

2024 District 7 Hunting Prospects

Chelan and Douglas counties



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District 7 general overview

Divided by the Columbia River and comprised of Chelan and Douglas counties, WDFW's District 7 is at the heart of Washington. From the crest of the Cascade Range to the shrubsteppe of the Columbia Basin, the Wenatchee District offers an incredibly diverse array of habitats and hunting opportunities. Hunters in District 7 have access to a variety of small and big game species, with hunting opportunities ranging from agricultural fields and sagebrush to montane forest and alpine basins tucked away deep in the wilderness.

Douglas County, the eastern half of the district, is a plateau of shrubsteppe, farmlands, and deep basalt coulees. Ownership is mostly private, but Douglas County offers excellent opportunities to hunt a variety of species. Hunters seeking pheasant, quail, doves, gray partridge, chukar, and mule deer will find many areas to hunt across the county. The game management units (GMUs) in Douglas County are 248 (Big Bend), 254 (Saint Andrews), 260 (Foster Creek), 262 (Withrow), 266 (Badger), and 269 (Moses Coulee).

Chelan County descends approximately 40 miles from a high point of 9,500-feet atop the Cascade crest at its western boundary down to a low elevation of 800-feet along its eastern border, the Columbia River. Chelan County encompasses five mountain ranges (Sawtooth, Chelan, Entiat, Chiwaukum, and Wenatchee), providing hunters with virtually unlimited terrain.

Home to some of the best mule deer and bighorn sheep hunting in the state, Chelan County is a destination for many hunters. With its large public land base, the county offers almost unlimited opportunities to find a place of your own. Four of the state's six high deer hunt wilderness areas are in Chelan County, as well as three bighorn sheep herds. GMUs in Chelan County are 243 (Manson), 244 (Clark), 245 (Chiwawa), 246 (Slide Ridge), 247 (Entiat), 249 (Alpine), 250 (Swakane), and 251 (Mission).

Current species status

Big game

Almost all the deer harvested in District 7 are mule deer, with very few white-tailed deer. Black-tailed deer can also be found in Chelan County along the Cascade crest, and mule deer here share more black-tailed genes than hunters realize. Elk are present primarily along the southern edge of Chelan County. These elk represent the northern extension of the Colockum elk herd, centered to the south in Kittitas County. Black bears roam across almost all habitats in Chelan County. Their densities are higher in the wetter timbered habitats in western Chelan County and near the crest of the Cascades, and at somewhat lower densities in drier habitats farther east. Hunters harvest few black bears in Douglas County, but they do occur in small numbers in brush-filled riparian draws along the Columbia River and other drainages. Cougars occupy all habitats where deer and elk are found. Most cougars are harvested during deer and elk seasons and the cougar harvest typically does not meet the harvest guidelines. Winter conditions and fresh snow determine the ease or difficulty of a dedicated cougar hunt. There are three California bighorn sheep herds in the district, the Swakane, Chelan Butte, and Manson herds. The world record California bighorn sheep came out of the Swakane herd in Chelan County in 2010, and the

Chelan Butte herd has become known for producing quality California bighorn rams. Mountain goats occupy some of the high elevation habitat in Chelan County, but there are no known herds of sufficient size to allow for hunting. As such, there are currently no mountain goat hunting opportunities in District 7.

Upland birds

Upland bird hunting opportunities are available across the district. Turkey hunting occurs mainly in Chelan County, but numbers are growing in northern Douglas County, and some recently acquired wildlife areas are expanding opportunities. Hunttable grouse species are found in forested environments in both counties. Hunters can pursue sooty, dusky, spruce, and ruffed grouse in different parts of the district. The three other grouse species found in the district (greater sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, and white-tailed ptarmigan) are protected species in Washington and cannot be hunted. Chukar require hunters to climb steep ridgelines and traverse rocky slopes to bag their quarry. Valley quail, as their name suggests, prefer gentler terrain, and usually stay in greater numbers near agricultural areas. Gray partridge, or Huns, are found primarily in Douglas County. Doves are hunted in both counties, but most hunters find success in Douglas County. There are two ring-necked pheasant release sites in Chelan County at the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife areas.

Small game

Coyotes are the most widely adaptable species in Washington, and as such, can be found across District 7 and beyond. Bobcats are another widely distributed species hunted across a wide range of habitats, from high mountains to dry shrubsteppe. Raccoons are almost everywhere, except for the highest peaks and the driest desert. Crows are another small game species available, and rarely pursued. Rabbits and hares offer hunting opportunity throughout the district, with snowshoe hares at higher elevations (mainly in Chelan County) and cottontail rabbits in a variety of habitats in both Douglas and Chelan counties.

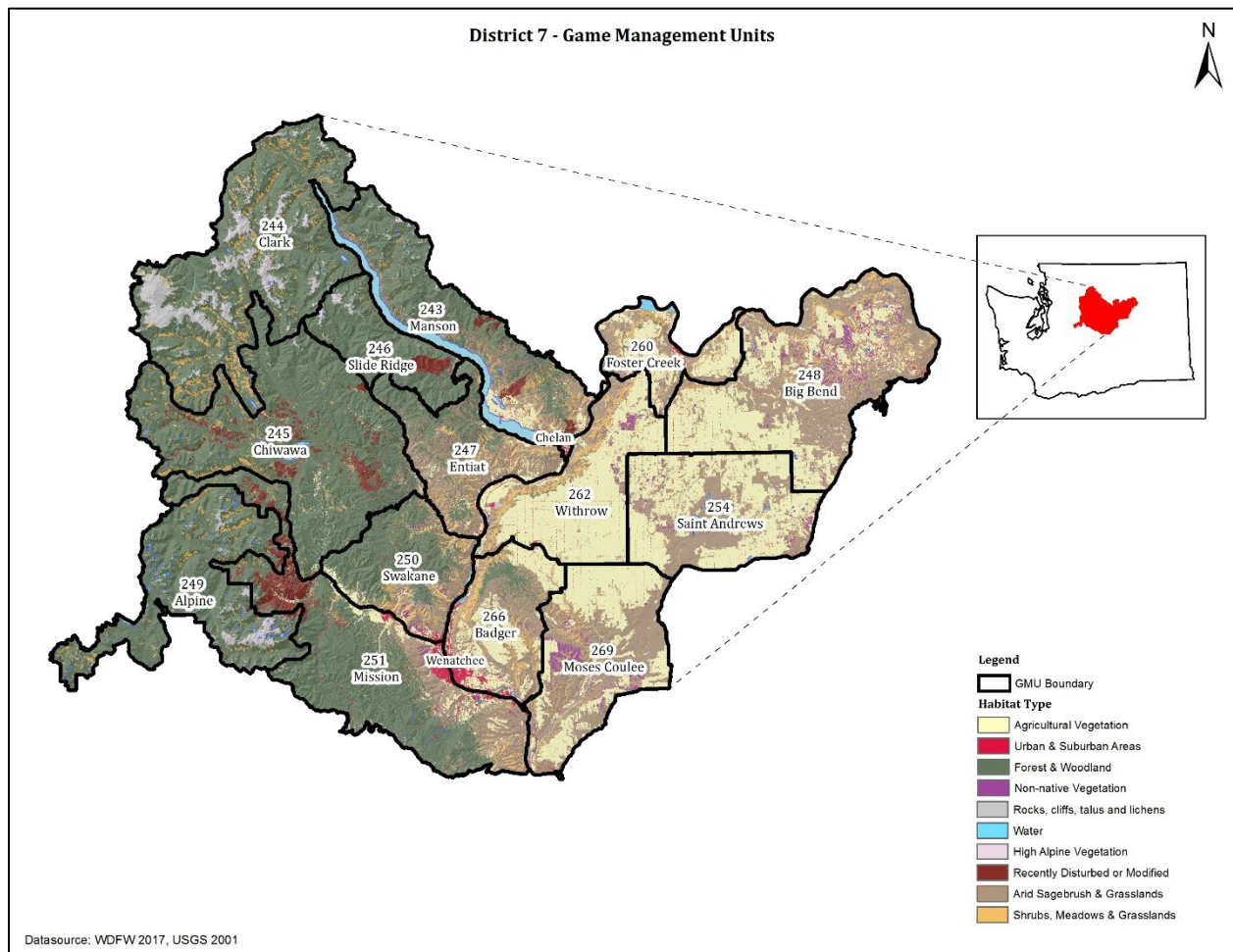
Waterfowl

There are opportunities for duck and geese hunting in different portions of the district. The bulk of waterfowl hunting in District 7 takes place along the Columbia River, with ducks being the primary focus. Goose hunts are mainly in Douglas County, but opportunities are also available along the Columbia River.

Game Management Units

The 14 Game Management Units (GMUs) in District 7 run from the crest of the Cascade Range to Moses Coulee and Banks Lake (Figure 1). Units in western and central Chelan County are high, rugged, and timbered. Eastern Chelan County units grade from mid-to-high elevation forested terrain down into low elevation dry habitat that provides mule deer winter range. The eastern half of the district lies above the Columbia River and encompasses six GMUs in Douglas County. Shrubsteppe and grasslands comprise native habitat in Douglas County and agricultural lands offer some of the best upland bird opportunities in the district.

Figure 1. District 7 Game Management Units.



Each GMU is unique and offers a different experience for hunters. GMUs 244 and 249, for example, are legally designated Wilderness Areas administered by the U. S. Forest Service (USFS). There are no roads within these Wilderness Areas and no mechanized vehicles, including bicycles, are allowed for any type of recreation. In turn, these two GMUs offer exceptional hunting experiences for those willing to go by foot or horse. By contrast, GMU 262 is the heart of Douglas County's wheat production and provides

great upland bird hunting and open country mule deer hunting where access is granted. GMU 269 offers the most dramatic coulee habitat in the district with stunning landscapes and a variety of hunting opportunities. GMU 260 is in the center of the district's rangeland and features big ranches and big views.

Once you have a GMU in mind, refine your scouting efforts by using the websites below to identify specific hunt areas, WDFW Wildlife Areas, and private lands offering hunting.

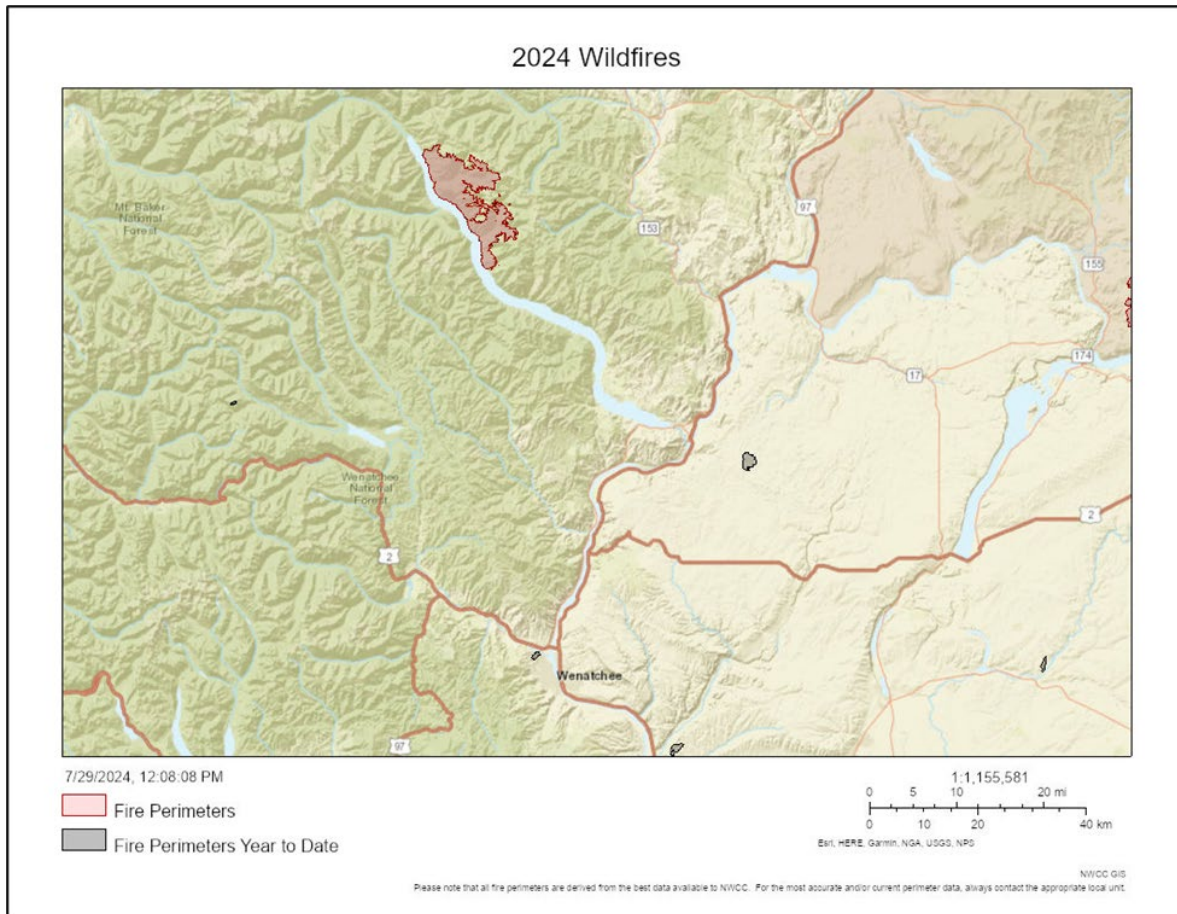
- [Printable maps of each GMU](#) with its respective land ownership composition and roads.
- [WDFW Wildlife Areas](#).
- The [Public Lands website](#) offers multiple ways to search for and identify public lands in Washington.
- The [WDFW Hunt Planner Web Map](#) allows you to select any GMU to learn what hunting opportunities are available there and when the seasons run.
- The [Washington Department of Natural Resources](#) offers LIDAR images if you need detailed topographic information.

Wildfire

Fire is a natural part of the ecosystem in central and eastern Washington and a common occurrence in summer and fall in District 7, affecting both forested and shrubsteppe habitats. However, fires have increased dramatically in frequency, severity, and size over the past decade. The aftermath of wildfires can impart both beneficial and deleterious effects to different wildlife species on different timescales, so it is useful to know when and where fires have burned in recent years. Burn areas from very recent fires (e.g., less than two years prior) are often areas to avoid- particularly if burn severity was high- as revegetation is unlikely to have occurred in such a short timeframe. On the other hand, burn areas 2-5 years old and sometimes older are often attractive to game species such as deer and elk, due to the nutritious forbes and grasses characterizing the early successional vegetation that can recolonize an area in the absence of mature shrubs or canopy cover. Below is information regarding recent fires in Chelan and Douglas counties that may assist hunters in identifying locations to avoid, choosing potential areas for scouting, and assessing access.

At the time of this report, the Pioneer Fire is burning on the north side of Lake Chelan between the shoreline and the Chelan/Okanogan County line, from Lone Fir Creek to Hazard Creek just south of Stehekin (Figure 2). It started on June 8, 2024, and has now reached 33,276 acres as of July 29, 2024. It is expected to burn well into fall and the USFS has issued a large-scale [Closure Order](#) for this fire that will likely significantly reduce hunting access and opportunity in GMU 243 (Manson) during the 2024 hunting season.

Figure 2. Map of wildfire in Chelan and Douglas counties in the 2024 fire season. Dark red are active fires as of 7/29/2024, and the grayscale layer are inactive wildfires.



Map collected from [Northwest Coordination Center](#).

There are still a few months left in the 2024 fire season, so watch for wildfire condition updates in the monthly Weekender hunting reports, WDFW news releases, or WDFW social media posts. Access restrictions can be put in place on short notice in the event of an emergency, so make sure to check fire conditions, access restrictions, and other emergency rules before you head out. There are multiple websites where you can check regional and statewide wildfire updates:

Resources management agency websites

- [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#)
- [Washington Department of Natural Resources](#)
- [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest](#)
- [Bureau of Land Management](#)
- [Chelan County](#)
- [Douglas County](#)

Fire monitoring websites

Visit these sites to learn what wildfires are active near your favorite hunting spots.

- [Inciweb](#)
- [Watch Duty](#)
- [National Fire Map](#)
- [WA Smoke Blog](#)

Recent Wildfires: 2020-2023

2023 Wildfires

While the 2023 fire season saw its share of small brushfires in Chelan and Douglas counties, only one large fire occurred (Figure 3). This was the Airplane Lake fire which was caused by a lightning strike in the White River drainage of GMU 245 (Chiwawa) on July 7, 2023. A total of 6,956 acres burned before the fire was fully contained on September 27, 2023.

2022 Wildfires

The 2022 wildfire season had multiple shrubsteppe and forest fires occurring in Chelan and Douglas counties (Figure 3). Over 25,000 acres of habitat burned in District 7, a similar amount to what burned in 2021.

In late July 2022, the Stayman Flats fire began burning on the Chelan Butte wildlife area and burned 1,200 acres. This area is within the range of the Chelan Butte bighorn sheep herd in GMU 247 (Entiat) and provides winter range for mule deer. The largest fire in District 7 in 2022 was the White River/Irving Peak fire near Lake Wenatchee in GMU 245, which started in mid-August 2022 and continued until November 2022, burning 11,180 acres.

2021 Wildfires

Central and eastern Washington experienced severe drought in 2021, with precipitation up to 50% below average in places. A record-setting heatwave developed in late June and lasted a couple of weeks, and temperatures remained above average throughout July. The 2021 wildfire season started with the Batterman Road fire in early July, which burned more than 14,000 acres of GMU 266 (Badger) in the Badger Mountain area of Douglas County (Figure 3). In mid-July, the Red Apple fire rapidly burned through approximately 12,000 acres of the southern portion of GMU 250 (Swakane) in the foothills north of Wenatchee, burning public and private lands, including parts of the Swakane Unit of the Chelan Wildlife Area. This area is home to the Swakane bighorn sheep herd and provides important winter range for mule deer. In mid-August, the Twentyfive Mile fire began burning on the south shore of Lake Chelan near Twentyfive Mile Creek State Park and quickly expanded south and west of the area. This fire continued to burn through late September and eventually burned more than 22,000 acres. The Twentyfive Mile fire primarily impacted GMU 246 (Slide Ridge) but also reached into the far northwest

portion of 247 (Entiat), with closures and reduced access due to safety hazards continuing into the general season and beyond.

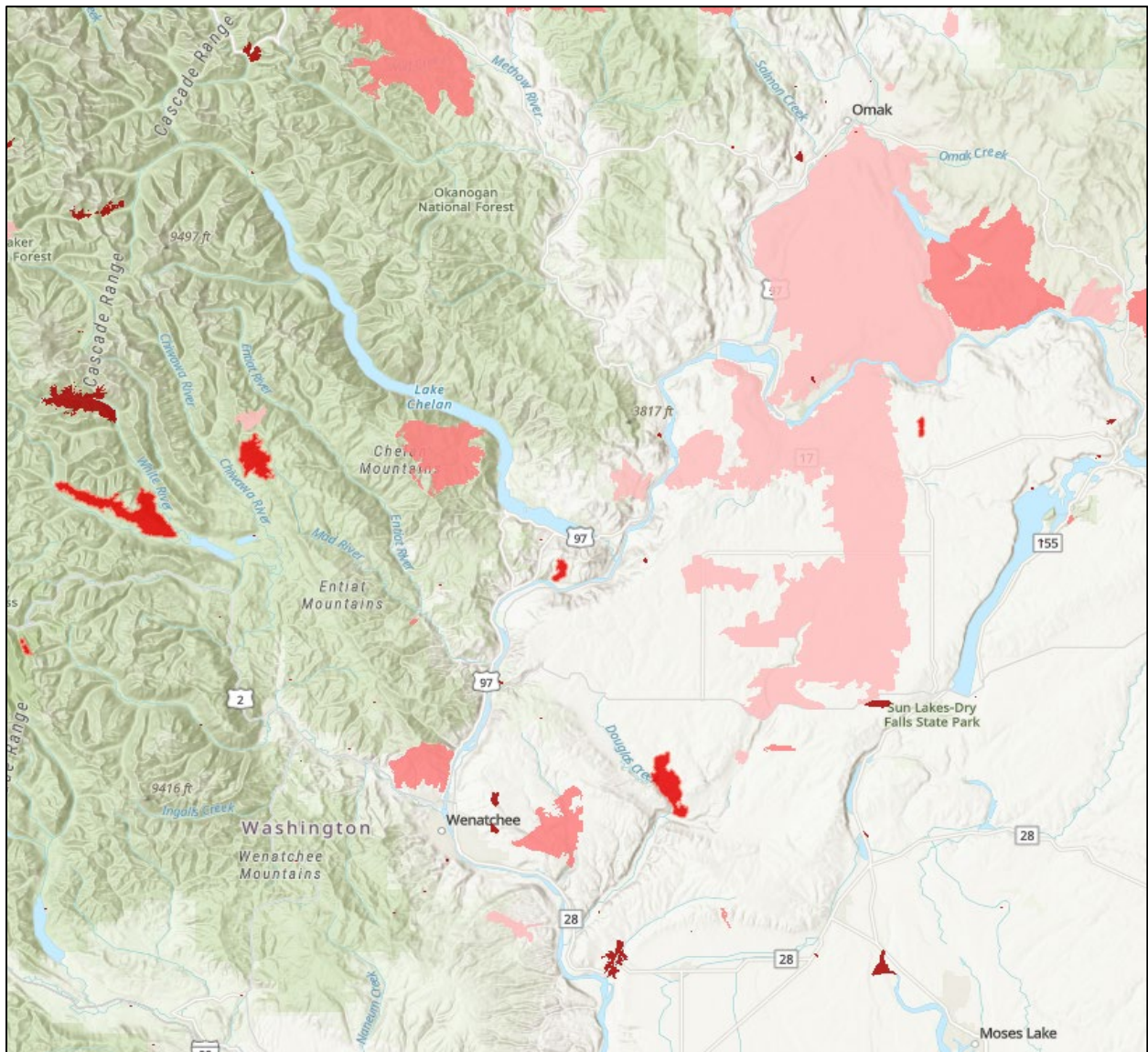
2020 Wildfires




In September 2020, the Pearl Hill fire spread across 224,000 acres of shrubsteppe habitats in northern Douglas County (Figure 3). This impacted both upland and riparian habitats in parts of GMUs 260, 262, 254, and 248. Post-fire recovery and restoration in the burn area has been variable depending on burn severity, resources for active restoration, and precipitation. WDFW wildlife areas implemented habitat recovery efforts on units in GMUs 248, 254, and 260. Those efforts focused on weed suppression, seeding native grasses, rebuilding irrigation systems, installing erosion control materials, building fences, and planting woody vegetation in creeks. Partner organizations including Foster Creek Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Chelan – Douglas Land Trust, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have conducted similar efforts on private and other public lands. These efforts will continue in the coming years to the extent that current and additional funding allows. New riparian plantings and beaver dam analogs in East Foster Creek are designed to stabilize streambanks, help with soil deposition, and provide woody browse in the future.

Table 1. Wildfires larger than 500 acres in District 7, 2020-2023.

County	Year	Fire Name	Acres Burned	GMU
Chelan	2023	Airplane Lake	6,956	244
Chelan	2022	Stayman Flats	1,200	247
Chelan	2022	White River Irving Peak	11,180	245
Chelan	2022	Minnow Ridge	5,140	246, 247
Douglas	2022	Mohr	6,944	269
Douglas	2022	Nilles	589	248
Chelan	2021	Twentyfive Mile	22,118	246, 247
Chelan	2021	Red Apple	12,280	250
Douglas	2021	Batterman Road	14,124	266
Chelan	2020	Chikamin	1,610	245
Chelan	2020	Apple Acres	5,755	243
Douglas	2020	Road 11	9,633	254, 262
Douglas	2020	Pearl Hill	223,802	260, 262, 254, 248

Figure 3. Map of wildfires in Chelan and Douglas counties in years 2020 through 2023.



-  2020
-  2021
-  2022
-  2023

Elk



Elk harvest. Photo by Pete Lopushinsky.

Although elk densities vary across the unit and are low to moderate throughout, GMU 251 (Mission) continues to offer the best elk hunting in District 7. Most elk harvested in the Wenatchee District come from here, where the Colockum Herd reaches its northern range extension in southern Chelan County (Figure 4). In GMU 251, elk are known to reliably use Jumpoff Ridge, Tronsen Meadows and Blewett Pass, the Camas Meadows/Peshastin area, and lands throughout the upper reaches of Mission, Stemilt, and Squilchuck Creeks. The Mission unit has a significant amount of private land, and hunters need to be aware of property boundaries when hunting elk near private ownership.

Elk are also found loosely distributed through the southern portion of GMU 249 (Alpine) near the boundary with GMUs 251 and 335 (Teaway) in areas such as Ingalls Creek and Jack Creek. GMU 249 comprises a large block of public land within the USFS Alpine Lakes Wilderness. While this GMU offers an opportunity for an over-the-counter archery tag for a branch-antlered bull, elk occur at relatively low densities here and occupy rugged terrain where hunters cannot use motorized vehicles. Hunters participating in the GMU 249 archery season are often surprised at the numbers of other hunters chasing elk.

Small, dispersed bands of elk can be found in GMUs 245, 246, 247, and 250 in areas such as Lake Wenatchee and in the canyons dominated by orchard and forested landscapes on the breaks of the Wenatchee River. However, elk here are much fewer and farther between and hunters hoping to be successful in these GMUs must be prepared to conduct a great deal of scouting. Local hunters who live and work in these areas tend to be the most successful at harvesting elk in these GMUs. A few elk harvests are scattered across Douglas County each season, but that harvest is not consistent from year to year and elk are very scarce throughout the county. Liberal harvest seasons are in place in Douglas County to keep elk from establishing herds in the agriculture-dominated landscape where they can cause commercial crop damage.

Opportunities to harvest a branch-antler bull in District 7 are primarily through limited-entry hunts. Most general season harvest opportunities are “spike bull” and “true spike bull”, but hunters that manage to locate elk in GMUs 243-247 and all Douglas County GMUs can legally harvest any elk. Hunters have the opportunity to harvest a branch-antlered bull in GMU 251 only via special permit hunt during two quality seasons and one bull elk season. Special permits are offered for branch antlered bulls and antlerless elk in Chelan County’s two Elk Areas, as well: 2032 (Malaga) and 2033 (Peshastin). Downloadable maps of these Elk Areas are available on [WDFW’s website](#).

The Malaga Elk Area offers the greatest number of permits for antlerless elk, with the intention of reducing elk numbers within and along the boundary of the Stemilt Basin agricultural area. WDFW reinstated both antlered and antlerless hunts in the Peshastin Elk Area in 2021 as biologists and agricultural producers noted an increase in elk use in the area, prompting concerns about orchard damage. The first three years of re-established Peshastin hunts have proven successful in providing a quality experience for hunters as well as keeping elk moving across the landscape and decreasing the time elk spent in any one orchard. In 2024/2025, 20 cow tags (mid-December through early February) and four any-bull tags (mid-February) are again available for the Peshastin Elk Area. Access is highly restricted to private lands, so be sure to contact landowners early if you have drawn a permit for Elk Area 2033. Permit holders should contact the Wenatchee District Office for additional information.

Elk eat a wide range of forage including grasses and forbs in the summer months, incorporating shrubby browse as more palatable plants dry out. Areas where timber harvest or wildfire has occurred can be excellent places to find elk, especially adjacent to creek drainages and intact timber stands. The disturbance stimulates the growth of elk’s preferred forage. Cow elk are especially dependent on finding high-quality forage in the fall to prepare their bodies for pregnancy over the winter. In areas of agricultural production, elk tend to concentrate in orchards in the winter once sufficient snow has accumulated at higher elevations, driving elk to seek lower elevation food sources.

Several recent changes to elk general seasons in District 7 have resulted in increased opportunity for hunters since 2021. One notable change is that GMU 251 was opened to early and late general season archery elk hunts for spike bulls. This increase in archery opportunity was reflected in the 2021 harvest statistics, with an increase in the number of archery hunters as well as elk harvested by archers over the previous years. That same level of success was maintained in fall 2022 but decreased in 2023, although archery harvest still exceeded pre-2021 levels. Additionally, as of 2023, muzzleloader hunters can now

harvest a spike bull in 249 in the early general season. Muzzleloader harvest nearly doubled from six in 2022 to 11 in 2023 and exceeds the previous 5-year average, likely due to this rule change.

Aside from a slump in the 2017 and 2018 seasons following the harsh winter conditions of 2016/2017, hunters typically harvest 40-55 elk under general seasons in Chelan County annually, and 53 were harvested in 2023, of which 49 were antlered and 4 were antlerless (Figures 4-9). Between 2022 and 2023, modern firearm elk harvest increased proportionate to the rise in hunter numbers and hunter days, with success rates remaining consistent between years. Although District 7 does not formally monitor elk populations, hunters and landowners alike report seeing increasing numbers of elk over the past several years, and the 2024 season should yield a harvest similar to the last few years.

Figure 4. Snapshot of general season elk harvest illustrating the preeminence of GMU 251 for elk hunting in District 7.

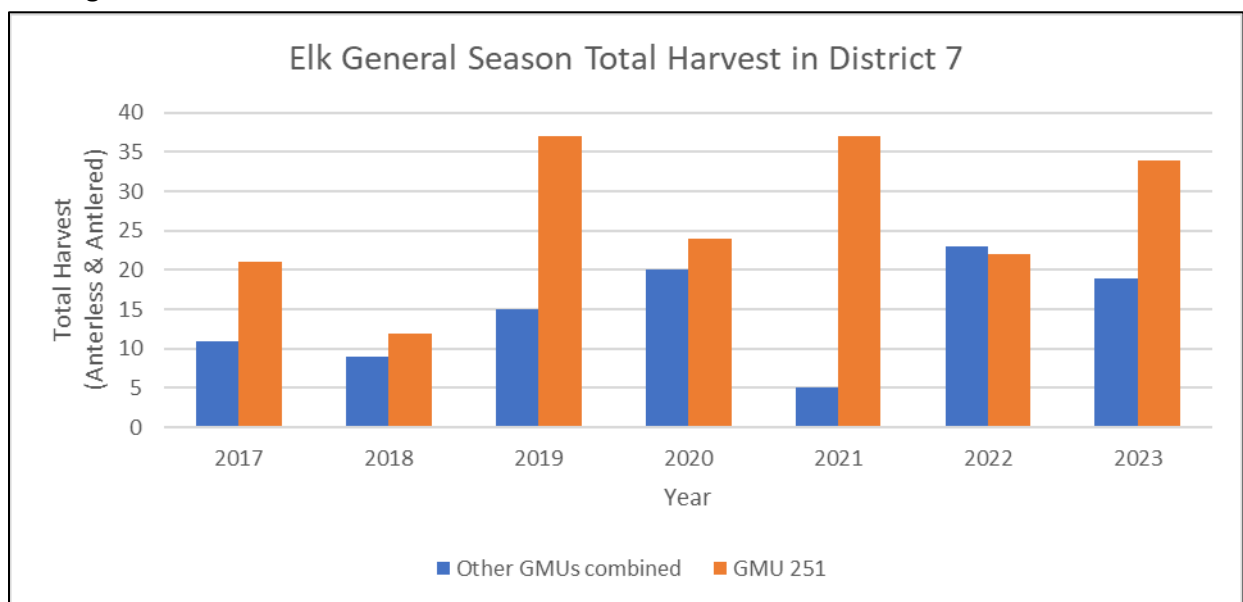


Figure 5. Total number of elk harvested by antler point during the general season in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

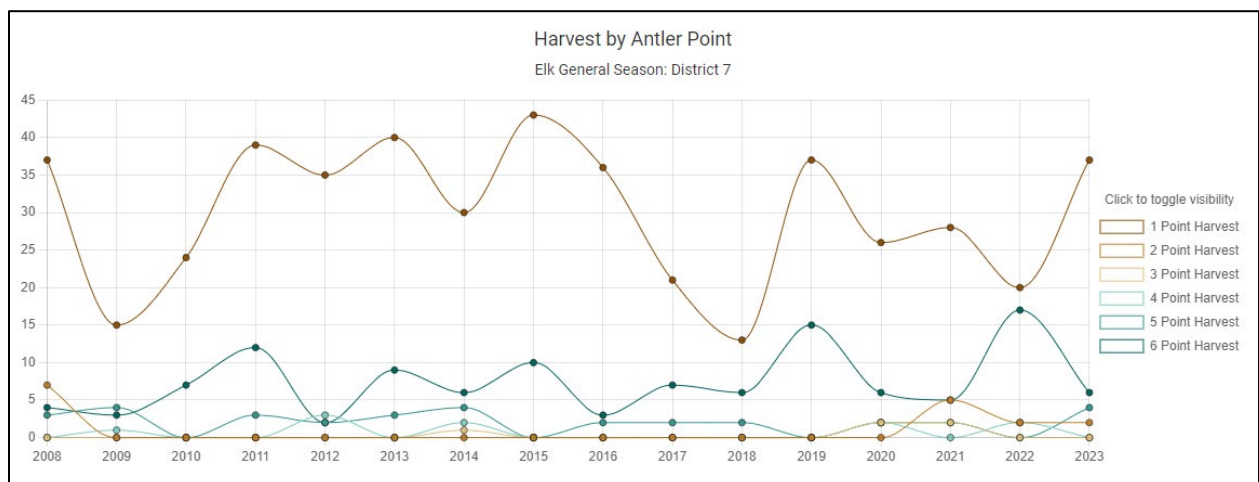


Figure 6. Total number of elk harvested by weapon type during the general season in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

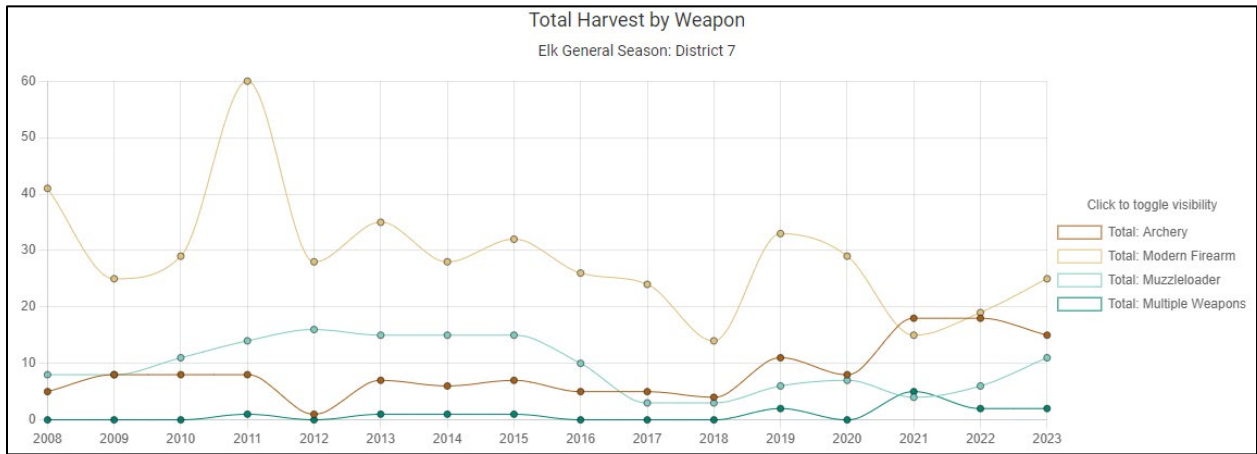


Figure 7. Number of general season elk hunters in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

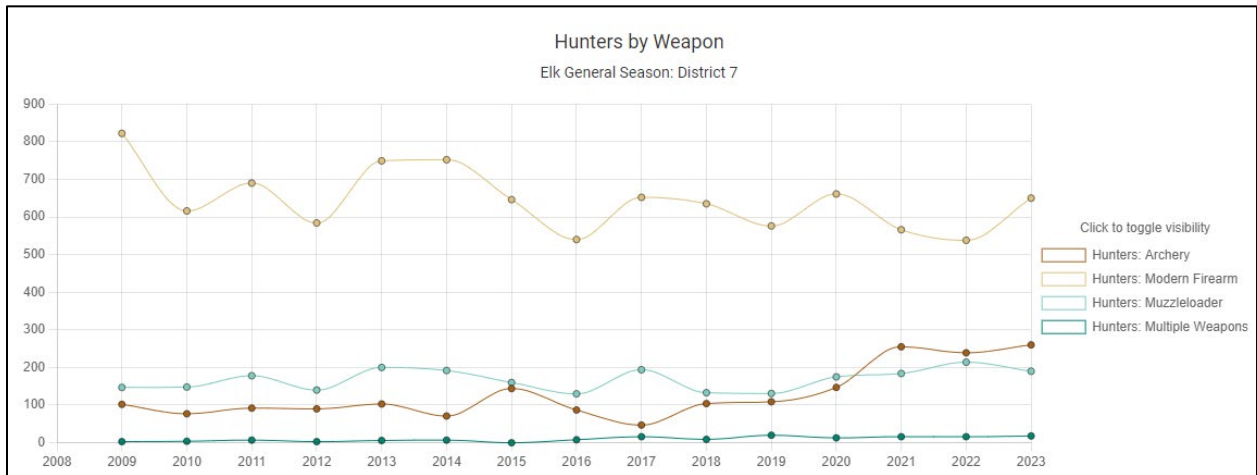


Figure 8. The number of days spent hunting per kill during elk general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

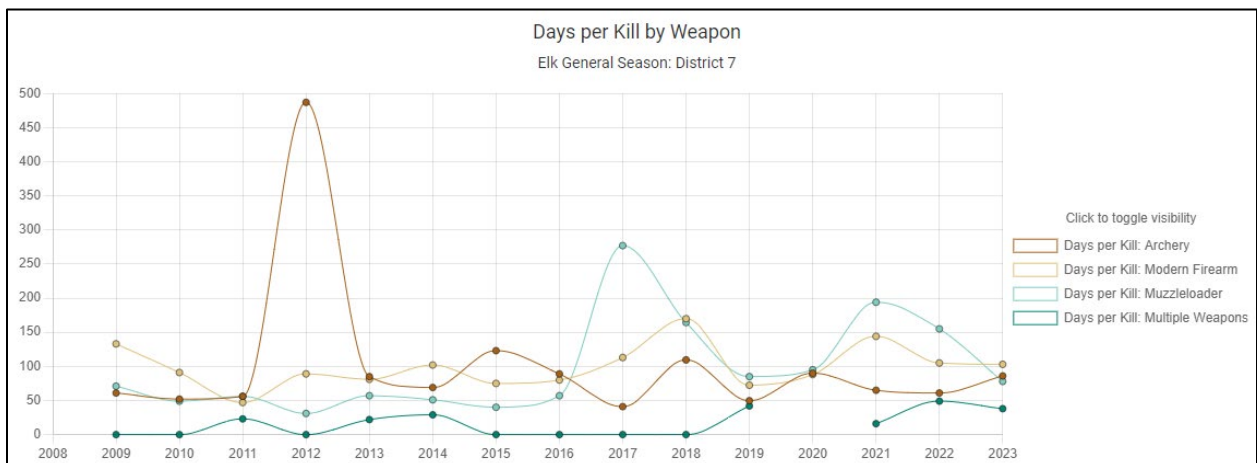
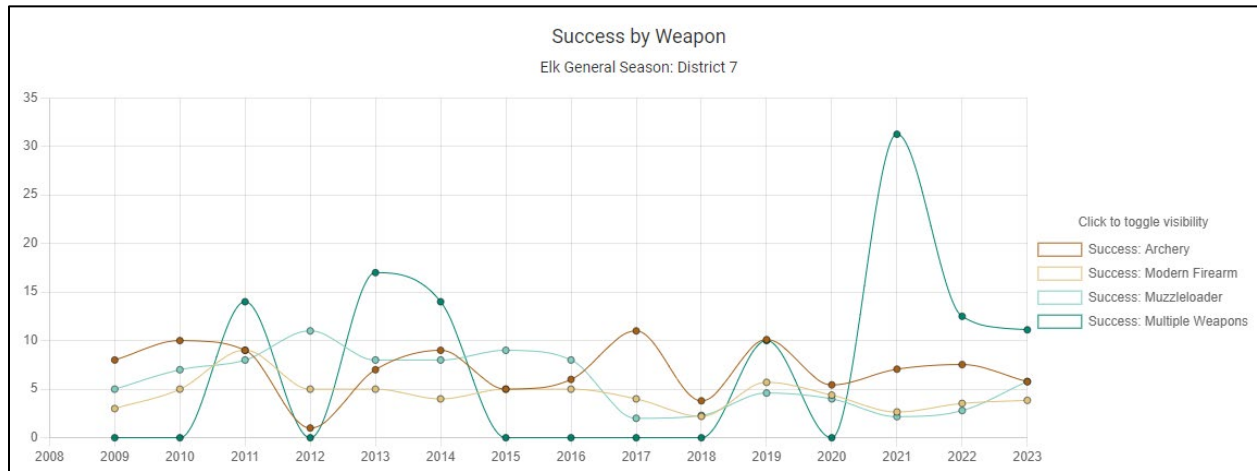


Figure 9. The percentage of successful hunters by weapon type for elk general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.



Elk hoof disease (Treponeme bacteria)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. WDFW diagnostic research from 2009 to 2014, in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate.

The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is found less frequently in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area. **TAHD has not been detected in the Colockum Herd or anywhere in District 7 at this time.** However, hunters are asked to be on the lookout for any signs of this disease.

If you harvest an elk with abnormal looking hooves (for example, overgrown or broken hoof claws or skin lesions) in eastern Washington, please report that harvest to your local WDFW regional office. TAHD appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. The hooves of any elk—young or old, male or female—can be affected by TAHD. Tests show TAHD is limited to animals’ hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process, and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat. Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk through the Department’s [online reporting form](#).

Additionally, anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area. WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, refer to [WDFW’s](#)

[website](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Regulations Pamphlet.

Deer



Mule deer buck harvest. Photo by Scott Moore.

Mule deer hunting is the bread and butter of the Wenatchee District. While the district does support a few white-tailed deer, mule deer far outnumber them and dominate hunters' attention. Chelan County has become a destination hunt for many mule deer enthusiasts across Washington, with late season limited entry permits being highly prized. Within District 7, hunters can pursue deer across a range of habitats, from high alpine basins along the crest of the Cascades in Chelan County to expanses of sagebrush in Douglas County. Deer in Chelan County are part of the East Slope Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone, while deer in Douglas County are part of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone. For more information on these herds and mule deer management in Washington, please refer to the [Washington State Mule Deer Management Plan](#).

In 2023, 1,312 deer were harvested from Chelan and Douglas Counties during the general season in 2023, an approximate 3% decrease from 2022's harvest of 1,355 deer (Figures 10 and 11). These

numbers represent a significant drop from the number of mule deer harvested from District 7 in years 2020 (2,061 deer) and 2021 (1,800 deer). There are likely several factors contributing to the last two year’s low general season harvests, including the decreased turnout of modern firearm hunters compared to 2020 and 2021 and unseasonably warm temperatures before and during the modern firearm season and well into the late archery and muzzleloader seasons (Figure 12). Archers experienced a particularly stark drop in success in 2023 compared to 2022 and lower than the previous 5-year average, while modern firearm hunters experienced a slight bump in success between 2022 and 2023 (Figure 13 and 14).

Approximately 85% of mule deer found within Chelan County (comprised of the Wenatchee Mountains and Chelan subherds of the East Slope Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone) are migratory and summer at higher elevations outside of the most popular GMUs (including Entiat and Swakane). Modern firearm hunters represent the largest portion of mule deer hunters by far, and hunters struggled to find deer in low to mid-elevations throughout Chelan County in both 2022 and 2023, as the heat and lack of snow at high elevations meant that bucks had no reason to head to lower ground in October and even early November.

It’s unknown whether a decline in overall mule deer abundance in Chelan County is another factor that contributed to the low general season harvest of 2022 and 2023 but it appears likely from aerial post-hunt survey data (refer to Chelan County mule deer section). Additionally, aerial survey data strongly suggests that a decline in mule deer abundance within the Douglas subherd of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone can at least partially explain the low harvest in Douglas County in 2022 and 2023 (refer to Douglas County mule deer section).

The Entiat (GMU 247), Swakane (GMU 250), and Mission (GMU 251) units tend to be the most productive deer hunting units in Chelan County, and 2023 was no exception (Table 2). In Douglas County, the most productive GMU in 2023 was the Big Bend Unit (GMU 248), as is almost always the case (Table 3).

Figure 10. Total number of mule deer harvested by antler point in the general season in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

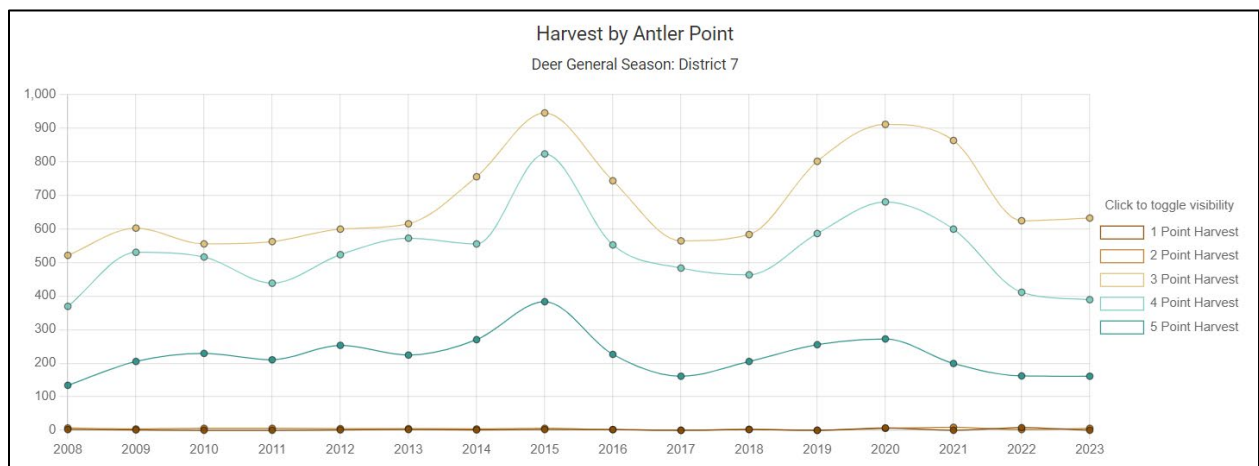


Figure 11. Total number of mule deer harvested by weapon type in District 7 from 2008 to 2023.

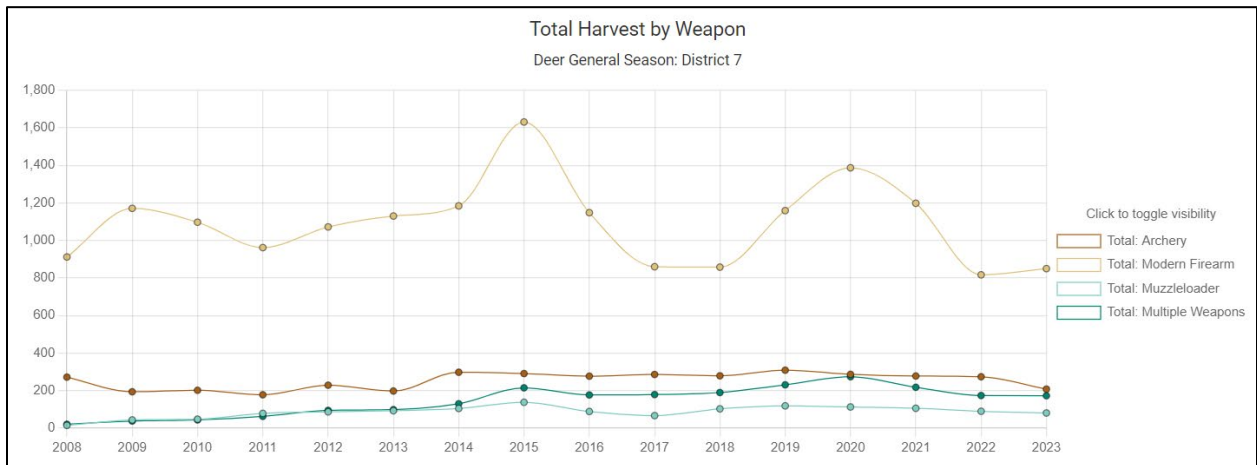


Figure 12. Number of hunters by weapon type for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

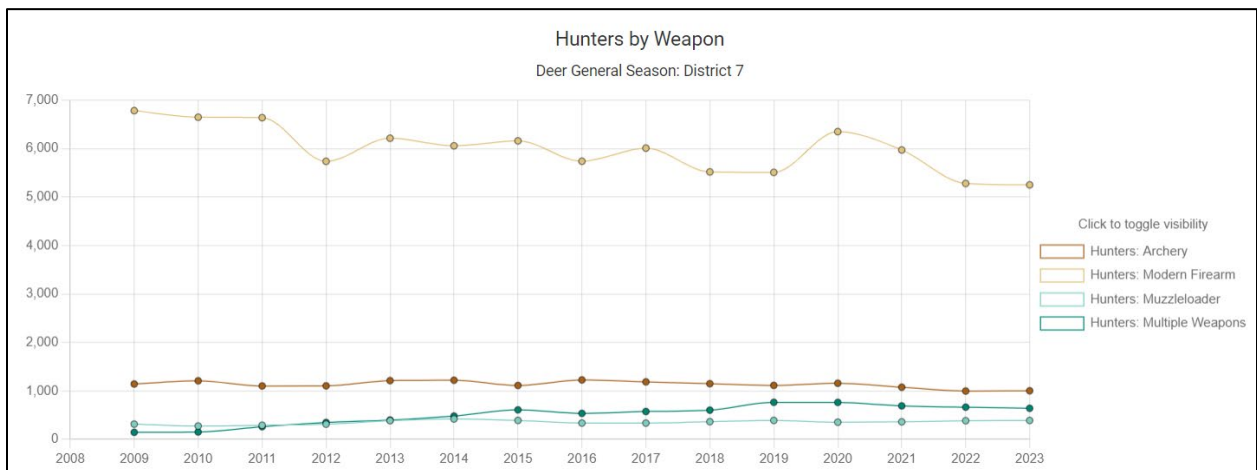


Figure 13. Percentage of harvest success by weapon type for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.

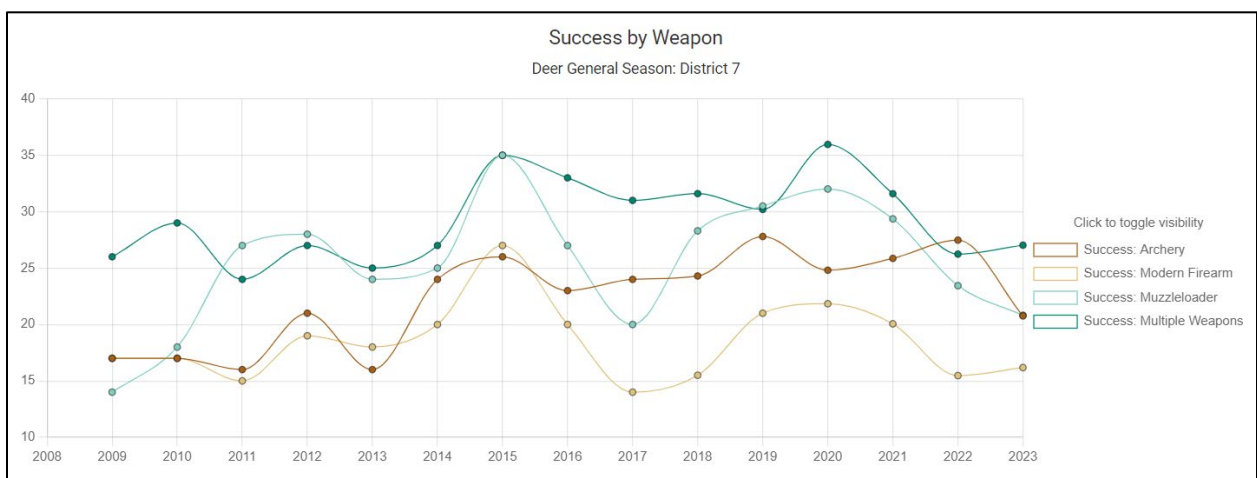
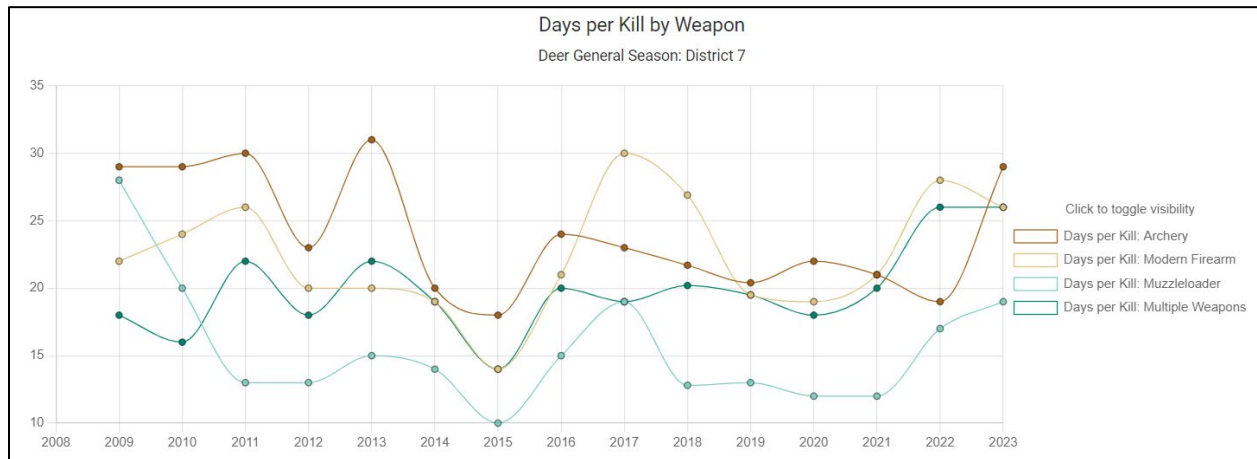


Figure 14. Number of days spent hunting per kill for mule deer in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.



Chelan County mule deer

***Please note while reading the information provided below that the [Pioneer Fire](#) currently burning a large area on the north shore of Lake Chelan and the resulting [USFS Closure Area](#) and [NPS Closure Area](#) are likely to impact many general and special permit seasons occurring in GMU 243 (Manson) in 2024. General seasons that will be particularly impacted by reduced access this year are the High Buck Hunt in Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, the general modern firearm season in GMU 243, and the early archery and muzzleloader seasons in GMU 243.**

The Chelan County portion of the district’s management goal 25 bucks per 100 does (minimum) post-season has been successful in providing hunters with opportunities for quality bucks over the last 10 years, and aerial surveys have found increasing buck:doe ratios in that time frame. The December 2023 aerial survey yielded a robust estimated buck:doe ratio of 29:100, well over the management goal. This represents an increase from the 24:100 buck:doe ratio estimated from the December 2021 aerial survey, which in turn was a slight increase from the 2018 buck:doe estimate of 23:100 and a major increase from the 2016 buck:doe ratio estimated at 18:100. At the same time that buck:doe ratios have been rising in Chelan County deer, post-hunt fawn:doe ratios have been declining. The 2023 fawn:doe ratio was estimated at 66:100, which, while still robust, represents a decline from the 2021 fawn:doe ratio of 76:100, and a greater decline from the 2018 fawn:doe ratio of 86:100.

Several years of decreased harvest, declining fawn:doe ratios, ongoing environmental impacts to mule deer such as drought, and many reports from hunters seeing fewer mule deer on the landscape throughout much of the county have all contributed to the decision to reduce antlerless hunting pressure in Chelan County. To conserve does in this portion of the East Slope Cascades, several changes have been made to the 2024 general deer season and special permit seasons. The early archery general season in GMUs 244-247 and 249, in which previously a legal deer was defined as 3 pt. minimum or antlerless, is now restricted to 3 pt. minimum harvest. Additionally, all Chelan County special permits previously in the antlerless category are now reduced in number but liberalized to allow harvest of any deer.

The 2022 and 2023 fire seasons have not been extensive enough to displace significant numbers of deer, and the nature of general season hunts in Chelan County remains unchanged. Ultimately, fall weather and deer movements determine harvest success in large part because greater snowfall results in mule deer moving farther off high-elevation summer range and into mid-to-low elevation transitional and winter range. The Chelan County mule deer herd spends winters on the breaks along the Columbia River and surrounding foothills but disperses into the large expanse of the Cascades during summer. These movements are characteristic of a strategy used by mule deer to maximize forage quality during summer and minimize energy expenditure during winter. Some Chelan mule deer travel as far as 40 to 50 miles while transitioning between summer and winter range.

A typical hillside of mule deer habitat in the Cascades will transition through the seasons from bright green in the spring and summer to light green to yellow, to orange, to red, to brown, then to bare branches. While we see changes in color, mule deer are perceiving changes in forage quality. The summer forage that supports deer and allows them to produce young and grow antlers does not retain its high quality all year, so as it changes, so do the habitats that deer occupy.

As early as mid-September, deer start responding to changes in vegetation by moving lower in elevation and occupying north-facing slopes where conditions are cooler and wetter, and forage is of better quality. From mid-September through the onset of winter, deer respond to changes in the quality of the available forage and utilize areas that best meet their needs. By mid-November, bucks are in condition and focused on breeding, but until then they are focused on food and security.

While hunting on winter ranges may sound appealing, as hunters can see long distances, most Chelan County deer will still be in areas of higher quality forage and greater security during the general seasons. Most deer will be in thicker cover where the food is higher quality and they have protection. These are usually the brushy north-facing slopes or at elevations much higher than typical open mule deer winter range.

There is one Deer Area in District 7 (2017, North Lake Chelan), a site of localized deer concentration where crop damage is a concern. WDFW provides limited, permit-only opportunities here to harvest antlerless deer to deter mule deer presence and reduce crop damage. Refer to [Washington Hunting Seasons and Rules](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions. A map of Deer Area 2017 is available on [WDFW’s website](#).

Table 2. The number of harvested mule deer for each GMU within Chelan County in 2023.

GMU	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
243	0	104	104	0	2	55	33	14
244	0	11	11	0	0	2	5	4
245	13	67	80	0	0	31	25	11
246	10	62	72	0	0	24	28	10

GMU	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
247	39	142	181	0	2	75	44	21
249	0	4	4	0	0	0	2	2
250	29	163	192	0	2	99	35	27
251	0	178	178	0	0	77	71	30
TOTALS	91	731	822	0	6	363	243	119

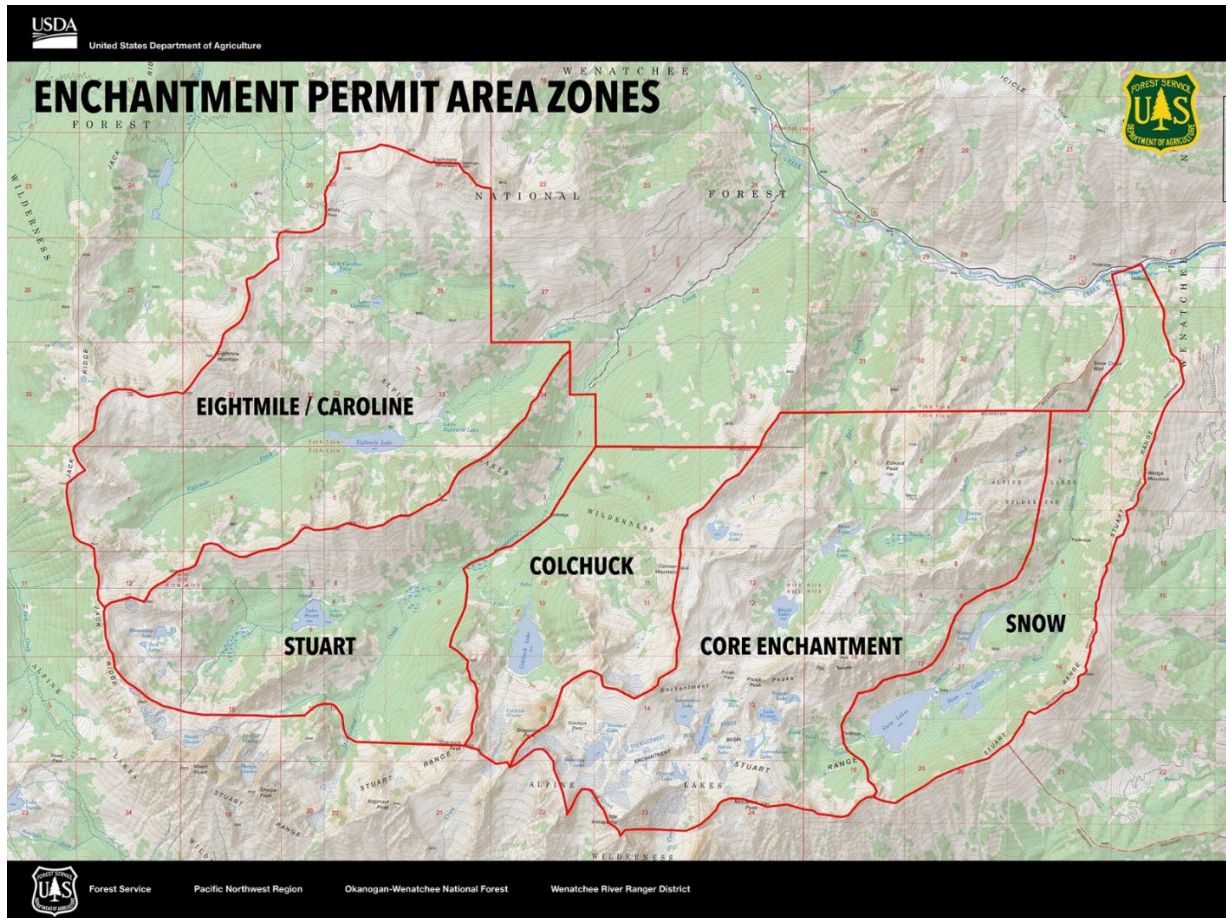
High buck hunts

High buck hunts in the Cascade Range are one of the most popular opportunities provided in the district. Each year, hunters don backpacks and ride pack strings into the heart of wilderness areas to pursue mule deer bucks and black bears. Within District 7, the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, Henry M. Jackson Wilderness, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area include open high buck hunt units. The administrative boundaries of these wildernesses and the recreation area are the hunt boundaries. Please note that **the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness is closed to high buck hunting Sept. 15-25** but opens for early archery where it overlaps GMU 243 (refer to the note on Pioneer Fire at the beginning of this section).

Hunters need to be aware of permit requirements in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and the Enchantment Permit Area Zones. U.S. Forest Service permits are now required for **day and overnight** use in any of these five zones (Figure 15). Permits are distributed through a lottery drawing system and are highly sought after. Hunters who have hunted these zones in the past need to be aware that permitting dates and requirements have changed. Without a permit, they may not have access to previously hunted areas. For more information about the Enchantment Permit Area Zones, visit the [Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest webpage](#) or contact USFS directly.

High-quality topographic maps and aerial imagery can help hone in on spots to target for scouting. Bucks can be difficult to encounter during high hunt seasons because of the complex topography of Chelan County and the vast acreage of dissected terrain and escape cover available that time of year. Hunters should scout early, when bucks are still in velvet and protecting their antlers, making them more likely to occupy less dense habitat, increasing their visibility. During the high hunt, deer are still on their abundant summer range and occur at low densities, making this hunt even more challenging.

Figure 15. Map of the Enchantment permit area zones within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.



Douglas County mule deer

Post-hunt ground surveys were conducted for the Douglas subherd in November/December 2023 and yielded a buck:doe ratio of 18:100. While this represents a decline from the B:D ratio of 20:100 estimated from 2022 post-hunt aerial surveys of the Douglas subherd in and is lower than the previous 5-year average of 22:100, it is still well-within the management objective for this herd of 15-19 bucks per 100 does. The fawn:doe ratio derived from 2023 Douglas ground surveys was 48:100, a marked decrease from the 67:100 estimated during aerial surveys in 2022 but a less pronounced decrease from the more comparable 52:100 F:D ratio derived from 2022 post-hunt ground surveys. Still, 48:100 marks a considerable departure from the previous 5-year average fawn:doe ratio of 65:100 does estimated from Douglas subherd ground surveys. Further, the 2022 post-hunt abundance estimate calculated from aerial sightability surveys was 11,873 mule deer. This represents a 22% decline from the last aerial survey performed here in 2018, which returned a population estimate of 15,254 (Figure 16).

The drop in fawn:doe ratios and significantly lower abundance estimate in 2022 over that of 2018 is cause for concern, particularly when paired with reports of hunters and landowners seeing fewer deer in some of the Douglas County GMUs in recent years. Biologists do not know what is driving this apparent

decline, and several factors could be at play including prolonged drought, severe wildfires, disease, and emigration to other parts of the Columbia Plateau Mule Deer Management Zone. Biologists seek to learn more in the coming years through continuing ground and aerial surveys. There are also discussions about potentially initiating a collaring project to track the movements of mule deer and investigate mortalities.

In the meantime, strong evidence of a herd in decline calls for more conservative antlerless harvest, and several changes have been made to the 2024 general deer season and special permit seasons in Douglas County designed to conserve the number of does in the herd. The early archery general season in GMUs 248, 254, 262, 266, and 269, in which previously a legal deer was defined as 3 pt. minimum or antlerless, is now restricted to 3 pt. minimum harvest. Additionally, fewer second deer antlerless special permits are available in Douglas County for the 2024 hunting season, and special permits in the youth, hunters with disabilities, and 65 years or over categories that previously allowed for only antlerless harvest have been reduced in number but liberalized to allow for the harvest of any deer. Special permit buck harvest opportunity is increased in Douglas County for the 2024 hunting season with the addition of two new any buck hunts, one in the modern firearm category in GMU 254 (St. Andrews) and one in the muzzleloader category in GMU 269 (Moses Coulee).

While deer numbers may be down in recent years, Douglas County still offers good mule deer hunting opportunity in a very different environment than found in Chelan County. Unlike Chelan County's largely migratory population, Douglas County's mule deer herd is thought to consist primarily of residents, and the landscape here poses a different set of conditions for deer hunters. Because much of the county is comprised of private lands, hunters have less opportunity to pursue deer freely across habitats, as they must pay attention to ownership boundaries. However, deer are more vulnerable in Douglas County's relatively open habitat with an extensive road network, compared to the rugged terrain of the Cascades.

Without the diverse cover provided by mountains and forests, buck escapement is lower in the sagebrush. This means a smaller portion of the bucks surviving are mature. Deer utilize the dry shrubsteppe habitat where forage quality remains higher longer, while balancing the need for security. Optimal hunting areas will include a mixture of sagebrush cover or steep, broken, rocky terrain and adjacent agricultural fields for forage (mostly winter wheat and canola fields). Large expanses of sagebrush, while not providing the best forage, can give deer the security they need.

In the broken Coulee County, the topography provides security for deer and riparian vegetation provides food resources. Deer in these areas often become experts at living in small, secure habitat pockets where they meet their needs and avoid hunters. While most of the county is private, more than 80,000 acres are enrolled in WDFW's Hunter Access Program. Start scouting now for deer herds on private lands and reach out to landowners before the rush of other hunters descend on them days before the season starts. Many farmers are partial to allowing youth hunters.

Figure 16. Aerial survey estimates of Douglas County mule deer population and structure, calculated from the modified Idaho Sightability Model, 2017-2022; 90% confidence intervals are demonstrated with brackets.

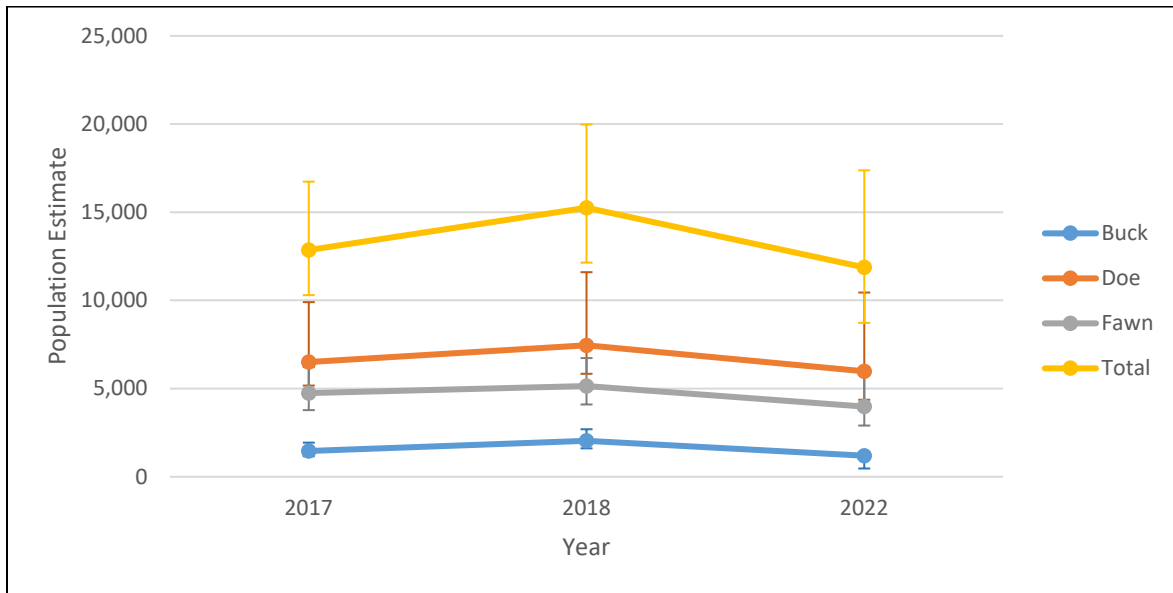


Table 3. The number of harvested mule deer for each GMU within Douglas County in 2023.

GMU	Antlerless	Antlered	Total Harvest	1 Point	2 Point	3 Point	4 Point	5+ Point
248	9	107	116	0	0	68	27	12
254	6	55	61	0	0	30	22	3
260	5	75	80	0	0	47	21	7
262	2	67	69	0	0	43	20	4
266	11	67	78	0	0	40	19	8
269	0	86	86	0	0	41	37	8
TOTALS	33	457	490	0	0	269	146	42

Black bear



Bears at Mud Creek. Photo by WDFW.

District 7 continues to provide great black bear hunting opportunity while maintaining a stable population with healthy age and sex composition. Black bears are common throughout much of Chelan County, particularly in the forested slopes of areas such as Mission Ridge, Blewett Pass, and Lake Wenatchee. In Douglas County, hunters can find bears sparsely distributed in small numbers in brushy riparian draws along the Columbia River and other drainages. Douglas County is part of the Columbia Basin Bear Management Unit (BMU 9), which is largely comprised of the most arid lands in Washington and makes up the smallest percentage of bear harvest in the state by far. Typically, fewer than 15 bears are harvested from the Douglas GMUs each year, most of which are taken from brushy riparian areas in GMU 248 (Big Bend).

Recent research by WDFW monitoring bear survival and productivity has contributed to our understanding of black bear population densities and sex and age structure in District 7. However, age analysis conducted using the teeth of harvested bears remains the most consistent method of monitoring black bear populations.

Research conducted in Chelan County indicates that fall forage availability influences reproduction and survivorship of cubs and yearlings. Black bears in Chelan County typically have a large amount of forage available to them and are most predictably found in areas suitable for berry crops, like huckleberries. As the season progresses and temperatures decrease, bears tend to move up in elevation to take

advantage of berries that are able to continue ripening in the later growing season of higher altitudes. By October, berries become scarce, and bears enter a period of frenzied eating known as polyphagia to prepare for hibernation. During this time, bears wander a broader range of elevations and habitats in search of all possible sources of food. Most bears harvested in the district are taken during open deer and elk seasons. Dedicated bear hunters will often hunt early in the season when bears are foraging on predictable annual berry crops. The incidental harvest that occurs during open deer and elk seasons is much more dependent on bear behavior and how widely they will have to travel for food.

All GMUs in Chelan County except for 243 (Manson), are part of the East Cascades Bear Management Unit (BMU 6). The East Cascades BMU is comprised of 23 GMUs along the Central Cascades, and the Wenatchee District is normally responsible for a substantial amount of this unit's harvest. While success relative to effort fluctuates from year to year, participation has been relatively stable, with approximately 4,000-4,600 hunters participating in the black bear season throughout BMU 6 each year. In Chelan County- and BMU 6 as a whole- GMUs 245 (Chiwawa) and 251 (Mission) consistently produce the highest numbers of harvested bears (Figure 17). BMU 6 saw a considerable decrease in black bear harvest and hunter success in fall 2023 as compared to 2022, with 26% fewer bears harvested and a drop-in success rate from 9.7% to 6.7%. Likewise, the North Cascades Bear Management Unit, BMU 5, which is made up almost entirely of Okanogan County GMUs with the exception of GMU 243 (Manson) in Chelan County, experienced a similarly stark drop in bear harvest and hunter success between 2022 and 2023.

However, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that bear harvest and hunter success declined in BMUs 5 and 6 as a whole, harvest in Chelan County itself experienced a significantly less pronounced reduction in harvest between 2022 and 2023, in which 198 and 168 bears, respectively, were harvested in all Chelan GMUs combined. Additionally, the 168 bears harvested in Chelan County in 2023 represent a number consistent with and a little better than the 5-year average of 153 bears taken here annually. Also interesting to note is that of all the GMUs encompassed by BMU 5, the lone Chelan County unit, 243 (Manson), was the only GMU to experience an increase in bear harvest in 2023 over 2022, and a substantial one at that. The 43 bears harvested in the Manson GMU in 2023 represent an all-time record for that GMU and a 47% increase over its previous 5-year average (Figure 17 & 18). However, bear hunters interested in GMU 243 for the 2024 season should note that much of the Manson unit currently falls within the [Pioneer Fire Closure Area](#), and is likely to remain so until late in the season.

Overall, examining Chelan County bear harvest on its own affords a more encouraging outlook on the 2024 season in the Wenatchee District. More importantly for this upcoming season, reports from the field of fair to good berry crops throughout much of Chelan County and a higher than usual frequency of bear sightings in several GMUs suggest that the 2024 bear season will be a productive one in District 7, with harvest and success rates likely remaining at or above 2023 levels. Hunters statewide are required to submit a premolar tooth from all harvested black bears by Dec. 1. Please contact the district office if you need assistance with submitting a tooth. For more information, refer to page 68 of the Washington Big Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

Figure 17. The number of black bears harvested during the general season in each Game Management Unit (GMU) in District 7. The total number of bears harvested in 2023 (orange) are compared to the 5-year average (blue).

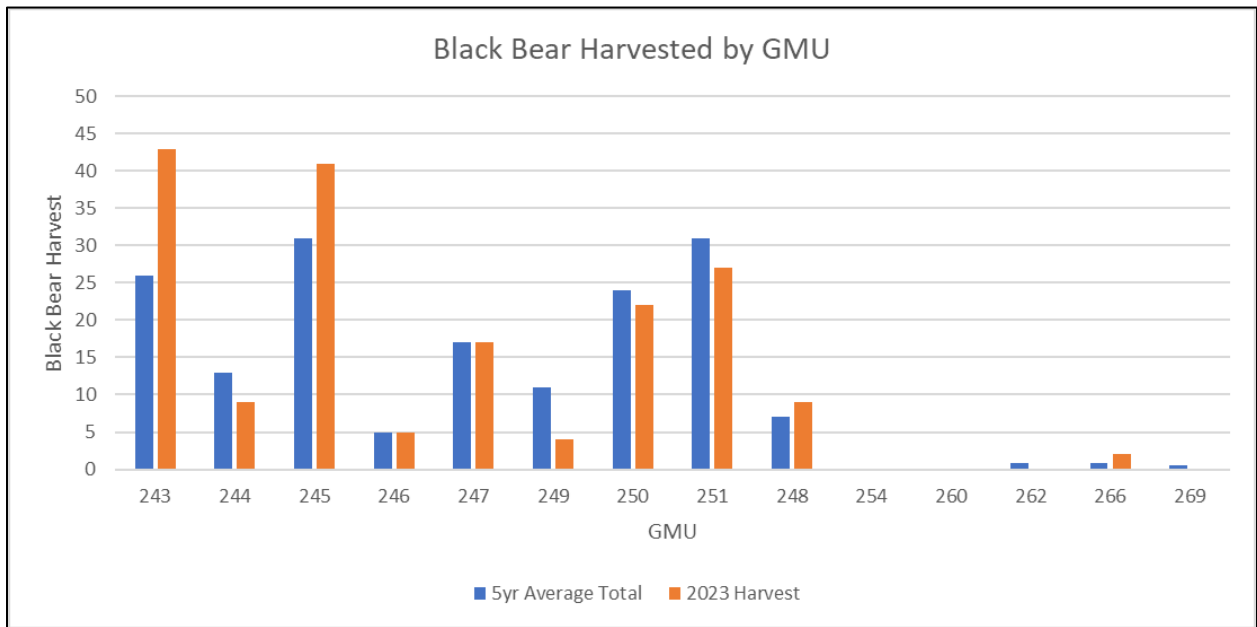
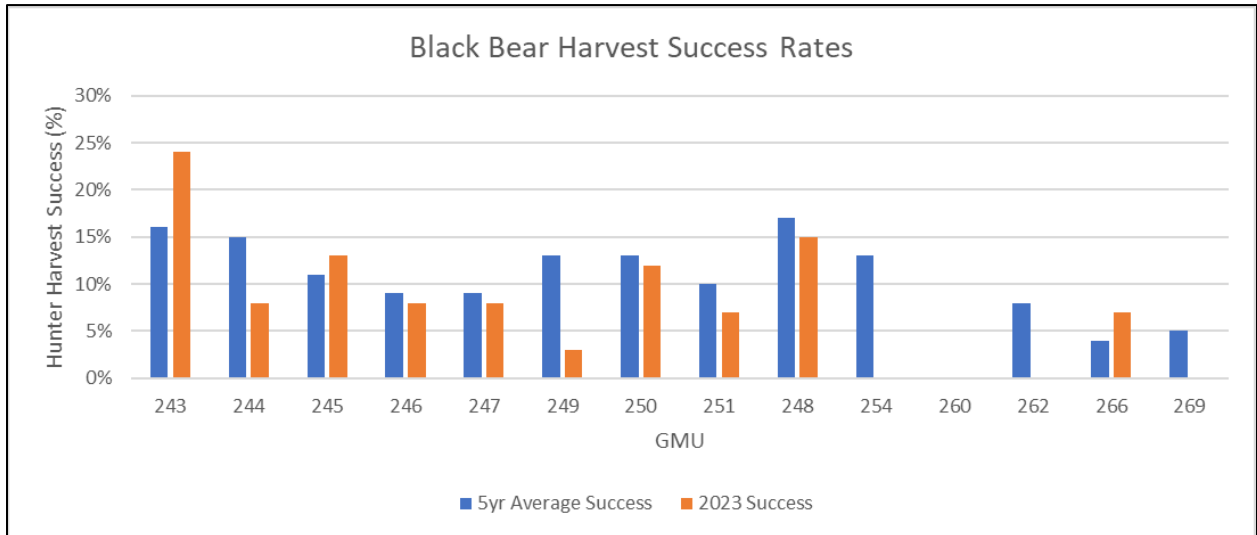


Figure 18. Black bear general season harvest success rates (%) in each GMU in District 7. The 2023 success rates (orange) are compared to the 5-year averages (blue).

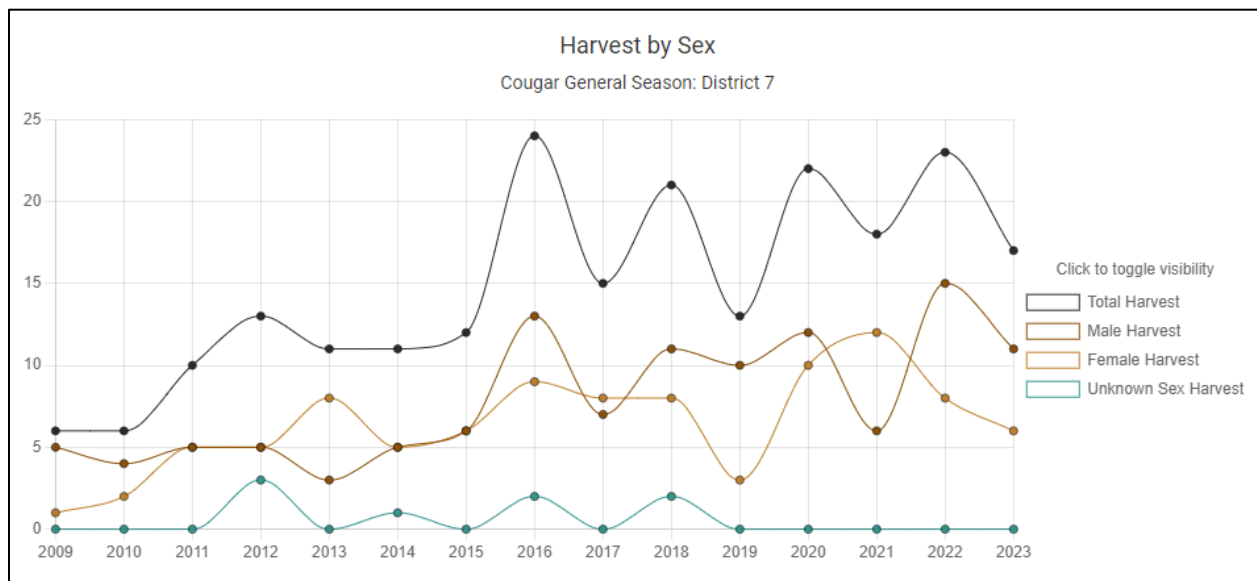


Cougar

Like black bears, population monitoring for cougar management comes primarily from harvest data. In District 7, cougar hunt areas are split into four different Population Management Units (PMU) in Chelan County and a Columbia Basin PMU which includes Douglas County. Within each of these hunt areas, harvest guidelines are established based on ungulate habitat and cougar population biology. Although cougar harvest fluctuates from year to year, cougar populations appear stable in District 7. In 2023, 24 cougars were harvested in District 7 which is right in line with the 10-year average of 25 (Figure 19). Cougars are dispersed widely throughout both Chelan and Douglas counties and both offer good hunting opportunities, especially when enough snow falls to allow for tracking.

2023 cougar harvest data are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage.

Figure 9. Number of cougars harvested by sex during general season in District 7 from 2009 to 2023.



While many cougars are harvested in Chelan County opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons, dedicated cougar hunters will wait until snow accumulation allows for tracking later in the winter. Cougars are most active when deer are most active, typically at dawn and dusk. Cougars follow deer herds and can typically be found at lower elevations as the early season progresses and deer move off summer range and migrate to winter range. Douglas County also offers good cougar hunting opportunities. Most hunters will focus on the Columbia River breaks, Moses Coulee, and Rufus Woods Reservoir. This rough country allows cougars access to deer herds while providing stalking cover. Successful hunters often wait for snow and track cats on foot.

In July 2024, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission approved changes to cougar hunting seasons. Going forward, there will be a single cougar season from September 1 to March 31, and there will be a cap set for each population management unit (PMU) at the intrinsic growth rate of 13% based

on specific statewide density estimates. All known human-caused cougar mortalities will count towards the 13% cap (e.g., cougars removed to protect humans or livestock will count towards the cap). If a PMU reaches the 13% cap before the season opens September 1, the cap for that PMU will extend to 20%. Once the assigned cap is reached, that area will close to cougar harvest. All hunters are responsible for knowing if their hunt area is open or closed; to confirm its status, all hunters must call the cougar hotline (1-866-364-4868) or [check online](#) prior to hunting.

To facilitate implementation of the cap, all successful cougar hunters are required to report their harvest to WDFW via the hotline within 72 hours of harvest (press 3 after greeting), and provide WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill. The **unfrozen** hide and skull must be presented to WDFW within five days of the kill. Proof of sex must be left attached for inspection and it is recommended that hunters insert a stick perpendicularly in the cougar's mouth to prevent the jaw from locking, as a tooth will need to be extracted at the time of inspection. Learn more about these changes to the [cougar hunting season](#).

Bighorn sheep



Bighorn sheep harvest. Photo by Mark Beardemphl.

Within District 7, WDFW manages three bighorn sheep herds in Chelan County: Swakane, Chelan Butte, and Manson. Each of these herds is the result of multiple translocation efforts beginning in 1969. Bighorn sheep continue to thrive in District 7, offering prized, once-in-a-lifetime sheep hunting opportunity sought by thousands of special permit applicants each year (Figure 20). Hunters selected under these drawings are encouraged to contact District 7 for additional information. All hunters harvesting a bighorn sheep ram in Washington are required to have the horn sets measured and plugged by WDFW within 10 days. Hunters need to call a WDFW Regional or District Office to **schedule an appointment** with a biologist for this inspection.



Each harvested ram must be plugged with an aluminum pin featuring a unique ID number. Photo by WDFW.

Swakane

The core range of this herd is within the Swakane Unit of the Chelan Butte Wildlife Area and the surrounding public lands adjacent to the Wildlife Area. Hunting pressure on this herd is low, as only two mature ram permits have been offered here each year. The Swakane herd is famed for producing the world record California bighorn in 2010 as scored by Safari Club International. Over the past two decades, this herd has increased from approximately 100 animals to a minimum count of 200 animals in 2019, well above the population objective for this herd. A 2022 spring aerial survey of the Swakane herd returned a minimum count of 195 sheep with a ram:ewe ratio of 84:100 and a robust population of mature rams. An aerial survey was not performed in 2023, however the ground-based surveys yielded a minimum count of 186 bighorn sheep in the Swakane subherd, with a high ram:ewe ratio at 95 rams per 100 ewes. The 2024 season will no doubt provide another year of world-class bighorn ram hunting opportunity.

Given the consistently high minimum counts and stable population trend seen in the Swakane herd, a new adult ewe season is being offered here in 2024. For the first time, two hunters will have the opportunity to harvest an adult ewe in the Swakane concurrent with the Hunters with Disabilities- Adult Ewe season open on Chelan Butte from October 11-31. This hunt follows the Swakane Any Ram hunt and thus will not have an effect on ram permit holders in the Swakane.

Bands of sheep of both sexes are routinely found on the cliffs and steep slopes along the Columbia River breaks. Permit winners can take advantage of the network of USFS roads within the Swakane bighorn hunt unit to gain access to high points for scoping out groups of rams. Hunters can also glass for this herd from the east side of the Columbia River at pullouts on Highway 97. In recent years, the Swakane herd has expanded its range, and sheep are regularly observed as far north as the Entiat River.

Chelan Butte

This herd is central to Chelan Butte between the Columbia River and the city of Chelan. The Chelan Butte herd provides some of the best access of all the sheep herds in Washington and is known to produce large rams. This fall will be no exception as the November 2023 aerial survey returned a ram:ewe ratio of 91:100, with 44% of the rams being mature ($\frac{3}{4}$ curl or full curl). Apart from any ram hunting opportunities, WDFW offers both ewe and juvenile ram permit hunts for the Chelan Butte herd for hunters with disabilities.

Permit levels for ewe hunts have been reduced due to multiple years of lower-than-expected minimum counts, and in 2024 two adult ewe and two juvenile ram permits are available for hunters with disabilities. Additionally, the four adult ewe permits offered in Chelan Butte have been discontinued, and instead one adult ewe permit is being offered in a newly added youth category for Chelan Butte. The relatively high number of ewe permits offered in Chelan Butte dates back to 2018, when the previous year's high count was well over the population objective at 218 individuals. However, the herd appears to have declined since that time, and the past three years of aerial surveys have yielded minimum counts of only 84-114 sheep despite extensive survey coverage (2023 minimum count = 93). It is unknown what factors may be leading to this decline, but ewe harvest must be more conservative for the foreseeable future as adult ewe survival and reproduction is essential to maintaining and growing a bighorn sheep herd. In the meantime, the high proportion of $\frac{3}{4}$ and full curl rams in this herd still makes for exceptional California bighorn hunting and some of the best sheep hunting in the state.

A county road bisects the Chelan Butte Wildlife Area, providing access to state and federal lands open for hunting. Some of the best glassing is available from the hang-gliding launch near the summit of Chelan Butte. For views of the cliffs along the Columbia River, try glassing by boat or from points along Highway 97 east of the Columbia River. Sheep in this herd are concentrated on the side of Chelan Butte facing the river, and range north as far as Wells Dam although the majority of sheep can be found in the Chelan Butte unit of the Chelan Wildlife Area. Hunters have also harvested rams from Deer Mountain, just north of Chelan.

The Manson herd primarily occupies USFS land on the north shore of Lake Chelan, concentrated between Antilon Creek north to Lone Fir Creek. The Manson herd occupies some of the most rugged and inaccessible terrain of all the sheep herds in Chelan County and Washington as a whole. This herd is most readily accessible by boat on Lake Chelan. USFS maintains several public docks and campgrounds along the Lake Chelan shoreline. A Federal Dock Permit is required to use any USFS dock between May 1 – Oct. 31. This herd can also be accessed by 4WD vehicle and what will likely be a steep downhill hike towards the lake by driving Grade Creek Road.

However, access to the Manson hunt unit may be limited in 2024 due to the currently ongoing [Pioneer Fire](#), which at the time of this writing (July 2024) spans over 33,000 acres between the north shore of Lake Chelan and the Chelan/Okanogan County line, from Lone Fir Creek to Hazard Creek just south of Stehekin. Although the fire itself will most likely be out by November, it could last well into October, potentially impacting pre-season scouting. **More importantly, the current [USFS Fire Closure Area](#) spans the entirety of the Manson hunt unit, including all boat-in docks and campgrounds in the area and Grade Creek Rd. Provided that the fire does not move far south of Lone Fir Creek, all areas to the south of the current fire perimeter should be open by November. However, Prince Creek and all uplake docks and campgrounds will likely remain closed due to hazardous post-fire conditions. Likewise, the Safety Harbor boat-in campground remains closed in 2024 due to the risk of flash flooding caused by the 2017 Uno Peak fire.**

The Manson hunt season occurs much later than the season for the Swakane and Chelan Butte herds and is timed for when rams should be more concentrated at lower elevations along the lake. A spring 2024 aerial survey of the Manson herd yielded a minimum population count of 69 total bighorn sheep, with a ram:ewe ratio of 60 rams per 100 ewes. The comparatively remote, rugged terrain and lower number of rams in the Manson herd makes for a more challenging hunt than either the Chelan Butte or Swakane Units, with days per kill consistently averaging higher here than in the other two sheep units in Chelan County (Figure 21). While it may take hunters more time to find the ram of their choice, hunters in the Manson unit still enjoy a 100% success rate each year along with some of the best scenery in the state.

District 7 bighorn sheep survival and health

Over winter survival for adult sheep remains high in all three of the Wenatchee District's sheep herds. Annual lamb mortality is characteristic of most sheep populations, where lambs suffer the highest rates of mortality during their first year of life, and the highest mortality of the year immediately after birth.

While *M. ovi* has not yet been detected in the Swakane, Chelan Butte, or Manson herds, this deadly pathogen has now infected bighorn herds to the north and south of District 7. The public is asked to be on the lookout for signs of infection in Chelan County's bighorn sheep, as *M. ovi* can cause pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn herds resulting in high sheep mortality. Symptoms of *M. ovi* in sheep include coughing, nasal discharge, persistent headshaking, lethargy, and sudden death. **Hunters are asked to report observations of any symptoms right away to the Wenatchee District Office and provide GPS coordinates for the observed sick or dead sheep.**

Figure 20. The number of applicants for Any Ram special hunt permits within District 7 from 2017 to 2023.

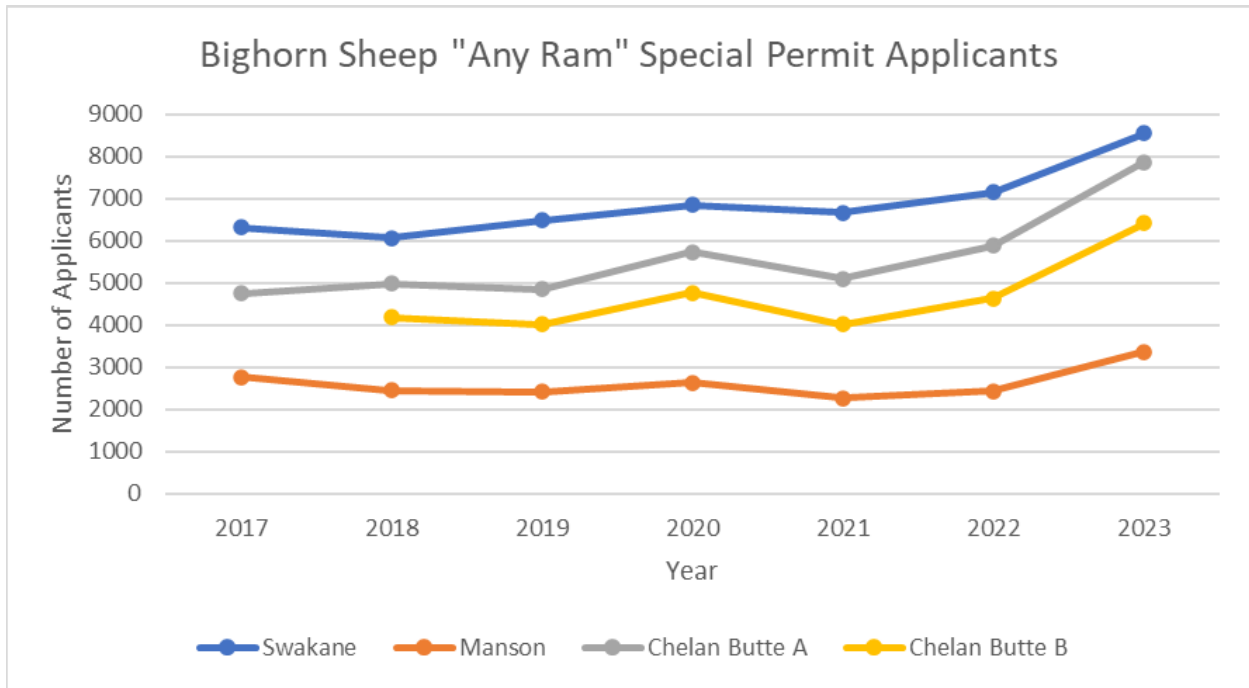
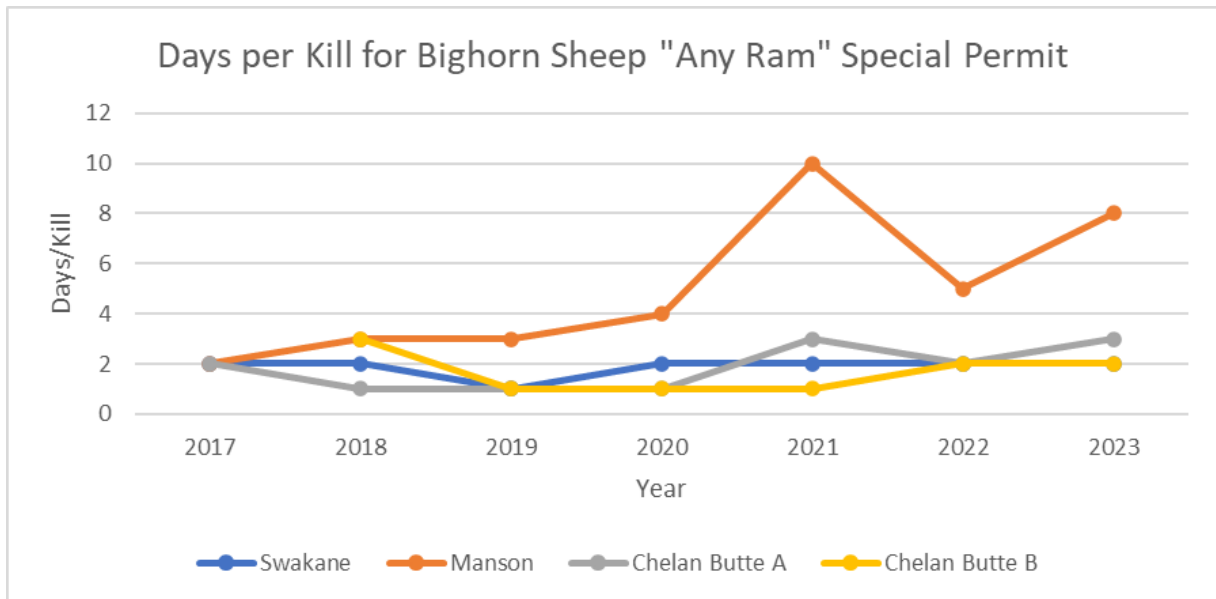


Figure 21. The number of days per harvest by each hunter for Any Ram special hunt permits within District 7 from 2017 through 2023.



Turkey



Youth turkey harvest. Photo by Adam Russell.

Merriam's turkeys in Chelan County descend from over 400 birds released between 2000-2002. Turkeys are not native to Washington, but their popularity with hunters make them a prized game species. Turkey densities in the district are relatively concentrated, but populations appear to be increasing in the northern portions of Douglas County and parts of Chelan County.

In Chelan County, the number of turkeys the landscape can support is determined primarily by the amount and availability of wintering habitat under typical snow depths. When winter snow depths reach 20 inches or more, wild turkeys have a difficult time making it through the winter. In areas where turkey can utilize ranches, barnyards, and farms for winter forage, they can show significant survival over winter. In Chelan County, GMUs 245, 250, and 251 produce the greatest turkey harvest.

The Stemilt Basin outside of Wenatchee and canyons of the Wenatchee River between Cashmere and Leavenworth offer good opportunities to find turkeys. Turkeys can often be found in these areas near the edge of private and public lands. Recent forest thinning projects and logging on public lands have created good spring turkey habitat. Areas to focus for turkeys on recently logged USFS lands include Derby Canyon, Yaksum Canyon, Mission Creek, Eagle Creek, and any other canyons that lead off Chumstick Highway between Leavenworth and Plain. Hunters can also find turkeys west through Plain, but they are often on private land. In Douglas County, GMUs 266 and 248 have been producing an increasing number of turkeys. Remember to scout early and get permission to hunt private lands.

Turkey hunters have enjoyed greater harvest opportunities in District 7 since 2021, when a fall season for the North Central PMU was introduced that allowed for the harvest of one turkey of either sex. All three fall seasons since have yielded very similar hunter turnout, harvest levels, and hunter success, with 611 hunters harvesting 218 turkeys in the North Central PMU in fall 2021, 706 hunters harvesting 220 turkeys in the fall of 2022, and 638 hunters harvesting 200 turkeys in the fall of 2023 (Table 4).

Beginning in spring 2022, the bag limit for bearded turkeys in Chelan County was raised from one to two. However, this increase in hunt opportunity has not yet resulted in an increase in hunter numbers or harvest during the spring season in PMU 20, and both metrics have actually decreased at roughly equivalent rates each of the past two years. Regardless, turkey opportunity remains strong in Chelan and Douglas counties with populations thought to be stable to increasing throughout District 7 and the updated bag limits remain in place for the coming fall and spring turkey seasons.

Table 4. Fall general season turkey harvest statistics for the North Central PMU (P20).

Year	Total Harvest	# of Hunters	Hunter Success Rate	Days per Kill
2023	200	638	31%	16
2022	220	706	31%	17
2021	218	618	36%	13

2023 turkey harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage.

Quail



Male California (valley) quail. Photo by WDFW.

District 7 offers excellent quail hunting opportunity. In both Chelan and Douglas counties, quail benefit from a variety of agricultural land uses that create edge habitat, such as where the edge of an irrigated field meets shrubsteppe, that they rely on. Edges of standing corn, wheat, or other grain fields, medium to heavy cover surrounding harvested fields, and other places where weed and grass seed are readily available are prime places to look for quail. Fortunately, areas such as these are plentiful in Douglas County.

Quail are also often found in thick tangles of trees and tall brush, especially near stream beds, valley bottoms with patches of Russian olive, oak or high sage; and weather-break tree lines and fence lines. In Chelan County especially, quail tend to be found in and around orchards and other irrigated crops. Swakane Canyon also provides great quail opportunity in Chelan County. However, public lands can be tough places to find larger coveys later in the season. To improve success, hunters should look for areas without easy access and spend some time seeking permission from private landowners.

Chelan County quail harvest dropped between 2022 and 2023 as did the number of hunters pursuing quail, and hunter days declined slightly as well (Figure 22). Because harvest numbers can be used as rough indices of population trends, this could mean that quail numbers may have remained relatively

stable in Chelan County from the previous year and the decrease in harvest might have more to do with hunter participation than with quail population size. Meanwhile, Douglas County saw a modest uptick in quail harvest in 2023 along with an inversely proportionate decrease in hunter numbers but an increase in hunter days, which could indicate a relatively stable quail population in Douglas County between years, as well (Figure 23).

Cool, wet weather prior to hatches and adequate early summer precipitation are ideal for increasing forage and insect mass for quail, whereas drought can stunt vegetation growth and reduce insect production, negatively impacting brood recruitment. Quail hunters in Chelan County will likely see lower numbers of birds during the 2024 season as, despite a cooler than average spring and early summer, much of the county remained in severe drought (and likely will continue to do so through the fall). However, quail numbers will likely remain stable or decline only mildly in Douglas County during the 2024 season due to the more moderate drought conditions present in much of the Columbia Basin.

2023 quail harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) website. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to previous years. For more information, refer to [Quail Hunting](#).

Figure 22. The total harvest for quail in Chelan County from 1997 through 2023.

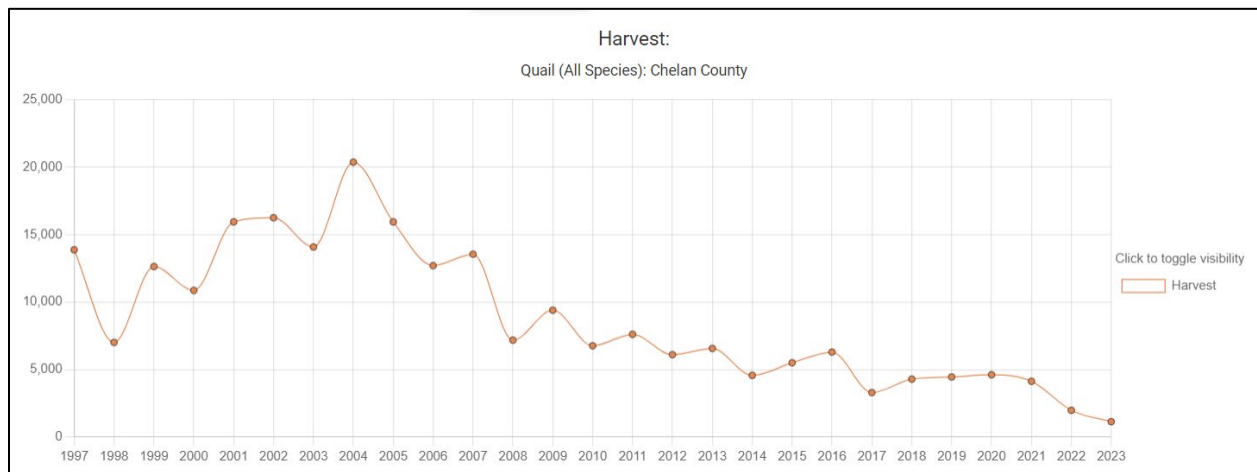
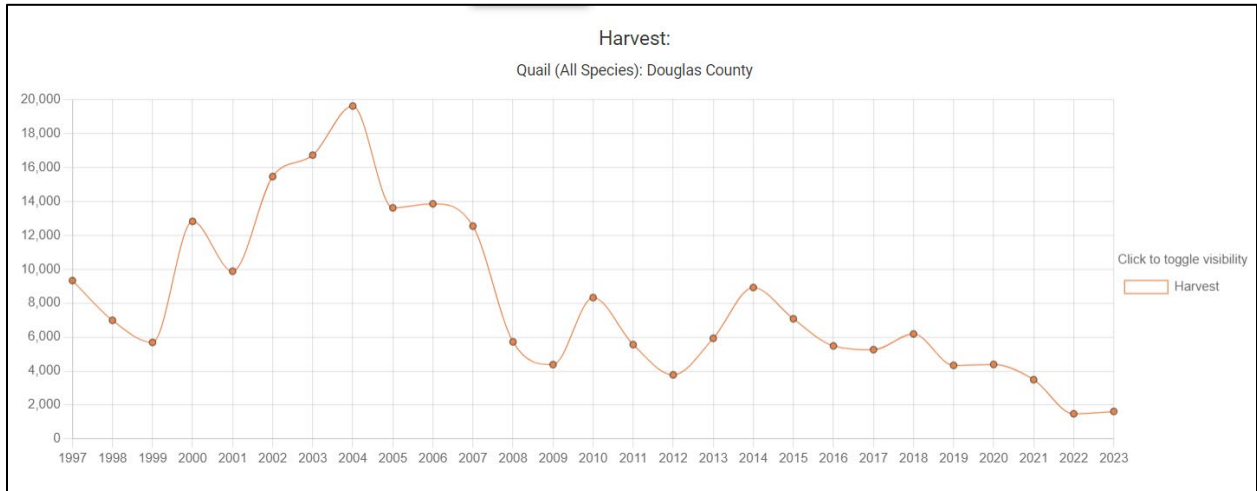


Figure 23. The total harvest for quail in Douglas County from 1997 through 2023.



Gray partridge



Gray partridge. Photo by Neil Paprocki.

Gray partridges, or “huns” as they are commonly called, are more common in Douglas County than in Chelan County and are associated with grasslands or agricultural areas that are interspersed with

patches of sagebrush. Brushy hedgerows adjacent to agricultural fields can often harbor huns in the winter. They occur at low density, with coveys dispersed across larger areas. Look to fields of grain crops enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with lots of grass cover extending into draws, as these are often a good place to find coveys. Covering a wide range of cover types is the best way to locate coveys.

District 7 hun harvest last season was lower than in 2022. Like chukar, hun populations are subject to steep yearly fluctuations, so the level of harvest in 2023 does not provide much insight into the outcome of the upcoming 2024 season. 2023 partridge harvest figures are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to previous years.

Chukar

Traditionally, more chukar have been harvested in District 7 than in any other district in the state, and opportunities for chukar hunting are numerous here due to a large amount of prime habitat on public lands. Chelan County has traditionally yielded more chukar harvest than Douglas County, but harvest rates have risen substantially in Douglas County over the past couple of years. In 2023, hunters harvested 1,914 chukar in Douglas County, more than double the previous year, and exceeded only by the harvest in Kittitas County (Figure 24a). This leap in chukar harvest in Douglas County is especially noteworthy because the number of hunters in 2023 remained consistent with hunter numbers in 2022 (Figure 24b). Whether east or west of the Columbia River, however, hunters have a large selection of lands to choose from throughout District 7.

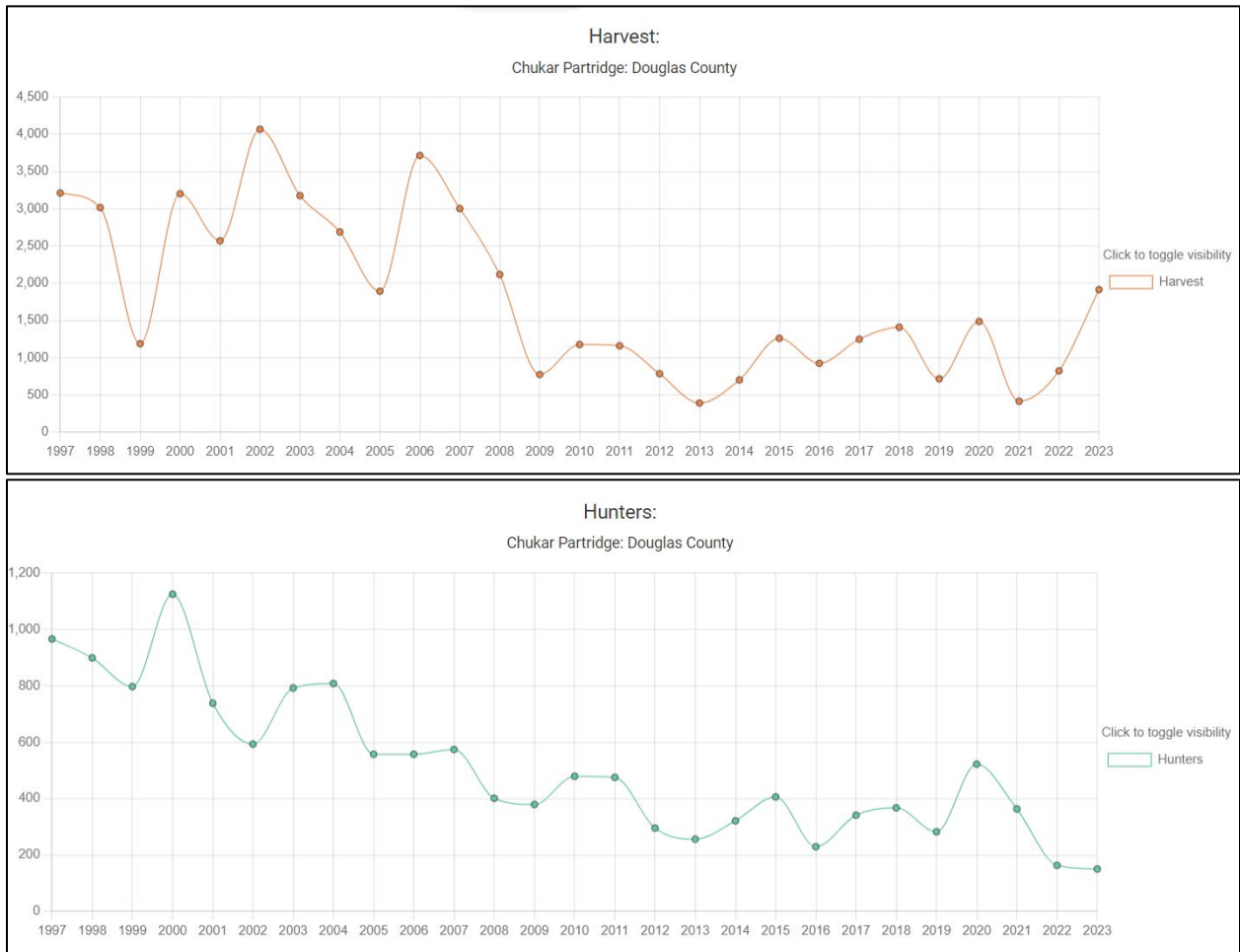
On the Chelan County side of the Columbia River, BLM, USFS, DNR, Chelan PUD, and WDFW all manage lands with chukar hunting opportunities, such as the Chelan Wildlife Area and Rocky Reach Wildlife Area. Chukar are also abundant on the north shore of Lake Chelan in the rocky exposed grassland habitats below Grade Creek Road, although as of July 29th, 2024, much of this habitat currently falls within the [Pioneer Fire Closure Area](#) and may remain closed to access through much of October. Along the Columbia River breaks in Douglas County, the majority of chukar habitat falls under private ownership, but Big Bend Wildlife Area in northern Douglas County offers hunters good chukar opportunity on public land.

Chukar inhabit steep, rocky shrublands and grasslands, and will readily fly uphill when flushed, so hunters should try to pursue these birds from above when possible. Chukar hunting falls into two distinct seasons: with snow and without snow. While trying to negotiate chukar habitat with snow and ice on the ground can be hazardous, there is no doubt that birds become concentrated following the accumulation of snow, so serious chukar hunters take advantage of this change in conditions. Throughout the season, the Columbia River breaks provide the majority of chukar habitat, along with areas adjacent to Banks Lake and Moses Coulee.

This species is subject to major population fluctuations due to low annual survival, so past trends are not very useful in predicting future harvest. Instead, spring and summer climate is the strongest predictor of what the hunting season holds for chukar. For instance, the jump in Douglas County chukar harvest from 2022 to 2023 likely can be partly attributed to the fact that drought conditions actually improved somewhat in much of Douglas County over that time period, whereas conditions worsened in Chelan County in that same time frame, corresponding with a drop in harvest here. Chukar clutch size is often greatly reduced in drought years, and some chukars do not breed at all in such difficult conditions. Cool, wet weather prior to hatches and adequate early summer precipitation are ideal for increasing forage and insect mass. Chukar hunters in Chelan County will likely continue to see lower numbers of birds during the 2024 season as, despite a cooler than average spring and early summer, much of the county remained in severe drought (and likely will continue to do so through the fall). However, chukar numbers will likely remain stable or decline only mildly in Douglas County during the 2024 season due to the more moderate drought conditions present in much of the Columbia Basin.

2023 chukar harvest figures are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and data from 2022 and 2023 will not be directly comparable to previous years. For more information, refer to [Hunting Chukar Partridge](#).

Figure 24. The total chukar harvest (top, a) and hunters (bottom, b) in Douglas County from 1998 to 2023.



Forest grouse



Spruce grouse. Photo by Neil Paprocki.

Three species of forest grouse can be found in the Wenatchee District: blue grouse (dusky grouse), spruce grouse, and ruffed grouse. Most grouse harvested in District 7 are taken in Chelan County in GMUs 245, 246, and 251, although 243 and 244 also offer good grouse opportunity. Please note that as of July 29th, 2024, much of GMU 243 currently falls within the [Pioneer Fire Closure Area](#) and may remain closed to access through much of October and possibly beyond. There are fewer dispersed opportunities for ruffed grouse and dusky grouse hunting in Douglas County, but coniferous and riparian forests offer the best hunting opportunities. GMUs 248 and 266 are the most promising for grouse hunters.

Most grouse harvest on the district occurs over opening weekend and then increases again with the general mule deer season. Hunters are asked to deposit one wing and the tail from each harvested grouse in wing barrels located across Chelan County. For directions on collecting these samples and a list of wing and tail collection barrel locations, visit the [WDFW website](#).

Hunters can find ruffed grouse in healthy riparian forests and aspen stands at the margin of timbered habitat, and dusky grouse will use timbered stringers that extend down as far as the shrubsteppe. Spruce grouse are restricted to higher elevation conifer forests, usually above the Ponderosa pine.

Hunters interested in forest grouse will improve their chances by searching out areas where fewer hunters concentrate. Popular road systems can provide early season hunting; however, they often “dry up” quickly due to the numbers of hunters and the vulnerability of hatch-year birds. Chelan County has a relatively limited road system within grouse habitat, and dedicated hunters know where they are, so hunters can increase the productive length of their season by hunting areas on foot away from roads and the bulk of the other hunters.

While forest grouse harvest and hunter participation exhibited a declining trend regionally and statewide for many years, 2022 and 2023 actually saw a roughly 30% increase in forest grouse harvest in Chelan County despite hunter numbers remaining stable (Figures 25 & 26). Interestingly, this trend corresponds precisely to what occurred on the state level, as statewide forest grouse harvest in 2023 was also approximately 30% higher than in 2022 despite consistent hunter participation between years. In the absence of brood surveys, which are not performed in District 7, it is difficult to predict what the 2024 forest grouse season holds, but the relatively cool and dry spring/early summer may result in stable forest grouse populations yielding harvest similar to or slightly below 2023.

In 2021, WDFW changed the forest grouse season to September 15 – January 15 to reduce harvest of reproductive age females and allow for brood dispersal, which will help sustain a harvestable population over the long run. The Sept. 15 grouse season opening date will remain in effect for the 2024 season.

2023 grouse harvest figures are available at WDFW’s [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and the results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to previous years. For more information, refer to [Hunting Forest Grouse](#).

Figure 25. The total harvest of forest grouse in Chelan County from 1998 to 2023.

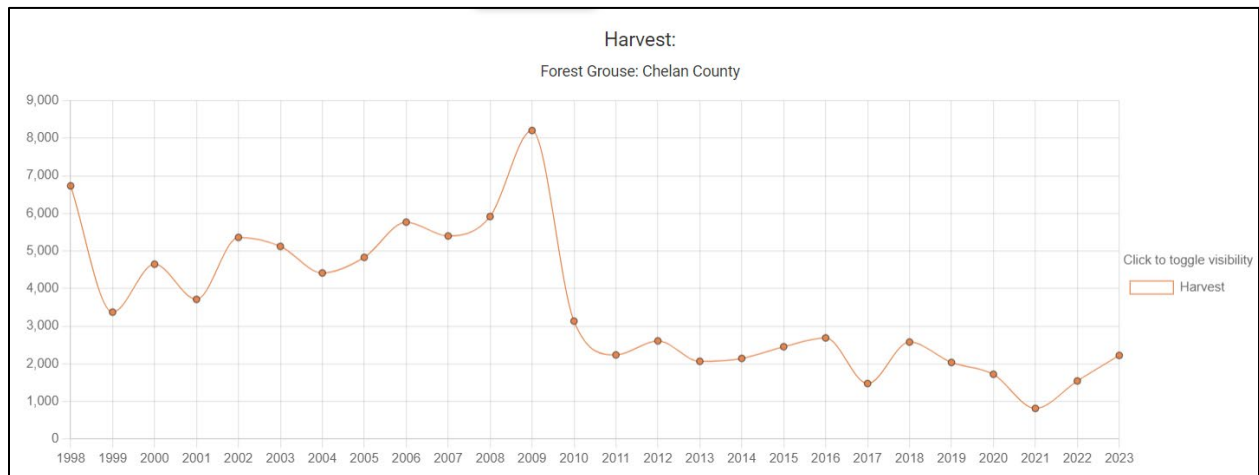
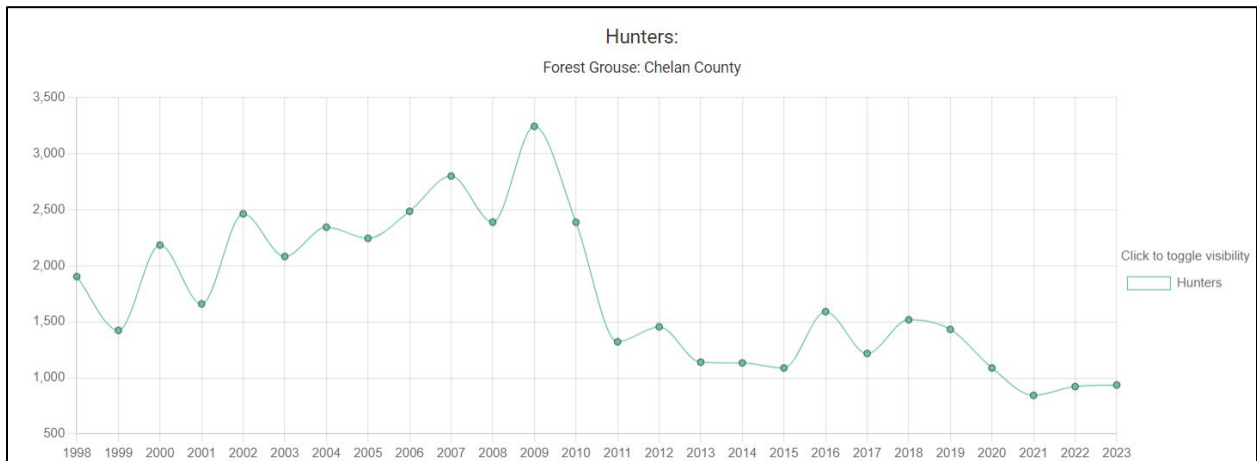


Figure 26. The total harvest of forest grouse in Chelan County from 1998 to 2023.



Dove



Mourning Dove. Photo by Neil Paprocki.

Most mourning doves harvested in District 7 are taken in Douglas County, but viable options for dove hunting exist in Chelan County in places like Swakane Canyon. Hunters should contact private landowners to secure hunting opportunities and gain access permission to agricultural fields. Look for open areas such as grain fields near wetlands, brushy upland streams, woodlands, and orchards where

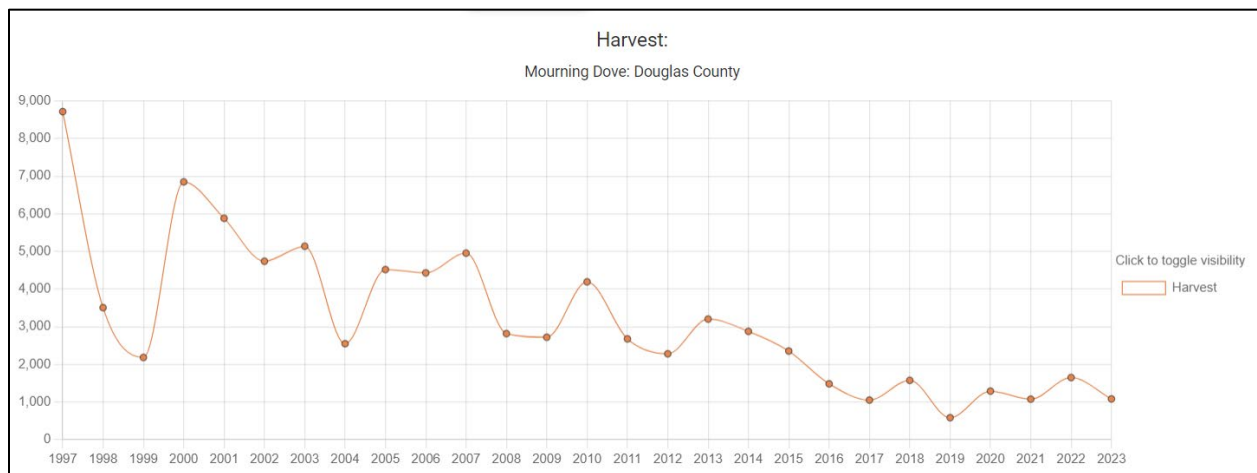
birds find both roosting cover and food later in the season. Evening roost hunting can be a productive approach for doves, with the best locations being stands of trees near water and surrounded by agriculture.

Dove harvest in Douglas County was 35% lower in 2023 than the previous year despite the virtually identical number of hunters on the landscape (Figure 27). The factors contributing to this drop in harvest are currently unknown, and it is difficult to predict what dove numbers in the 2024 season will look like. It is possible that the persistent, strong spring and summer winds reduced nest success, which may in turn contribute to another year of low harvest in District 7.

Hunters should remember that Eurasian collared doves can be found in the same areas as mourning doves. Eurasian collared doves are classified as a deleterious species in Washington and do not count toward daily dove bag limits, so be sure to take a few when the opportunity arises. The Eurasian collared dove is a stocky bird with a distinct black collar on the dorsal side of the neck. Refer to a photo comparison of the two species in the [Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlets](#).

2023 dove harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to those from previous years.

Figure 27. The total harvest of forest grouse in Chelan County from 1997 to 2023.



Pheasant

Wild populations of pheasants can be found on public and private land in a few locations in Douglas County. Hunters should focus on areas with a mixture of native shrubsteppe habitat, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands, and wet meadows/wetlands. Look for weedy and tall vegetation on the roadsides, which provides good cover. Good pheasant hunting can be found in Foster Creek (GMU 260), St. Andrews (GMU 254), and Big Bend (GMU 248).

In Chelan County, WDFW releases cock pheasants annually at both the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife units. Nontoxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites (Figures 28 & 29). 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. Pheasants are released before the youth upland season and before the general season opening day, with a final release taking place before the end of November. Hunters interested in hunting pheasant release sites in Chelan County can visit the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program website](#) for more information.

While modest compared to other areas such as neighboring Grant County, pheasant harvest in Douglas County tends to be consistent from year to year. With 216 birds taken in Douglas County in 2023 and 333 from Chelan County, pheasant harvest was down from the previous year throughout District 7, with a more marked decrease in Chelan County. This may be partially attributed to the fewer days hunters spent pursuing pheasants in Chelan County in 2023 and does not reflect the number of pheasants available to hunters, as the number of pheasants released at the Swakane and Chelan Butte wildlife units remained consistent between 2022 and 2023.

2023 pheasant harvest results are available at WDFW's [Game harvest reports](#) webpage. Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to those from previous years.

Figure 28. Chelan Butte Pheasant Release Site in Chelan County

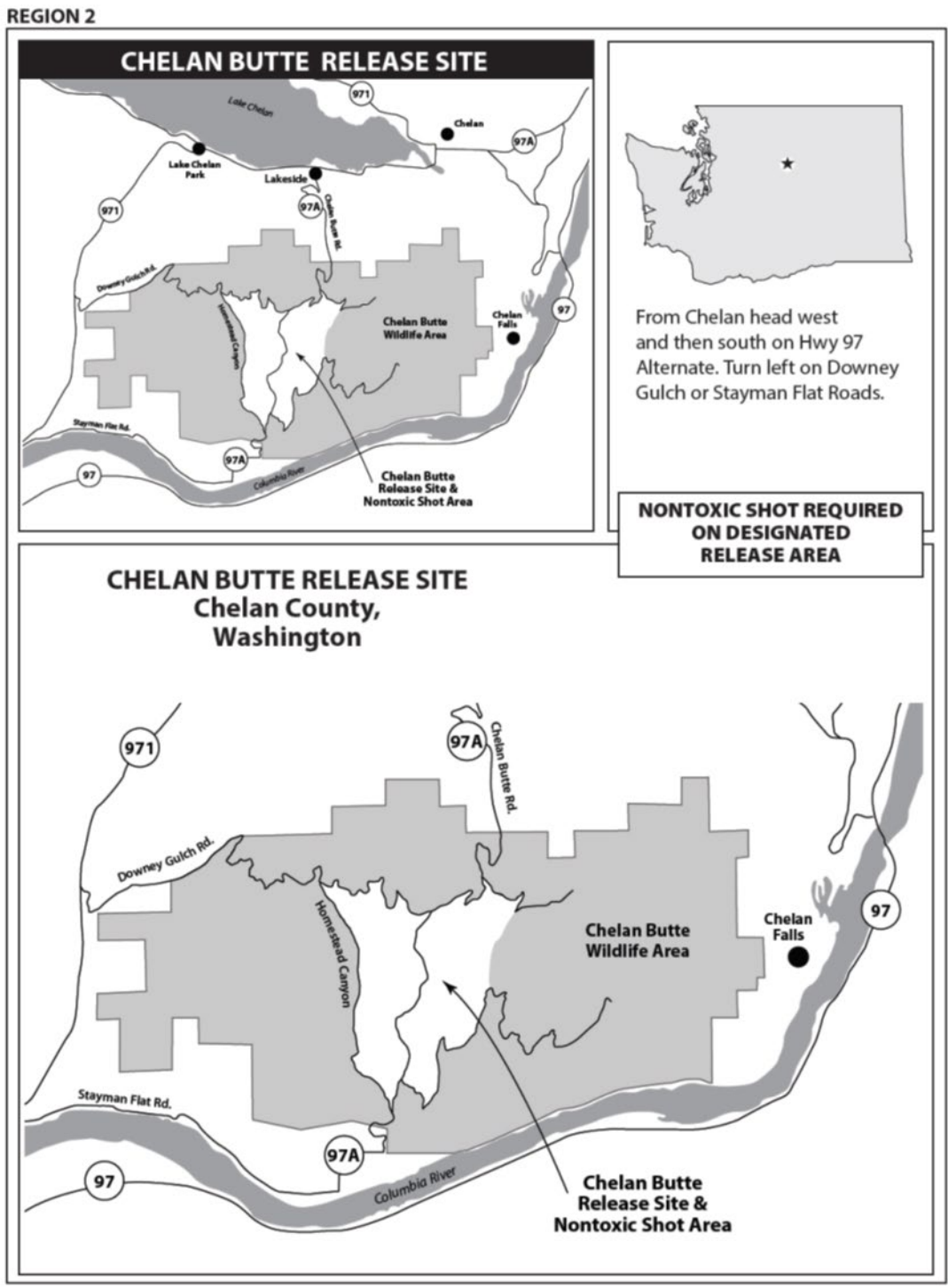
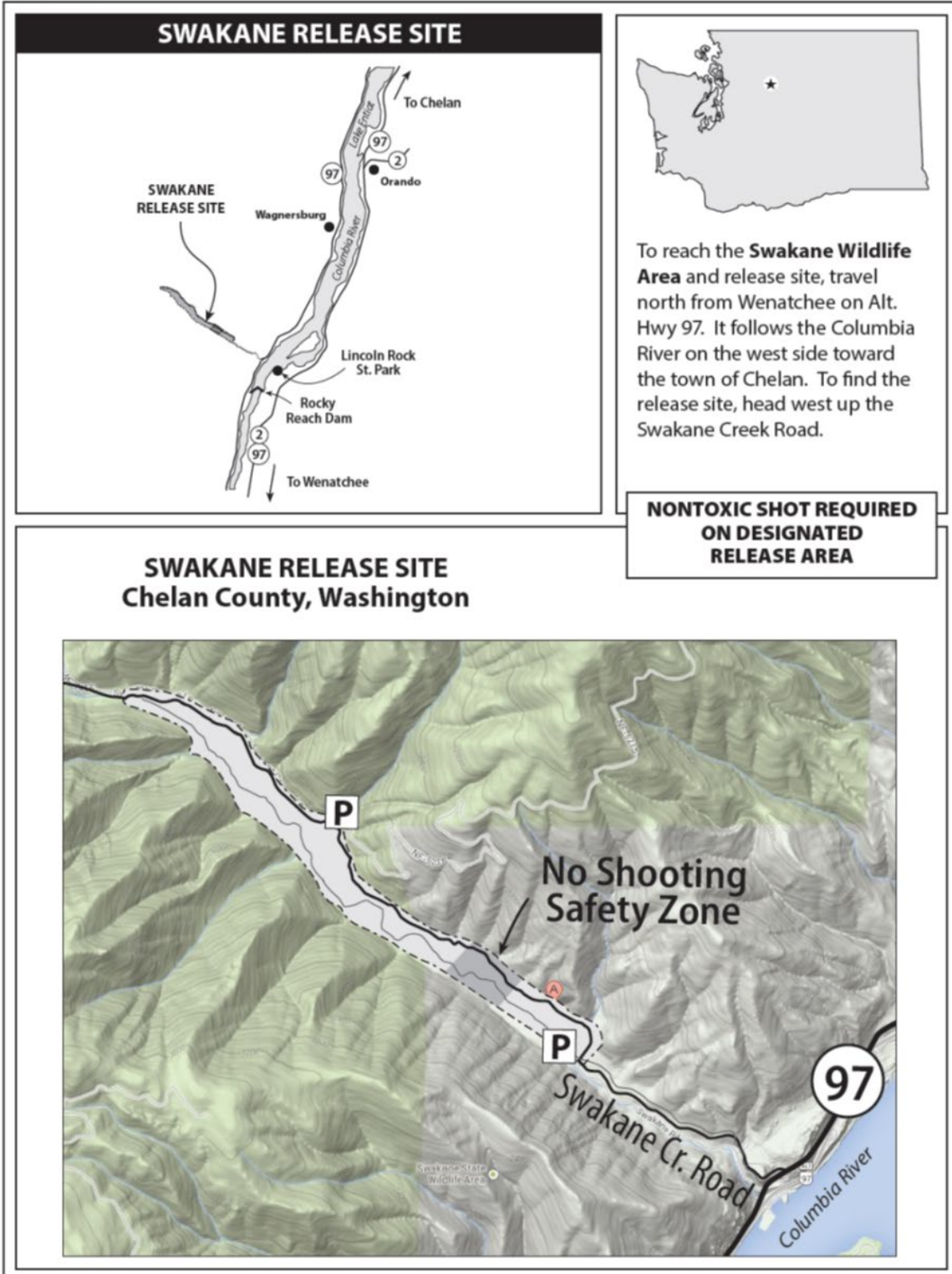


Figure 29. Swakane Pheasant Release Site in Chelan County

REGION 2



Waterfowl



Duck hunters. Photo by Adam Neff.

While not a major waterfowl hunting destination, District 7 provides opportunity for duck and geese hunting in several areas across both counties. In Chelan County, most waterfowl hunting is focused along the Columbia River. It is important to note that, due to county ordinances and the expansion of Wenatchee City Limits, **there is a no-shooting zone from the Odabashian Bridge to the George Sellar Bridge** which connects Wenatchee and East Wenatchee.

The Columbia River is the primary site for waterfowl hunting in Douglas County. The Bridgeport Bar Unit is a popular and productive hunting location, where ducks form large rafts on the Brewster Pool. Northern Douglas County also has a concentration of small lands and ponds that hold waterfowl. Currently, both Chelan County and Douglas County are in moderate to severe drought, with river levels running low and less water in local ponds, potholes, and lakes. The lingering effects of a decreased winter snowpack and lower than usual precipitation makes it likely that these drought conditions will last well into the fall. This could in turn concentrate waterfowl activity in areas with available water, so hunters will likely need to get creative in searching out locations off the beaten path to avoid hunting pressure at the better-known areas. The success of the season also depends on the number of birds migrating through the area, the timing of this migration, and how late into the season smaller water sources remain unfrozen. Although waterfowl harvest decreased statewide between 2022 and 2023, duck and goose harvest levels in Chelan County and Douglas County remained largely consistent across

both years (Figures 30 & 31). Methods used for small game harvest analysis have been revised and results from 2022 and 2023 are not directly comparable to those from previous years. 2023 waterfowl harvest results are available online at [Game harvest reports | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#).

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

Figure 30. The total duck harvest in Chelan County from 1997 to 2023.

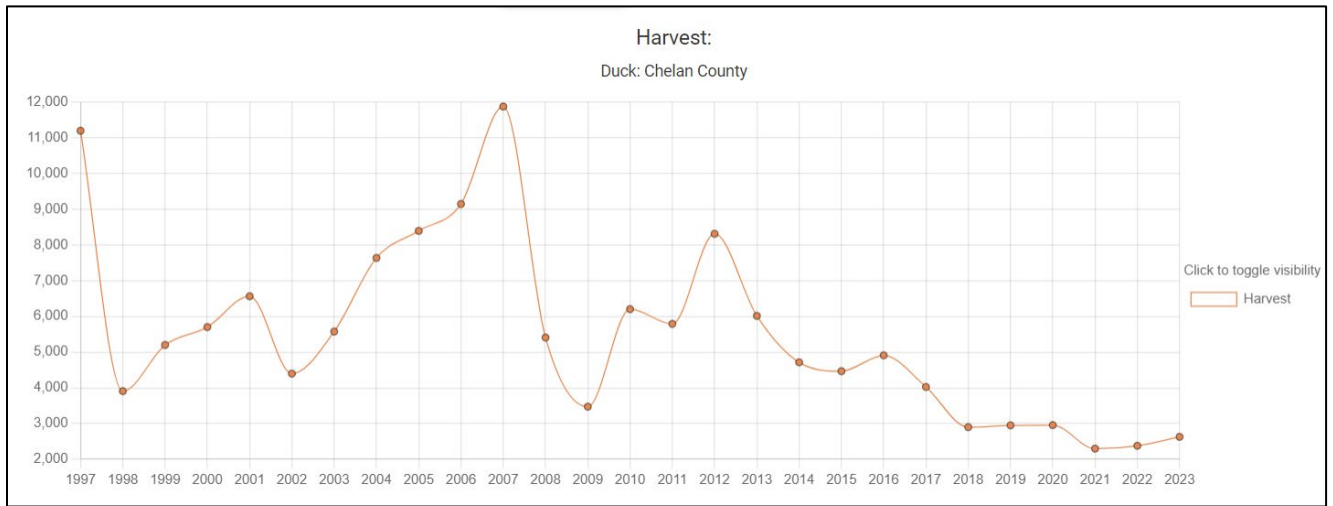
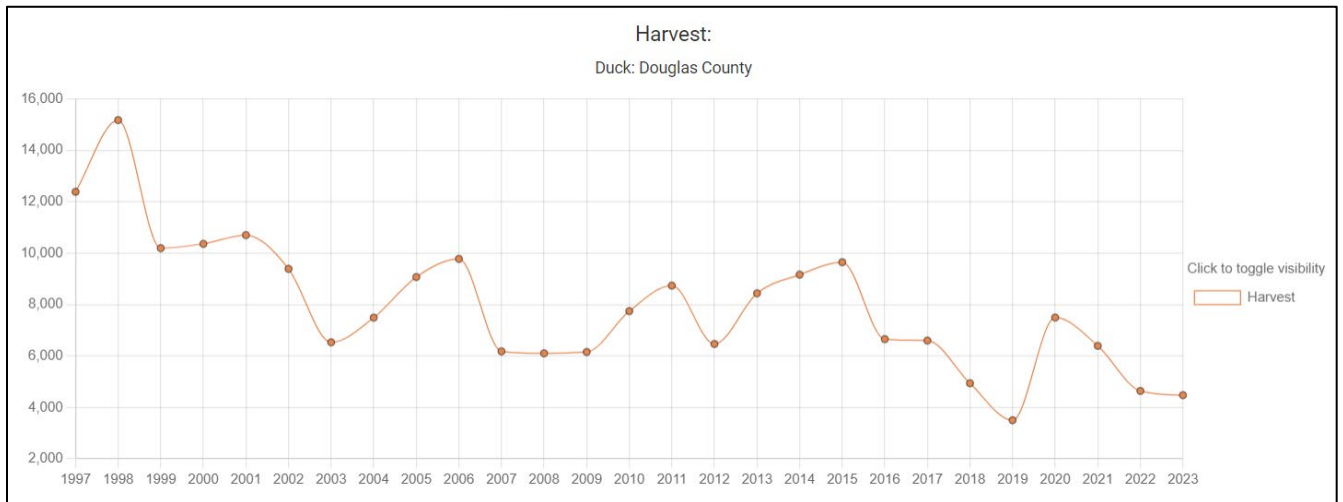


Figure 31. The total duck harvest in Douglas County from 1997 to 2023.



Private lands hunter access

WDFW maintains hunter access agreements with hundreds of participating landowners across the state, providing public hunting on private lands. There are thousands of acres of Hunter Access Program lands in Douglas County to utilize throughout the season. Please respect any closures and be aware of all wildfire restrictions during hunting season. Access lands are marked with signs displaying contact information, and hunters can also locate all private land hunter access areas on [WDFW's website](#).

In Chelan County, private landowners often allow hunting access in areas of high deer or elk concentration, but there are no formal hunting access agreements. Hunters in Chelan County must be proactive in gaining permission from landowners. Hunters wishing to apply for tags in the Lake Chelan North Deer Area, the Malaga Elk Area or the Peshastin Elk Area are encouraged to contact the Wenatchee District Office prior to applying.

Additional online tools and maps

As digital technology has rapidly advanced, today's hunters have a plethora of apps and online resources available to them to help plan their hunting trips. While these tools are excellent for focusing your efforts, navigating, and coordinating logistics, they can't replace scouting in the field. Below is a list of helpful resources to help you plan your hunting trip.

- [USGS Topo maps](#): downloadable topographical maps for the United States.
- [GoogleEarth](#): free application for exploring aerial and 3D imagery. Useful for importing and exporting locations.
- [AgWeather Net](#): Washington State University maintains an array of weather stations from across Washington. View real-time and historic weather data. Also available as a free app.
- [Interactive Snow Depth Map](#): This map compiles NOAA snowfall data for the U.S.
- [SNOTEL](#): Customizable tables looking at historic and forecast data as well as current snow conditions.
- County landownership maps: Most counties in Washington publish web maps with landowner data by parcel. These maps can be used to ensure you are hunting on public lands and are aware of where private land permissions may be needed. District 7 encompasses [Chelan](#) and [Douglas](#) counties.