree stand.



White-tailed deer. Photo by WDFW.

During the late permit season, some white-tailed deer summering at modest elevations will move a little way downslope, but most will be in the same areas where they spent the summer.

GMU-specific recommendations for late permit holders and late archery season in the western portion of the district:

GMU 215: White-tailed deer are abundant on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.

GMU 218: Look for deer in the Eight-mile drainage, along the Chewuch River, and in the lower half of the Rendezvous Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area (despite the open habitat).

GMU 224: Brushier areas along Bear Creek, Upper Beaver Creek and its tributaries, and basin drained by the West Fork Salmon Creek west of Conconully are promising locations.

GMU 231: Good possibilities include the huntable portion of the Big Valley Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area, down low on USFS land in the Twisp River Valley (north of the Twisp River Road), and the Little Bridge Creek drainage. White-tailed deer can also be found on the south slopes of the Big Buck Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area as they move uphill off private land.

GMU 233: Despite the open terrain, the Happy Hill area of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area is productive, along with the Buzzard Lake Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 239: White-tailed deer can be found on Okanogan National Forest land in the South Summit area between Loup Pass and Leecher Mountain and in wetter areas in the western portion of the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and adjacent DNR lands.

GMU 242: Productive areas include the brushy areas along the river and in the northern half of the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area, as well as the valley bottom of the Twisp River drainage. Public land along Libby and Gold creeks is also a possibility.

Antlerless white-tailed deer permit holders should look for deer in the same areas mentioned above, with the added expectation of a few more deer in the higher reaches of areas like the Twisp River and Eight-mile drainages than might be expected during the late season.

Deer Areas

Hunters with second deer permits in Deer Areas 2012 – 2016 should remember that those permits are good **only on private land**. Permit holders are responsible for contacting private landowners to secure hunting access.

Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

Black bears are reasonably abundant and well-distributed throughout District 6 and are managed for sustainable harvest and diverse age structure. The local black bear population and associated harvest appeared to be relatively stable through 2018. In 2019, the bag limit was raised to two bears in eastern Washington. Since this change, harvest has increased by an average of 32% in District 6 as a whole and by roughly 45% in the western two-thirds of the district. Recent data from western Okanogan County estimated black bear densities (including cubs) to be about 22 bears per 100 square kilometers; about average for eastern Washington. Densities in GMU 204 in the eastern third of the district are suspected to be somewhat higher, and WDFW plans to launch a similar density survey effort there next spring.

For hunters pursuing black bear in the northern portion of the Washington Cascades, it is critical to be able to positively identify bear species, as endangered grizzly bears could potentially be seen in this area. WDFW's website features some interactive training materials on how to tell the difference between black and grizzly bears. View the Interactive Bear Identification Program and take the Bear Identification Test on [WDFW's website](#).

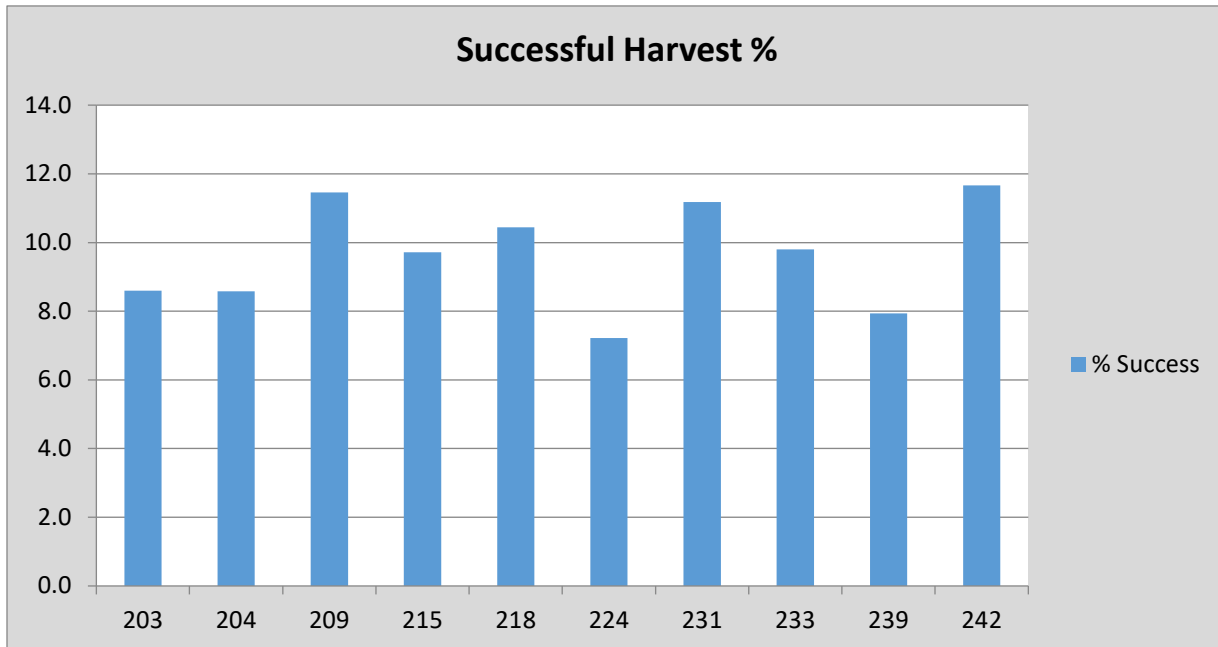


Cinnamon-phase black bear. Photo by WDFW.

Which GMU should bear hunters hunt?

All GMUs in the Okanogan District typically provide good black bear hunting opportunities. In 2023, the success rate (7.8 %) in the Okanogan portion of Bear Management Unit (BMU) 5 declined noticeably along with a 37% decrease in harvest. These decreases came on heels of the harvest spike and berry crop failures in 2022. By contrast, harvest and success were fairly stable in GMU 204 in the Northeastern BMU(7) last year.

Figure 4. Okanogan District 5-year average black bear harvest success rates by GMU.



For specific harvest information, visit [BBMU 5 2023 Black Bear Harvest](#) and [BBMU 7 2023 Black Bear Harvest](#).

What to expect during the 2024 season

Overall bear numbers are likely down in District 6, particularly in BBMU 5 due to a combination of factors including habitat loss to fire in 2021, multiple berry crop failures and a harvest spike in 2022, and diminished cub production in 2023. At the beginning of black bear season, animals are likely to be found at middle elevations in areas where berries are peaking. As the season progresses, expect bears to follow the ripening berries to higher elevations. Berry crops have been variable so far this year. Currently the landscape is extremely dry and the effect on later season foods like huckleberries is still unclear. If the dryness continues, bear may be ranging more widely than usual to find what will likely be patchy food resources.

Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status



Cougar. Photo by WDFW.

The District 6 cougar population is healthy and dispersed throughout the landscape. In the Okanogan District, cougars are managed by a harvest guideline at the scale of one or two GMUs to better promote stable population structure and high-quality sustainable harvest, while also minimizing human-cougar conflicts.

Cougars follow the deer herds, which means they will be spread throughout the district through late October and concentrate more at lower elevations as deer move to winter range. Much cougar foraging activity takes place at night, so the best opportunities to spot the cats on the move are at dawn and dusk.

Which GMU should cougar hunters hunt?

All Okanogan District GMUs support cougars and are open to hunting. **At the time of this writing, cougar hunting regulations have not yet been set for the 2024-25 season. See the [WDFW hunting webpage](#) for updated information.**

Last season, harvest in District 6 did not exceed the guideline in any PMU and control-related mortality was low. As a result, cougar numbers should be robust and hunting opportunities in District 6 should be good in 2024-25. See the five-year harvest summary table (Table 1) for more information.

Table 1. District 6 cougar harvest guidelines and 5-year adult harvest by GMU.

PMU Hunt Area GMUs	Adult Harvest Guideline	2019-2020 Adult Harvest	2020-2021 Adult Harvest	2021-2022 Adult Harvest	2022-2023 Adult Harvest	2023-2024 Adult Harvest
203	4-5	0	0	0	0	0
204	6-8	4	4	3	3	6
209, 215	3-4	3	6	3	4	3
218, 231	4-5	0	1	0	1	0
224	2	0	0	0	0	1
233, 239	4-5	2	2	0	3	3
242, 243	5-6	3	2	1	2	0

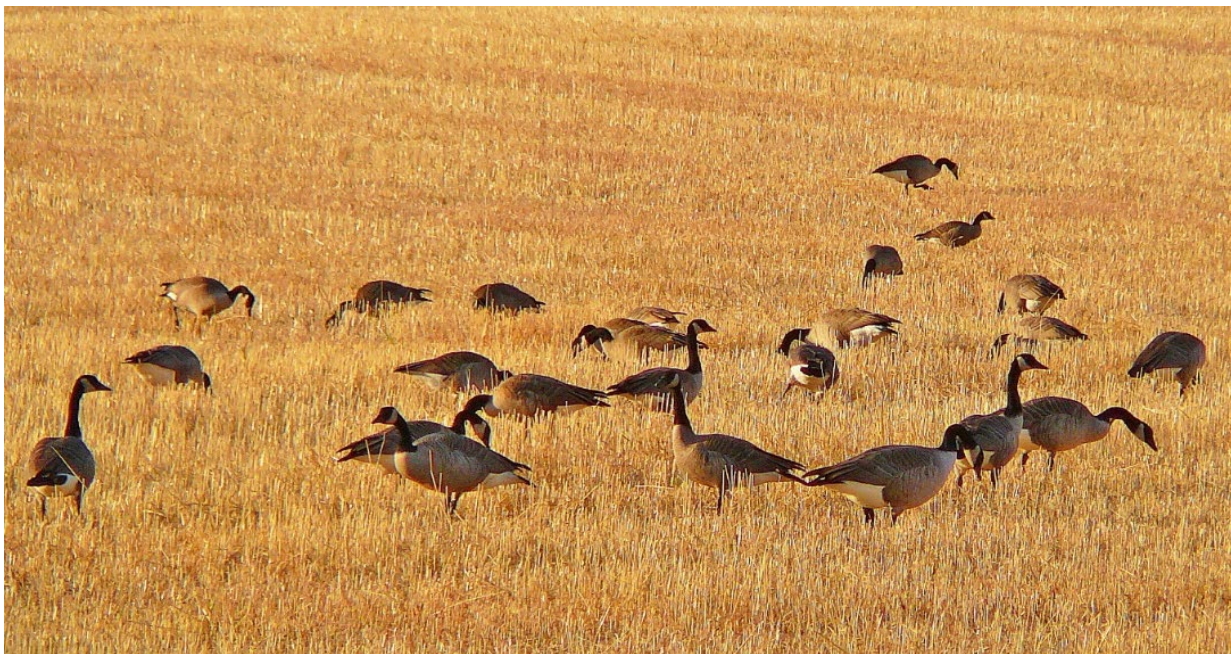
Waterfowl

General information

The Okanogan District offers modest waterfowl hunting opportunities as compared to many other areas of the state. The largest concentrations of birds occur at the southern edge of District 6, at the mouth of the Okanogan River and on the Columbia River. The main stem of the Okanogan and Upper Similkameen rivers and the larger lakes and potholes in the Okanogan Watershed are good secondary sites. Hunters can find good public river access at the Washburn Island Unit of the Wells Wildlife Area, the Driscoll-Eyhott Island Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, and the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area.



Lesser scaup. Photo by WDFW.



Canada geese. Photo by WDFW.

Water levels in smaller local potholes are low this year and some have dried up entirely. River levels are currently running below normal, and the long-term forecast suggests this will be the case into the fall. Aside from water levels, waterfowl hunting opportunities are mostly dependent on the number of birds migrating from Canada and Alaska, and how long it takes before water on the district freezes.

Last year's goose and duck harvest were similar to the previous season. The 2023 waterfowl harvest numbers are available at [2023 Small Game harvest reports webpage](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.

Forest grouse

Species and general habitat characteristics

The Okanogan supports robust populations of ruffed, dusky (blue), and spruce grouse within the forested areas of the district. Ruffed grouse are generally associated with deciduous tree cover at lower to middle elevations, particularly in riparian habitats. During the hunting season, dusky (blue) grouse are generally encountered in mid- to upper-elevation conifer forests, often moving to ridges as snow begins to accumulate. Spruce grouse are found in higher elevation conifer forests throughout the district on a year-round basis. Additional tips on hunting forest grouse can be found on WDFW's [Forest grouse hunting tips webpage](#).

Forest grouse populations (particularly dusky and spruce grouse) remain below historical norms within the boundaries of the many recent large wildfires within the district. These fires have typically burned in some of the best and most densely occupied forest grouse habitat in the region. However, grouse habitat within the burns is improving annually. Some of the older burns, such as the Needles, Farewell, and 30-mile fires have been aggressively colonized by deciduous vegetation and could now support good ruffed grouse populations. The conifers, preferred for dusky and spruce grouse habitat, will take longer to recover, but the birds are beginning to use the habitat again in some portions of the Tripod fire area. Bird numbers outside of burned areas appear to be relatively stable, but fluctuate annually with the severity of winter and spring weather.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Harvest in 2023 more than doubled compared to the take in 2022. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this year's harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Forest Grouse Game harvest reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.



Male ruffed grouse. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasants

Species and general habitat characteristics

Pheasants occur at low densities and in a patchy distribution throughout the Okanogan watershed portion of District 6, with most harvested birds coming from pheasant release sites. This year, pheasants will again be released at the Bureau of Reclamation's Hegdal and Kline sites, and at the Chiliwist Unit of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. What little wild production exists within the county comes mostly from private land. Hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private property. Additional hunting tips for pheasants can be found on WDFW's [Pheasant hunting tips webpage](#).

Pheasant release sites are mapped in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Release Program Booklet](#). Hunters are reminded that nontoxic shot is required for **all** upland bird hunting on **all** pheasant release sites statewide.

District 6 pheasant harvest numbers are fairly consistent year to year and are available at [2023 Pheasant Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.



Pheasant release. Photo by WDFW.

Quail

Species and general habitat characteristics

Quail are locally abundant and widespread throughout the district's lower elevation shrubsteppe and open pine forest habitats. District 6 Wildlife Areas offer good access to quail habitat. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this year's harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Quail Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022. Tips for hunting quail are available on WDFW's [Quail hunting tips webpage](#).

Turkeys

General description

Turkey numbers are highest in GMUs 204, 215, and 239, but all GMUs except 203 offer good opportunities. Hunters can find turkeys in scattered groups throughout the district where they often concentrate on private land near agriculture areas later in the fall. Prospective hunters should seek permission in advance of the season to access private land. Hunters harvested 200 birds during the general fall season in North Central Washington. Both the harvest number and the 31% success rate were similar to the previous season.

For specific harvest information visit [2023 Statewide Turkey Harvest by Management Unit](#).



Wild turkeys. Photo by WDFW.

Chukar and Hungarian (gray) partridge

General description

In general, Hungarian partridge populations are widely distributed and patchy throughout the district's shrubsteppe habitats. Hunters frequently encounter partridge on most all wildlife area units in the district. Scattered groups of chukar can be found in rocky areas in lower elevations of District 6. The steep hills along the Similkameen River in the north part of the Okanogan Valley and the rocky areas of

the Pateros and Indian Dan Wildlife Areas typically support birds. See tips for hunting chukar and Hungarian partridge by visiting [Hungarian partridge hunting tips](#) and [Chukar hunting tips](#).



Hungarian partridge. Photo by WDFW.

Chukar and Hun harvest declined by around 50% in 2023, like due to the previous tough winter. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this years' harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Small Game Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.

Dove

General description

Look for doves in planted food crops in the Sinlahekin and at lower elevations on other public lands. With warmer fall temps becoming the norm, doves now frequently stay in District 6 well past the Sept. 1 opener.

Like partridge, dove harvest numbers declined significantly in 2023 and the previous winters' weather again have been a factor. Weather this spring and summer has been extremely variable and the effect on this years' harvest prospects is unknown. The 2023 harvest numbers are available at [2023 Dove Harvest Reports](#). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have recently been revised and this year's results will not be directly comparable to years prior to 2022.



Mourning dove on the Methow Wildlife Area. Photo by WDFW.