

2024 District 8 Hunting Prospects

Yakima and Kittitas counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

August 2024

2024 District 8 Hunting Prospects

Yakima and Kittitas counties

Author

Erin Wampole, District Wildlife Biologist

Callie Wilson, Assistant District Wildlife Biologist

Cover photo by WDFW.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at [wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation](https://www.wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation), 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.

Table of Contents

District 8 general overview	3
Road access	4
Wildfire effects on hunting success	5
Hunter orange/pink requirements.....	5
Elk	5
Selecting a special hunt opportunity	7
Hunt opportunity explained.....	8
Elk hoof disease (Treponeme-associated hoof disease).....	10
Deer	11
Bighorn sheep	13
Mycoplasma Ovipneumoniae (Movi) impacts to hunting	14
Hunt opportunity overview.....	15
Mountain goats	15
Black bear	17
Harvest Opportunity	18
Population Trends.....	19
Cougar	20
Where to hunt cougar	21
Notable changes.....	21
Small game, upland birds, and waterfowl	22
Harvest overview	22
Ducks	25
Where to hunt?.....	26
Population monitoring.....	28
Turkey	29
Quail	30
Partridge (Chukar/Hungarian).....	31
Forest grouse	31
WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection	33
Pheasant.....	34
Online tools and maps	36

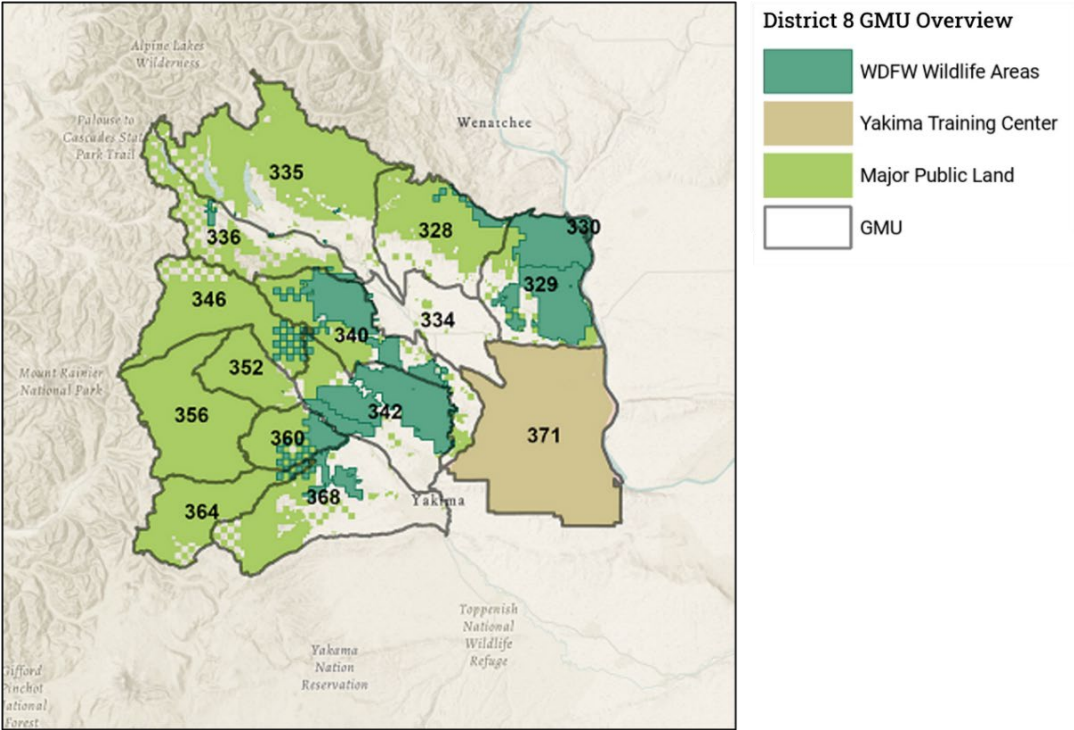
District 8 general overview

District 8 is in south central Washington and includes Yakima and Kittitas counties and game management units (GMUs) 328 (Naneum), 329 (Quilomene), 330 (West Bar), 334 (Ellensburg), 335 (Teanaway), 336 (Taneum), 340 (Manastash), 342 (Umtanum), 346 (Little Naches), 352 (Nile), 356 (Bumping), 360 (Bethel), 364 (Rimrock), 368 (Cowiche), 371 (Alkali), and part of 372 (Rattlesnake Hills).

Large blocks of public land dominate District 8, including more than 300,000 acres across the L.T. Murray, Colockum, Wenas, and Oak Creek Wildlife Areas. This land is interspersed throughout thousands of acres of Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and US Forest Service (USFS) lands. Another 327,000 acres south of I-90, along the breaks of the Columbia River, is the [Yakima Training Center](#), which is available for high quality hunting pending military training activities. Public land hunters can also access the 9,000 acres on the [Wild Horse Wind Farm](#), which facilitates access through WDFW's [Hunt by Reservation](#) system.

Hunters can choose a variety of habitats, ranging from lowland shrubsteppe to high elevation alpine wilderness which supports diverse game species. The district is best known for excellent elk hunting and multiple bighorn sheep populations. However, hunters also have expansive lands for enjoying small game and upland bird pursuits.

Figure 1. Game management units and associated available lands for public hunters and recreators within District 8.



Hunters in District 8 are encouraged to visit the WDFW [Hunt Planner Web map](#), which provides information on [Washington 2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#) and hunts based on location, date, weapon choice, and more. Additionally, the web map provides layers showing public and private land hunting opportunities, GMU boundaries, roads, topographical features, and county lines. Be sure to check with the appropriate landowner/manager and obey all posted rules and regulations. To dig more into the dynamics of GMUs hunters are encouraged to check out harvest reports and harvest statistics online at [Game Harvest Reports](#). These reports are published annually and can shine light on areas where hunter success is high.

Road access

Together with the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and private landowners, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) cooperatively manages many roads within Yakima and Kittitas counties under the "Green Dot" system. This system provides access for camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, and ATV and off-road vehicle riding, while protecting sensitive habitat from damage caused by motorized vehicles.

Using the Green Dot system is easy: roads open to motor vehicle travel are marked with a round green reflector on a white route marker. These roads are shown in green on the area maps. In some areas, public roads (such as county or U.S. Forest Service roads) are used to access the Green Dot system and are shown in gray on the maps.

Any roads not designated as a Green Dot or public access road are off-limits to motor vehicles. Seasonal closures are also shown on the maps; check the map legend for more information. These roads are used by a wide variety of recreationalists. Please respect others and avoid driving on wet, soft roads in an effort to reduce damage.



Rainbow over the Yakima River from the Wenas Wildlife Area on a cloudy day. Photo by WDFW.

[Green dot maps](#) can be printed from home, downloaded onto smartphones, picked up at individual wildlife area headquarters, the WDFW Yakima regional office (1701 S. 24th Ave, Yakima, WA 98902), and the Washington DNR south east Regional (713 Bowers Rd, Ellensburg, WA 98926) office.

Wildfire effects on hunting success

As of the end of July 2024, there have been several significant fires in District 8 which will likely impact access and hunting opportunity this season. Hunters are encouraged to learn about the affected areas and scout prior to hunting, since wildfires can greatly impact hunting success due to drastic changes in available forage, predator-prey dynamics and animal behavior.

- [Black Canyon Fire](#) (GMU 340 & 342) >10,000 acres. Deer, elk, chuckar, grouse. Wenas Wildlife Area.
- [Retreat/Rimrock Fire](#) (GMU 360 & 364). >30,000 acres. Deer, elk, bear, chuckar, grouse. Oak Creek Wildlife area.

Hunter orange/pink requirements

State rules require hunters to wear a minimum of 400 square inches of fluorescent hunter orange and/or fluorescent hunter pink exterior clothing under specific conditions. This fluorescent clothing must be worn above the waist and be visible from all sides. A hat, by itself, does not meet this requirement. A combination of both colors may be worn to meet the 400 square inch requirement. Check out this [fact sheet](#) for more information.

Typically, hunters using a shotgun, muzzleloading firearm, bow and arrow, or falconry do not have to meet this requirement. However, there are many cases where hunter orange or pink is required because of the overlap with a modern firearm season in the area. It is the hunter's responsibility to learn and follow the specific requirements for their associated hunts.

Elk

District 8 is considered some of the best elk hunting area in the state. It contains two major populations, the Yakima and Colockum elk herds. The Yakima elk herd is one of the largest in the state, with greater than 10,000 animals roaming over 900,000 acres of public land. There are about 4,000 elk in the Colockum herd with coveted high-quality bulls. This reputation results in tough competition for special hunt permits and relatively high hunter presence throughout the hunting season.

The only antlerless archery **general season** permits occur in GMUs [334](#), [335](#), and [371](#). These GMUs are managed for minimal numbers of elk due to human-wildlife conflict issues in adjacent agricultural lands. This year's archery season runs from Sep. 7 through 19. Elk Area 3911 covers all GMU 334 and the lower portions of GMU 335, where most elk in these units reside. Master hunters can harvest antlerless elk using modern firearms from Aug. 1, 2024 through Jan. 20, 2025 in elk area 3911, so for safety, archery

hunters in this area **must** wear hunter orange or pink. In 2023, archers harvested 12 antlerless from GMU 335, and 2 antlerless elk from GMU 334. Overall, archery hunters find highest success in GMU 371, and have higher success rates in GMU 334 and 335 than modern firearm hunters (**Table 1**).



A collared bull elk on the Colockum Wildlife Area. Photo by WDFW.

Opening weekend is crowded, with hunters setting up camp early and heading home before the season ends. For those looking for a higher quality experience, consider hunting the last two or three days of the modern firearm season or opt to hunt during the quieter archery or muzzleloader seasons.

Generally, once seasons begin, hunters will find more elk at higher elevations and away from roads. The wilderness areas in the Yakima herd range can provide some of the better opportunities in the district for those willing to invest the effort to chase elk in the high country away from roads.

Table 1. Elk 2023 General Season hunter success rate (%) by GMU and weapon type for District 8.

GMU	Archery	Modern Firearm	Multiple Weapons	Muzzleloader
328	3.2	7.4	5.2	4.2
330	NA	NA	NA	NA
334	10	2.8	0	8.6
335	6.4	2.8	20	7.6
336	1.4	2.4	0	5
340	4.4	4	9	1
342	1	6	21	4.8
346	0	4.4	9	NA
352	1.8	3.8	0	1.6
356	3.6	3.4	0	3.2
360	NA	7.8	10.6	7.4
364	3.6	1.6	0	2
368	5	9.4	7.6	7.2
371	26.6	54.4	66.6	0

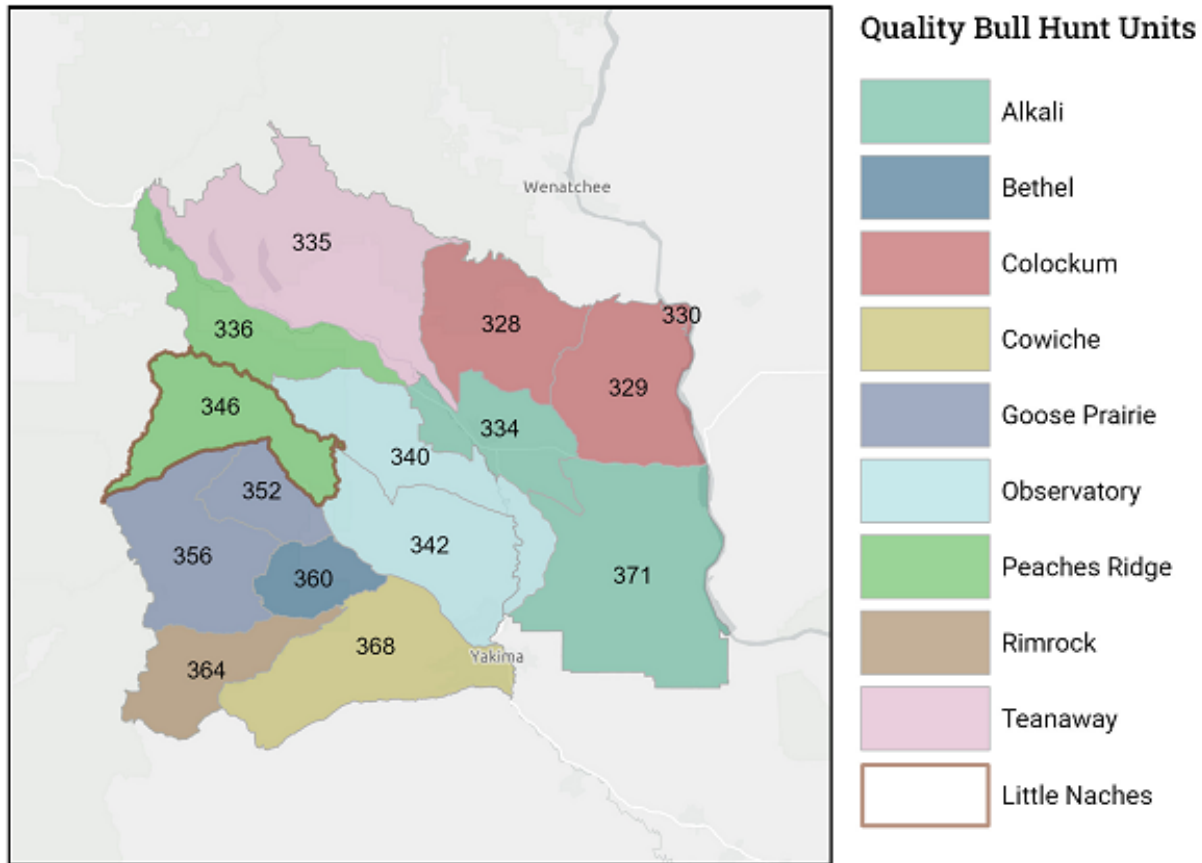
The open terrain of GMU 371 on the [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC) has good numbers of elk and boasts a hunter success rate of more than 50%, with 37 antlerless elk harvested last season. YTC is open to the public for various recreational activities. This includes hunting, bird watching, mountain biking, horseback riding, hiking, falconry, and archery target practice. All patrons wishing to access YTC lands for recreational purposes must have a [YTC Recreation Access Card](#).

Access to these lands is NOT under the control of WDFW and can change based on military training schedules.

Selecting a special hunt opportunity

Special hunt permits are available for quality bull (Figure 2) and antlerless special hunt opportunity (Figure 3). The 2023 winter survey of the Colockum elk herd estimated the bull to cow ratio at 24 bulls to 100 cows, exceeding objective range. Special bull permits were thus increased, nearly doubling in the Colockum hunt unit. The Yakima bull population is currently stable and permits remain consistent with previous years opportunity.

Figure 2. District 8 quality any bull hunt units across Game Management Units (GMU).



Hunters ready for a challenge should look at units with steeper terrain and higher forest cover/density (Teanaway, Peaches Ridge or Goose Prairie) where elk prefer to be in earlier seasons. The Colockum, Alkali, and Observatory units have higher proportions of shrubsteppe and more open-rolling terrain providing easier terrain to traverse and greater ability to glass large areas. Elk however are likely to be sparser in this habitat during the hunting season, seeking security within dense cover or near private lands. Hunters should focus on drainages that provide cover far from roads. Success is ultimately variable across units, refer to Table 1.

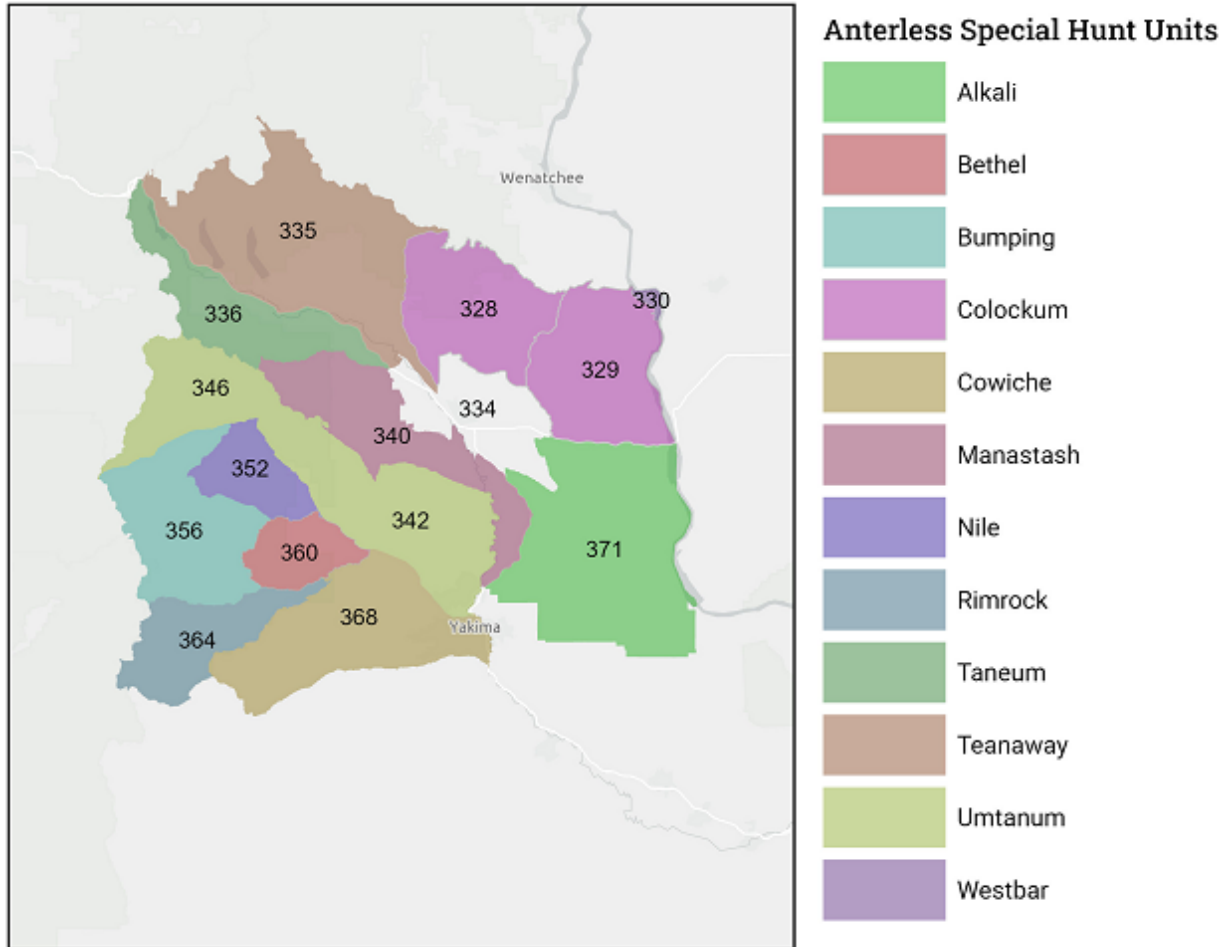
Hunt opportunity explained

WDFW utilizes multiple data sources to guide hunting regulations, season setting, and permit levels. When considering hunt opportunity, the health of the herd is prioritized. Annual or bi-annual post-harvest surveys of each of our elk populations are conducted to estimate the population size and ratios of calves and bulls to cows. These estimates provide critical data to evaluate trends in the population. Hunt opportunity fluctuates based on these status and trends of the population.

Each herd has an established population and ratio (calves to 100 cows and bulls to 100 cows) objectives that are used as guidelines for increasing or decreasing permit numbers. If a herd is within or exceeding the population objective or bull ratio then hunt opportunities (number of permits available) may be

increased. When a population is below objective or exhibits a declining trend, opportunities may be reduced in order to decrease pressure on the population and encourage stability and/or growth. Thus, we modify harvest to manage for “stable” populations across time, while trying to maximize opportunity for hunters.

Figure 3. District 8 Antlerless Special Hunt units across Game Management Units (GMU).

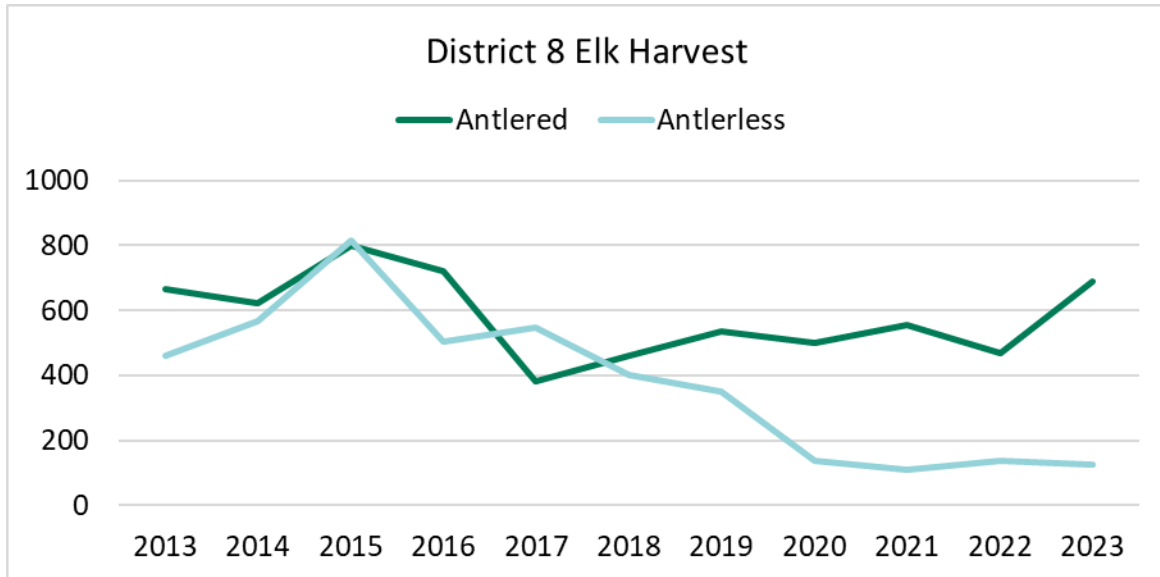


WDFW considers these key factors when determining the number of hunting permits:

1. **Population Status:** The current size and health of the elk population are assessed to ensure that hunting does not negatively impact the overall herd.
2. **Trend:** Population trends, whether the elk numbers are increasing, stable, or declining inform decisions to maintain a balanced ecosystem.
3. **Sex-Age Ratio:** The ratio of different sex-age groups (e.g., bulls to cows) helps determine which segments of the population can be sustainably hunted. This is crucial for maintaining reproductive capacity and population stability.

Figure 4, highlights trends in harvest in relation to population status. Elk populations began to decline in 2015 following a harsh winter and continued to decrease through 2017. This decline prompted a reduction in opportunity and harvest. As populations recovered from 2018 to present, opportunity has increased and has remained stable. More information can be found in the Status and Trend reports published each year on our website.

Figure 4. Combined general season and special permit harvest trend of antlerless (cow) and antlered (bull) elk within District 8.



For more information on hunting season setting and rule making process visit our website, [Hunting season setting and rule making process](#).

Elk hoof disease (Treponeme-associated hoof disease)

District 8 has had positive occurrence of treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD); however it is still considered uncommon. WDFW works with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. For more information about TAHD, visit the [WDFW elk hoof disease webpage](#). Additional details on TAHD and this incentive program can be found on pages 65 and 66 of the [2024 Big Game Hunting Regulations](#). Please keep any abnormal hooves and report your observations of lame or limping elk to the nearest [WDFW regional office](#). WDFW will work with you to submit the hooves for diagnostic testing. You can use this link to learn more about [TAHD and WDFW's TAHD online reporting tool](#).

Deer



A doe with her two fawns during fall in Region 3. Photo by WDFW.

All District 8 GMUs are managed using mule deer hunting regulations. However, the area boasts a combination of mule deer, mule-black-tailed hybrids, and black-tailed deer. This species diversity makes hunting especially interesting since these species all use slightly different elevations and habitat types. Deer harvest in District 8 hit its lowest levels in 2017 and 2018 and has since rebounded slightly (Figure 5). The 2024 harvest is hard to predict, but in the past a decreased deer harvest was linked to widespread drought across eastern Washington. In contrast it appears that the two consecutive harsh winters in the area did not appear to increase the mortality of radio collared individuals.

Hunter numbers have declined with the reduced deer population. Many of the remaining modern firearm hunters now set up camp and claim their favorite spot for elk season. If you are looking for relatively low hunter densities, consider the higher elevations of District 8. Harvest and hunter numbers are typically highest in GMUs 335 (Teanaway), 328 (Naneum), 340 (Manastash), and 342 (Umtanum). Hunter success rate by GMU and weapon type can be seen in Table 2. Harvest increased from 2022, with higher harvest of 5-point buck compared to recent years (Figure 6).

Figure 5. General seasons harvest success by method in District 8 from 2013 through 2023.

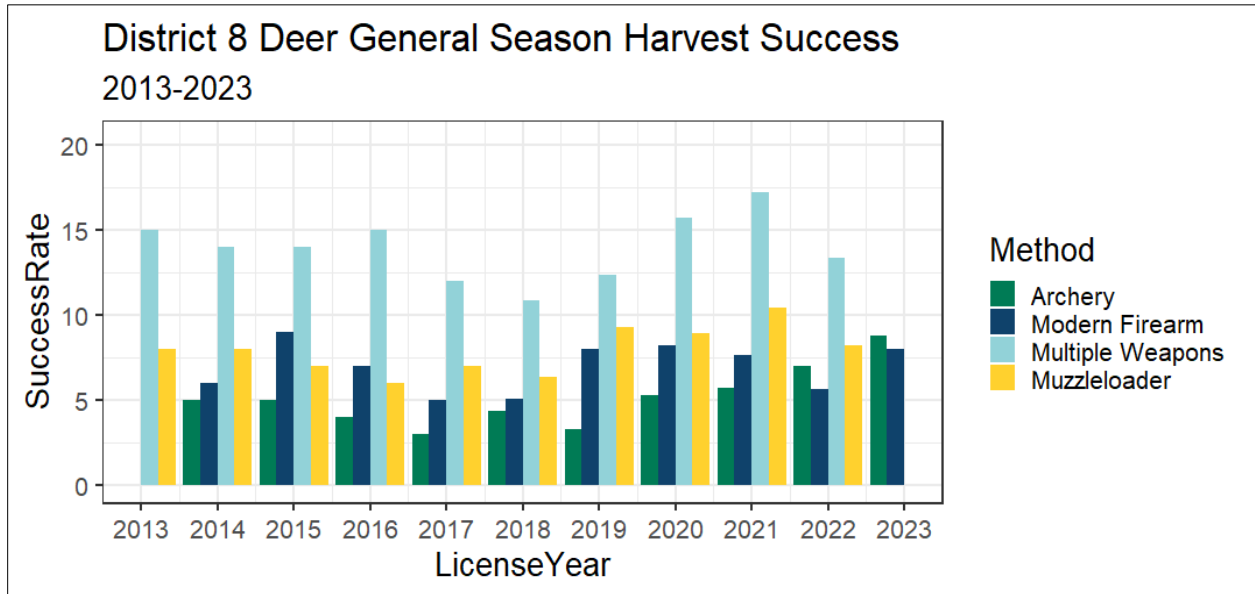
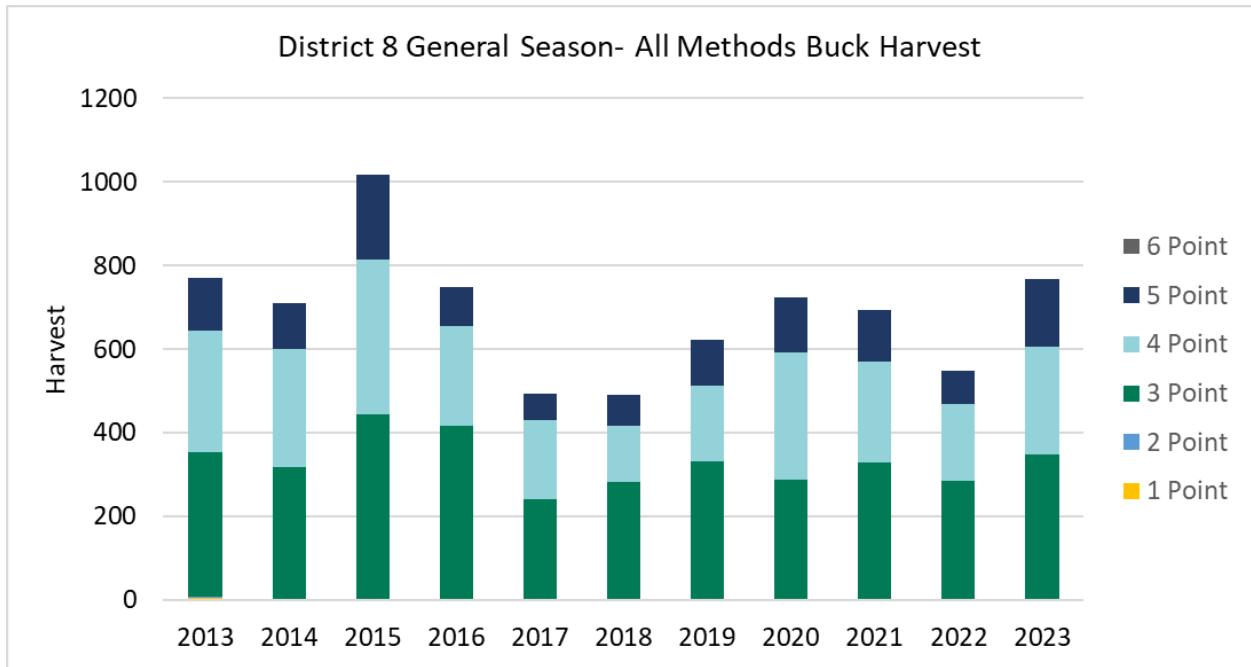


Table 2. Mule deer 2023 season hunter success rates by GMU and weapon type in District 8.

GMU	Archery	Modern Firearm	Multiple Weapons	Muzzleloader
328	8.2	7.4	20.6	17.2
330	NA	28.6	0	100
334	34.8	9.4	38.4	52
335	6.4	14.4	27.6	23
336	6.8	4.4	13.8	6.4
340	4.4	5.4	8.8	11.4
342	10	6.8	12.8	13
346	10.2	6	8.4	NA
352	5.4	5.4	21.8	0
356	4.6	1.4	0	0
360	0	2	7.6	6.8
364	2.6	3.4	5.8	0
368	11.2	6.2	17.8	4
371	NA	NA	NA	NA

Figure 6. General seasons buck harvest by point in District 8 from 2013 through 2023.



Bighorn sheep



A group of young rams from the Cleman Mountain population. Photo by Ralph Owen.

District 8 contain three hunted populations of bighorn sheep. These include Cleman Mountain, Selah/Umtanum and Quilomene bighorn sheep; and is also home to more than 70 percent of the bighorn sheep in Washington. While drawing a permit to hunt sheep is still challenging, bighorns can add enjoyment to a hunting trip in District 8. **Rams are in rut from mid-October through November** when many hunters travel through the area. There are populations of bighorns that can often be easily viewed along Highways 821 (Yakima River Canyon) and 410 (Clemans Mountain, north of the US Highway 12 junction).

Mycoplasma Ovipneumoniae (Movi) impacts to hunting

Movi is a bacterium that can cause fatal pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn sheep. All three populations of bighorn sheep in District 8 have tested positive for Movi, with severe fatal outbreaks in Cleman Mountain and Umtanum/Selah Butte populations. In an attempt to control Movi outbreaks, harvest was increased, and lethal removals were conducted of visibly infected sheep prior to 2022. As a result, both populations are well below historic abundance and had consistent low lamb recruitment. In winter 2022 through 2023, the Department initiated a three-year study to investigate the efficacy of Test and Remove methodology for “cleaning” Movi from infected populations. The study focuses on capturing, testing, and removing infected sheep that are positive for Movi for two consecutive years in the Test population (Selah/Umtanum) and comparing results with the control population (Cleman Mountain).

The combination of the population impacts of fatal outbreaks and the on-going Test and Remove study has results in several changes to hunting opportunities in these herds.

1. No harvest opportunity is available in Umtanum/Selah Butte. Mature rams have significantly declined in the Umtanum/Selah Butte precluding sustainable harvest of rams.
2. Ewe harvest has been temporarily suspended in Cleman Mountain.

In addition, hunters should note that a significant number of ewes and rams have GPS collars and marked with ear tags. Collared or marked sheep are not protected if they are legally harvestable. WDFW requests that hunters avoid damaging the collar and to return it to the Department.

You can help the Department with our effort to reduce Movi impact on the population by reporting sick or dead bighorn sheep to WDFW.

Hunt opportunity overview

Table 3. An overview of bighorn sheep hunt areas within District 8 including the terrain, sheep visibility, access notes and current hunt opportunity.

Hunt Area	Terrain Type/Sheep Visibility	Access Notes	Current Opportunity
Cleman Mountain	Shrubsteppe. Open rolling to steep hills. Sheep are typically visible glassing from the road or ridge top.	Foot trails available from Waterworks Canyon and Oak Creek Bighorn feed site. Road access is possible through the Wenas Wildlife Area.	Ram only. No ewe hunts are currently available due to the impacts of Movi on the population and current Test and Remove study.
Quilomene	Shrubsteppe and rocky cliff sides. Sheep can often be glassed from the river.	Best approach is by boat on the Columbia River to foot trails. Limited road access.	Ram only.
Selah/Umtanum	Shrubsteppe with rocky cliffsides, steep difficult terrain in southern sections. Sheep can typically be glassed from the highway the hillsides, along the rim or in drainages.	Road access is available on SR 821, ATV access is available from the Wenas Wildlife Area green dot roads.	No hunts are currently available due to the impacts of Movi on the population and current Test and Remove study.

Mountain goats

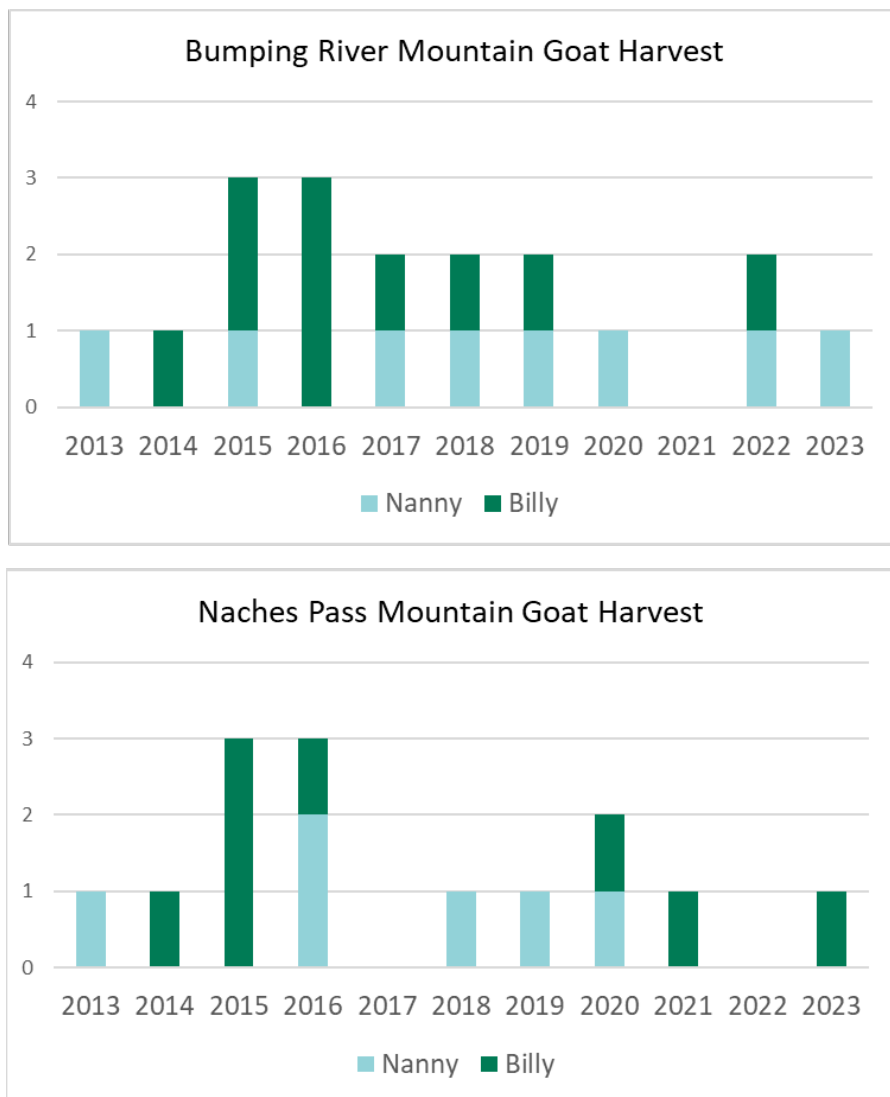


A nanny with her kid during spring in Region 3. Photo by Ralph Owen.

District 8 contains three hunted populations of Mountain Goats: Bumping, Blazed Ridge, and portions of Goat Rocks East. Hunt opportunity is extremely limited with often a single permit offered per unit and over 4000 applicants for each hunt unit annually. Hunter success is high, with nearly 100% success rates across hunt units for this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Significant population declines have been observed in multiple mountain goat populations throughout the state, including populations within District 8. Within District 8 boundaries, from license year 2013 through 2023, over 35% of harvested goats have been nannies (Figure 7). Harvest trends of nannies in combination with unknown impacts from climate, human disturbance, land use change, and disease is likely negatively impacting sustainable harvest opportunity of mountain goats. Harvest opportunity has thus been limited in recent years and likely will continue.

Figure 7. Harvest trends of mountain goats from 2013 through 2023 in the Bumping River and Naches Pass hunt units.



Nannies have accounted for over 35% harvest in District 8. Mountain goats are long-lived species with slow reproductive growth rates. Harvesting of nannies can severely impact populations over time.

Hunters should NOT harvest nannies to help reduce pressure on populations with declining population trends.

Black bear



Black bear traversing a hillside. Photo by WDFW.

Black bears live in diverse forested habitats throughout the state, from coastal rainforests to the dry woodlands of the Cascades' eastern slopes. They are found in hardwood and coniferous forests, meadows, alder thickets, burns, clear cuts, and sub-alpine parkland. Core bear habitat can occur in all of Washington's vegetative zone except the shrub steppe, which is considered fringe habitat. Good habitat typically includes water or wetlands. Black bears tend to move to higher elevations in the fall, following the progression of seasonally available foods; so when scouting, look for food items such as huckleberries and other berry-producing plants or acorns which occur in some areas of Yakima County. Recent wildfires have impacted bear habitat in several places throughout the District. While these areas cannot currently support a large bear population, as the habitat recovers, it will be better suited for bears and other wildlife.

Harvest Opportunity

Fall black bear season begins Aug. 1 and runs through Nov. 15. In District 8, black bears are at higher abundance in the forested areas in western and northern units of the district. Hunters have higher success in GMU 329 and GMU 334 (Table 4). **Hunters are strongly urged not to shoot a female black bear with cubs.** During the fall females may be accompanied by cubs (weighing 30-50 lbs.) which tend to lag when traveling, so please observe and be patient before shooting.

If you plan to hunt bear in any of 12 game management units (GMUs) in Washington state, you must successfully complete the WDFW [Bear identification program](#) test or equivalent test from another state and carry proof of successful completion. Those GMUs include 101, 105, 108, 111, 113, 117, 203, 204, 209, 215, 418, and 426.

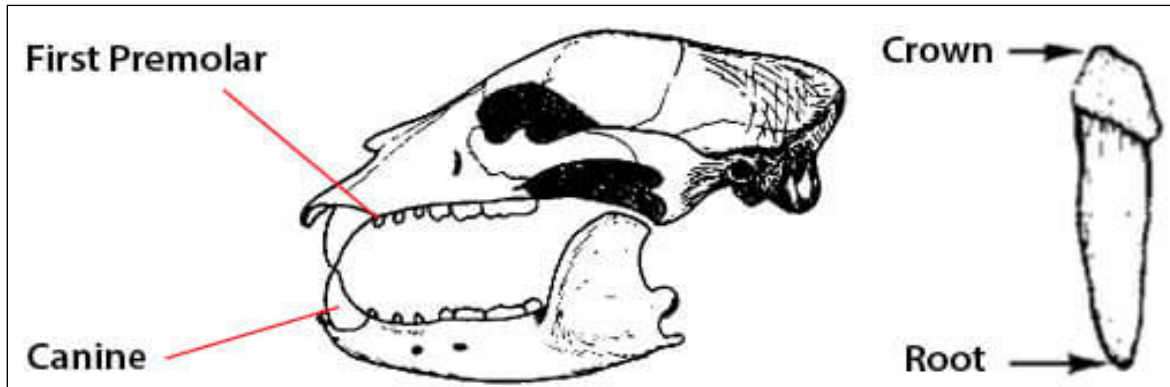
Table 4. Black bear harvest, hunter effort, and success rate in District 8 by GMU for 2023 license season.

GMU	Total	Female	Male	Success rate	Hunter days	Hunters
328	5	2	3	1.6	2043	313
329	12	8	4	13.4	510	90
330	0	0	0	0	12	2
334	0	0	0	0	155	35
335	50	17	33	9.4	3278	535
336	4	2	2	1.4	1968	276
340	5	2	3	2	1943	246
342	4	0	4	4.4	590	91
346	2	2	0	0.8	1388	232
352	3	0	3	2.6	702	114
356	0	0	0	0	708	129
360	6	2	4	3.6	1213	167
364	0	0	0	0	1257	173
368	15	6	9	3.8	2923	393
371	0	0	0	0	5	2

All successful fall black bear hunters statewide **must** submit a black bear premolar tooth (Figure 4) per WAC 220-415-090 to the Department within five days of harvest or by Dec. 1, 2024. The premolar tooth is located behind the canine tooth of the upper jaw (Figure 8). Tooth envelopes are available at all

WDFW offices. Biologists use this information to better monitor black bears, make management decisions, and evaluate the impacts of harvest on the population. In addition, black bear hunters that submit a tooth can find out the age of their harvested bear by entering their Wild ID into WDFW's [tooth age lookup tool](#). Just be aware that it takes about six months after the close of all bear seasons to receive the ages back from the lab, so there is a delay in this information being available.

Figure 8. The location of a black bear's first premolar required tooth submission to WDFW.



Population Trends

In 2023, WDFW biologists conducted a population monitoring effort in GMUs 352, 356, and 360 to obtain a more accurate population density estimate for this area. Using hair snare corrals, biologists collected more than 600 hair samples. These samples are being processed and will be sent to a lab for genetic testing. With this information, an estimate of the number of bears per 100 km² for the GMUs will be calculated. This, coupled with the harvest reports and age data obtained from premolar teeth, will improve local estimates of age and sex ratios and population size and trends that guide bear harvest guidelines. Most recent monitoring efforts produced a median age of District 8 harvested bears as 3.5 for males and 5 for females, which is consistent with the statewide numbers.

Cougar



An adult cougar peers from behind a snow-covered tree. Photo by WDFW.

District 8 is a popular area for hunting cougar due to the expansive public land. Cougar hunters are likely to be more successful going early after fresh snow fall, when fresh tracks are most apparent. Most cougars in the district are harvested by deer and elk hunters who opportunistically cross paths with a cougar during general deer and general elk seasons and have a cougar tag. A hunter who wishes to harvest a cougar must possess a valid big game license, including the cougar species option, before harvesting a cat. The primary prey for cougars in the district is mule deer, so hunters who spend time in areas with more deer will increase their chances of seeing and harvesting a cougar. Independently, cougar hunting is a fun and challenging experience.

Cougar harvest increased in 2023 after a slight decline during 2021 to 2022 (Figure 9). Harvest has remained relatively evenly distributed among age and sex class. While formal surveys are not conducted to assess cougar abundance within District 8, cougars are routinely detected during regular field activities on game cameras and road track surveys.

Where to hunt cougar

Male cougars are territorial and use a broader range when deer and elk are dispersed in summer and early fall. Deer and elk typically migrate back to the winter range by mid-November. Cougars will follow, and the highest densities can be found in lower elevations in late fall and winter. One popular cougar hunting technique is to use calls. This is most successful when snow is on the ground and tracks can be found. Rather than following the cougar hoping to find it, hunters call, trying to get the animal to come to them. Several calls work. During deer and elk seasons, hunters might consider a fawn bleat call, which typically won't spook deer or elk. Without snow, it can be challenging to know where to start. Rather than working large blocks of timber, consider timbered stringers. Cougars inhabit open terrain but prefer cover. Cougars hunting open shrubsteppe will likely hide in timber stringers during the day. Cougars inhabit nearly every portion of the district, but some online hunting groups post where cats have been seen recently. Checking those sites may improve your success.

It is unlawful to kill or possess spotted cougar kittens (usually <80 lbs.) or adult cougars accompanied by spotted kittens. Hunters should be aware of how to identify young from adults by consulting the [cougar brochure](#) prior to hunting. Females can have dependent young throughout the year. Since cougars are solitary, observing multiple tracks suggests a female with offspring. However, smaller kittens may not be visible to hunters so please observe and be patient before shooting.

Notable changes

The cougar hunting season structure has changed starting in 2024. Here are the main points and steps hunters need to follow before hunting cougars:

- **Hunting season:** Sep. 1 through March 31, or until the cap is reached.
- **Before hunting:** Call the Cougar Hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 2) or visit [WDFW's website](#) to check if Cougar Hunt Areas are open.
- **After a successful hunt:**
 1. Report the harvest within 72 hours to the cougar hotline at 1-866-364-4868 (press 3). Provide your name, WILD ID, date of kill, sex of kill, and GMU of kill.
 2. Present the unfrozen hide and skull for sealing and sample collection by WDFW within five days of the kill. Leave proof of sex attached.
- **Reporting:** All hunters with a cougar tag must report their hunt activity (successful or unsuccessful) via the WILD system by March 31, 2025. Note: Agency inspection/sealing must be within 5 days of the kill. The hotline reporting is separate from sealing.

After a harvest, hunters must call the closest Regional Office to schedule an appointment with a biologist for a tooth extraction and hide sealing. The skull and hide **cannot** not be frozen when presented for inspection.

Small game, upland birds, and waterfowl

The public land provides plenty of upland bird hunting opportunities in District 8, but populations have fallen on hard times and aren't likely to rebound. Wild pheasants are almost extinct, and nearly all species have declined to near historic lows. Bird hunters wanting to wander over large areas have many options in District 8. Along the breaks of the Columbia River, the Yakima Training Center consists of 327,000 acres south of I-90, while there are 9,000 acres on the [Wild Horse Wind Farm](#), which utilizes the [Hunt by Reservation](#) system. A motivated upland bird hunter with a good dog could pursue grouse, chukar, partridge, quail, and pheasant on the same day.

Harvest overview

District 8 boasts a variety of hunt opportunities for small game, upland birds and waterfowl. Harvest and hunter activity between Kittitas (Table 5) and Yakima counties (Table 6) are shown below. Harvest trends reflect the diversity of WLA opportunities within each subregion. Numerous watershed across Yakama County, such as Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area provide abundant duck hunting. Expansive shrubsteppe habitat of the Colockum and Wenas wildlife areas make for excellent chuckar hunting. Forested areas of the L.T. Murray and Oak Creek wildlife areas offers excellent forest grouse opportunity.

Table 5. Kittitas County reported small game, upland bird, and waterfowl harvest and hunter activity during the 2023 through 2024 license season.

Species	Harvest	Hunters	Days
Duck	4428	342	2310
Chukar Partridge	2324	337	2011
Forest Grouse	1266	1040	5877
Mourning Dove	520	36	108
Late Goose	511	120	559
Hun	392	62	727
September Canada Goose	255	32	70
Pheasant	234	140	429
Quail (All Species)	218	126	373
Cottontail Rabbit	28	42	140
Snowshoe Hare	18	27	69
Snipe	4	7	6

Species are listed in order of highest to lowest harvest levels.

Table 6. Yakima County reported small game, upland bird, and waterfowl harvest and hunter activity during the 2023 through 2024 license season.

Species	Harvest	Hunters	Days
Duck	24096	1283	11566
Mourning Dove	6918	412	1689
Quail (All Species)	6845	657	4411
Late Goose	3363	496	3526
Pheasant	2085	695	4179
Forest Grouse	1378	896	5353
Chukar Partridge	1114	208	900
Cottontail Rabbit	403	94	2171
September Canada Goose	153	45	72
Hun	103	44	340
Snowshoe Hare	32	30	169
Snipe	8	13	11

Species are listed in order of highest to lowest harvest levels.

Figure 9. Yakima County harvest, hunters, and hunter days for reported small, upland, and waterfowl game.

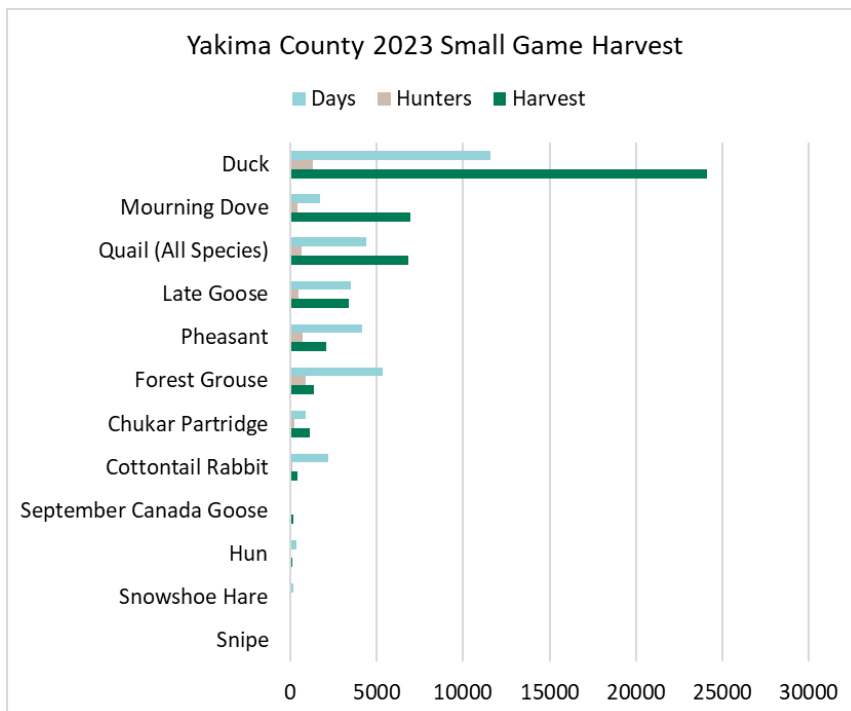


Figure 10. Kittitas County harvest, hunters, and hunter days for reported small, upland, and waterfowl game.

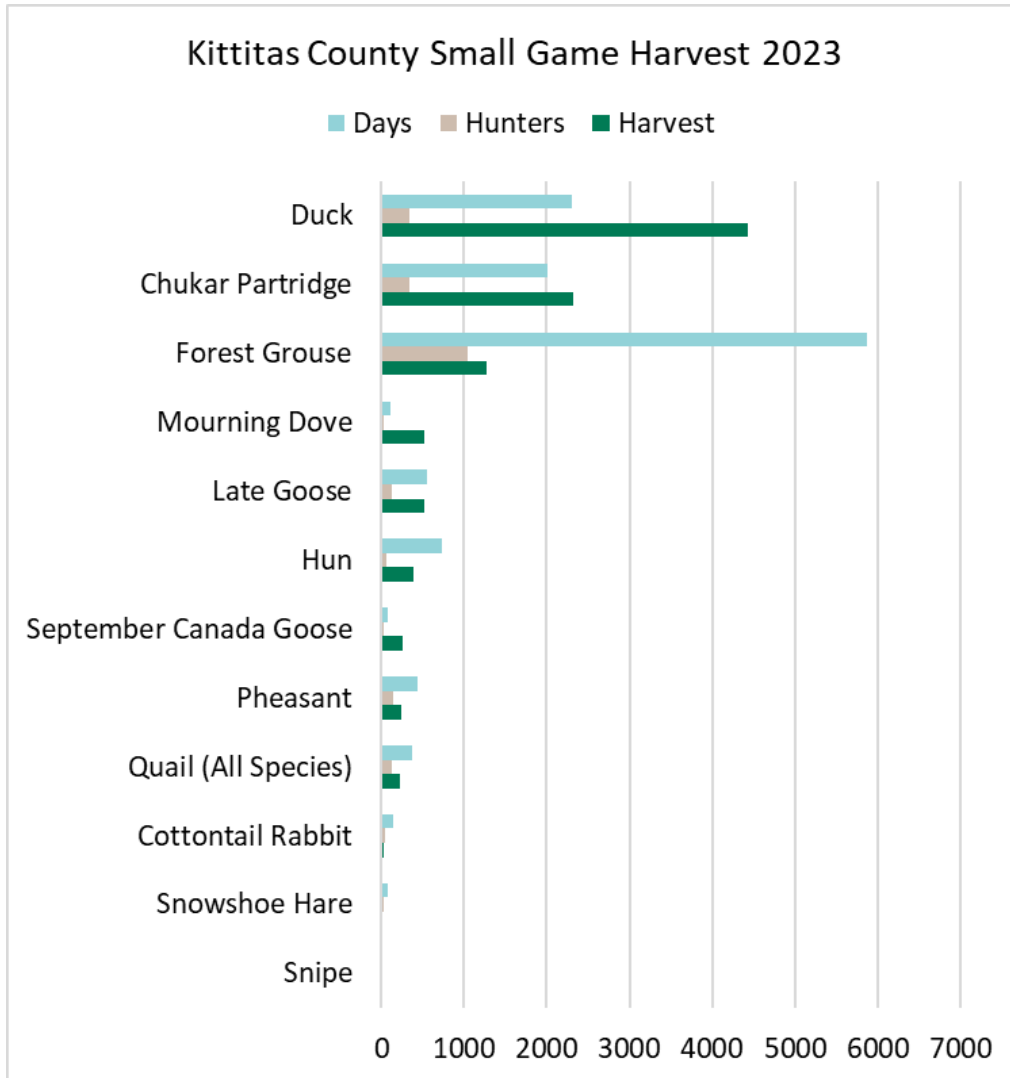
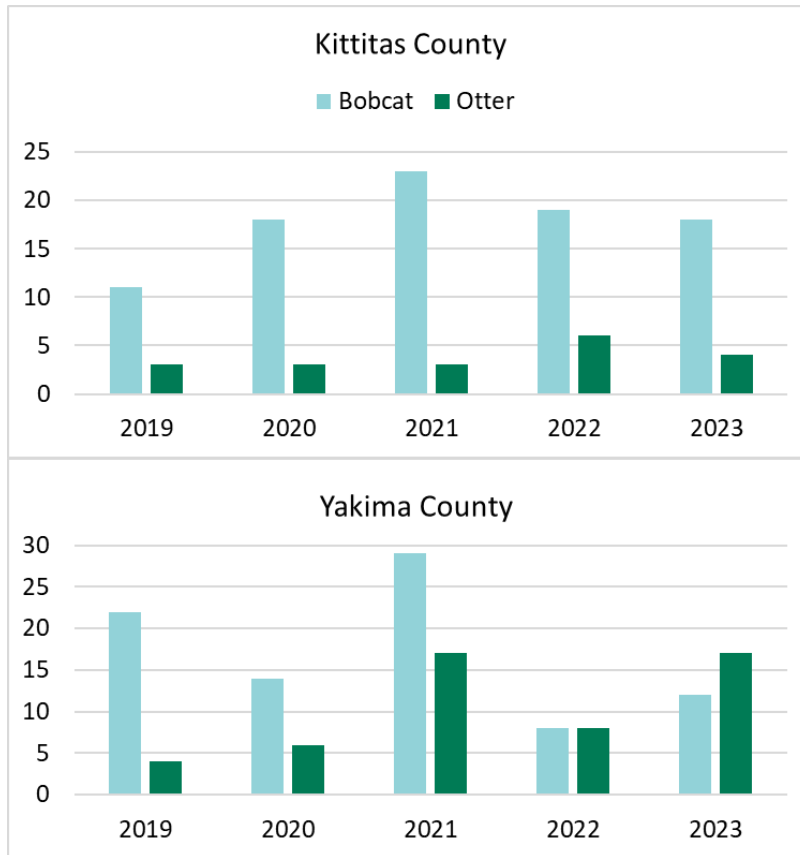


Figure 11. Bobcat and otter harvest trends from 2019 through 2023 in Kittitas and Yakima Counties.



Ducks

In District 8, fall and winter populations of waterfowl have been declining. Total harvest peaked at around 50,000 birds in 2012 and has declined to roughly 20,000 in recent years. During the 2022 through 2023 and 2023 through 2024 season, harvest exceeded the ten-year average (29,693 birds) but did not exceed the 20-year average (33,038 birds).

Band returns suggest that locally produced ducks tend to stay in the Yakima Valley, and that early season success is likely tied to regional production. Late season success is likely influenced by weather and the naive northern migrants it pushed south. The USFWS surveyed northern areas this year, but population estimates won't be published until August. The first cold wave is typically around Thanksgiving. Once ponds and sloughs freeze over, the Yakima River can be productive. For the best late-season hunting, watch for significant weather changes. If there is a quick thaw and rain, new ducks enter the valley, and can result in a week or so of good hunting before the birds move into the safety of private land and reserves. A freeze and thaw may also fill wetlands that had been dry earlier in the year.

Refer to the [Washington 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for information about migratory waterfowl and upland game hunting. There are some bird hunting opportunities that get underway in September, so hunters can start making plans now by checking out

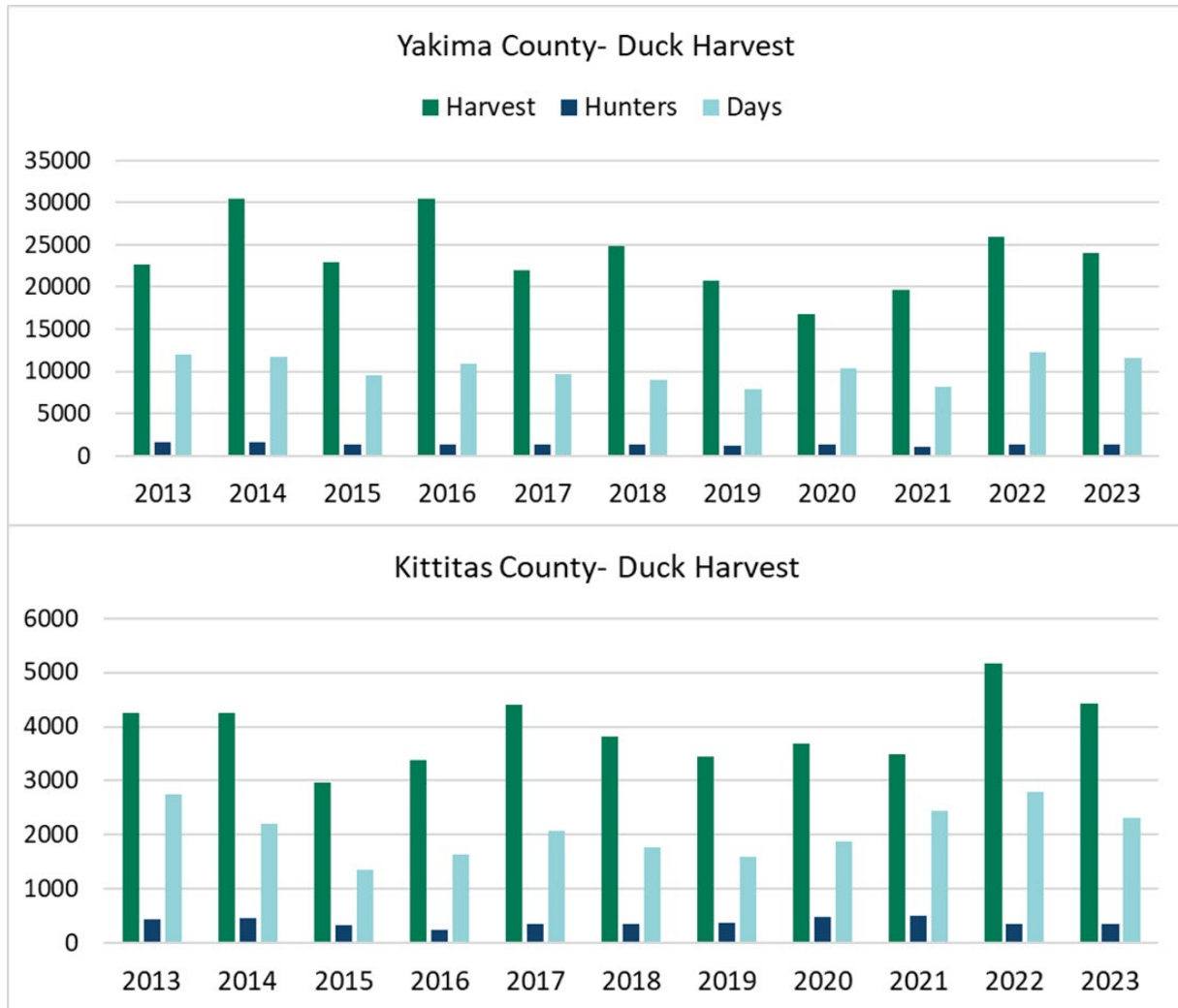
the upcoming seasons. Additionally, an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting in Washington can be found on the WDFW's [Let's Go waterfowl hunting webpage](#).

Where to hunt?

The best waterfowl hunting is in the lower Yakima Valley, especially on Yakama Nation (YN) lands. The Yakama Nation is working to increase waterfowl hunting opportunities along the Yakima River every year. Review their [Feel Free to Hunt map](#) annually, use Google Earth to pre-scout, and don't be afraid to explore. YN's Satus Wildlife Area is the most popular and is open to hunting Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday, and holidays. The Satus Wildlife Area is very popular due to relatively easy access. Hunting can be just as good on Mosebar ponds and the northern areas of Satus.

Public hunting can be found on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) (SSWA) and [Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge](#). The Sunnyside Unit of the SSWA has several managed wetlands which include the Rice Paddy Wetlands, Johnson Wetland, and the North and South Haystack Ponds. There are three blinds on the SSWA, all of which require the use of waders while putting out decoys. The blinds offer mostly duck hunting with a rare flock of geese passing by. These are first-come first-serve, with ADA hunters having priority if the blind is occupied one-and-a-half hours prior to daylight. Infrastructure problems in recent years have left one or more blinds dry. For information on which blinds have water and to obtain the combination to the lock, call the SSWA at 509-545-2028. The wildlife area also has several agriculture fields with small grains that can also provide some field hunting opportunities. Harvest and hunter days on Sunnyside have been low and are likely influenced by the challenging nature of managing dense vegetation and low water levels during drought years.

Figure 12. Duck harvest estimates in Yakima and Kittitas Counties for hunting seasons from 2013 through 2023.



Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge has also had difficulty filling wetlands, especially in October. Water can only be pumped from Toppenish to fill wetlands in the Robins Unit if flows exceed 30 cubic feet per second. The Pumphouse wetlands depend on Toppenish Creek side channels to fill at higher creek levels. Flows in those side channels have been unpredictable in recent years. At a gauge height of three feet, the channels should fill. Hunters can check flow/levels at the [USGS website](#). Summer flows in Toppenish Creek are always low. Significant fall rain is needed, which usually doesn't come until November. A private hunt club due east of the refuge that attracted large numbers of ducks to the area was abandoned a few years ago. Few ducks were seen leaving the reserve and flying over the Toppenish Refuge last year. Before making a trip to Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge, calling the refuge at 509-865-2405 for conditions would be best.

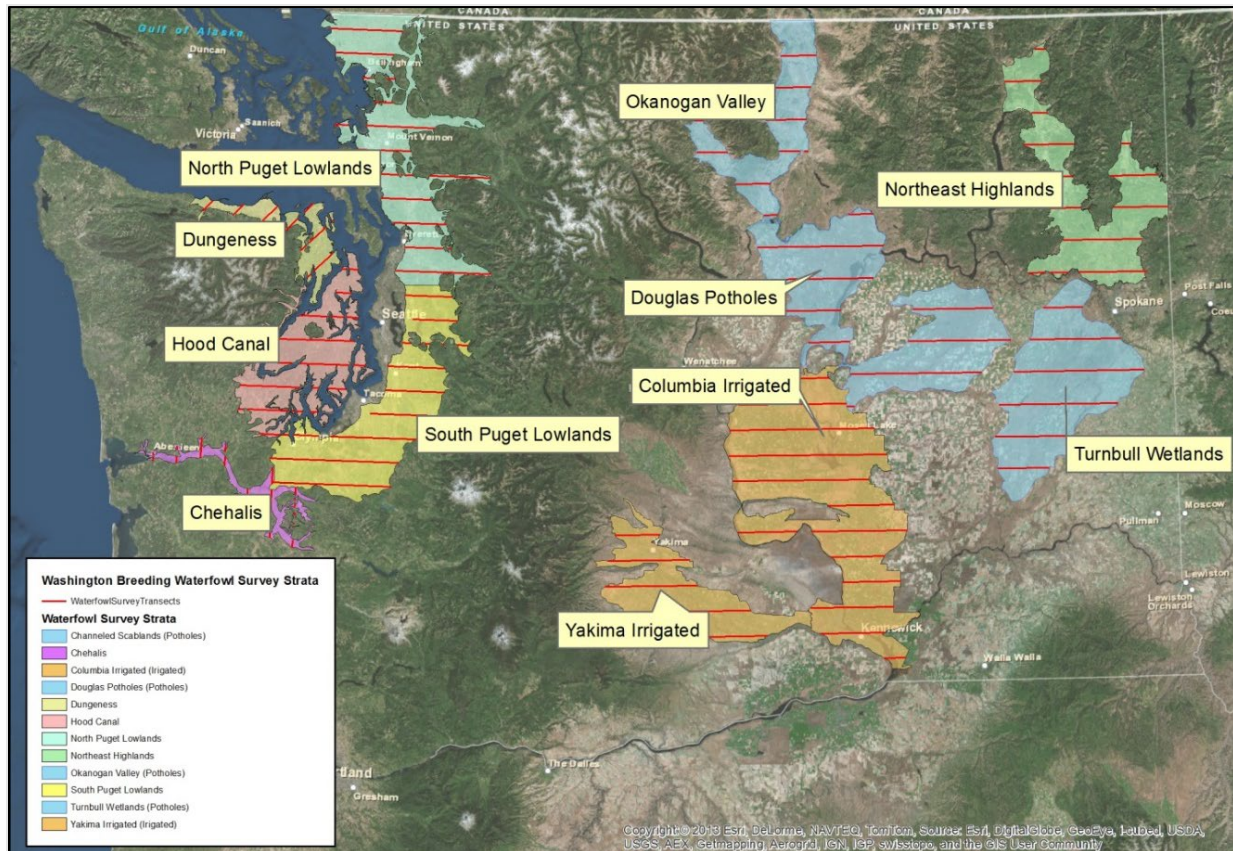
Population monitoring

The Washington Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey is conducted yearly and is an index of breeding abundance since all areas of the state cannot be sampled. This year's survey was conducted May 6 through 10 in eastern Washington. Parts of the district are within the Yakima and Columbia Irrigated survey stratum (Figure 14).

Mallards are the most abundant breeding and wintering waterfowl species in Washington. Unsurprisingly, the estimate of breeding mallards in the spring of 2024 in eastern Washington was 43,135 birds, which was a mere 136 birds above the 2023 estimate (42,999) but was 5% lower than 2022 and 26% lower than the long-term average. This was the first year that western Washington had a higher mallard estimate than eastern Washington.

Ultimately, ducks need water, and the extreme drought throughout the west and prairie potholes negatively impacted populations in the past four years.

Figure 13. Washington State breeding waterfowl strata and long-term Breeding Waterfowl Population Survey transects and survey strata.



Turkey

Turkey hunting can be one of the most exciting and shareable hunts. Adequate scouting and preparation are important for hunter success. Finding where birds roost at night and sneaking into a spot nearby before sunrise is a common tactic used by die hard turkey hunters in both spring and fall. Because the hunting season aligns with the spring breeding season, male turkeys respond well to calls and decoys. They are trying to attract a mate at this time, so males will strut to display their dominance and will occasionally fight with other males often resulting in a very entertaining and memorable hunt. A great resource for new turkey hunters is [The Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington](#) document released by WDFW’s Hunter Education Program.

The best hunting early in the spring is on private lands in the lower elevations of GMU 335, which is why most of the District 8 harvest comes from GMU 335 (Table 7). However, this GMU sees 40% of the district’s hunter days spent afield. By May, some birds will move into higher elevations which opens opportunity on the Teanaway Community Forest. The remainder of GMUs yield a harvest of fewer than 30 birds. The 2022 season saw the highest hunter success rates in GMU 346 (25%), 336 (23%), and 340 (19%). Healthy populations of turkey can also be found along most of the Yakima River.

Table 7. District 8 spring turkey harvest by GMU for the 2019 through 2023 seasons.

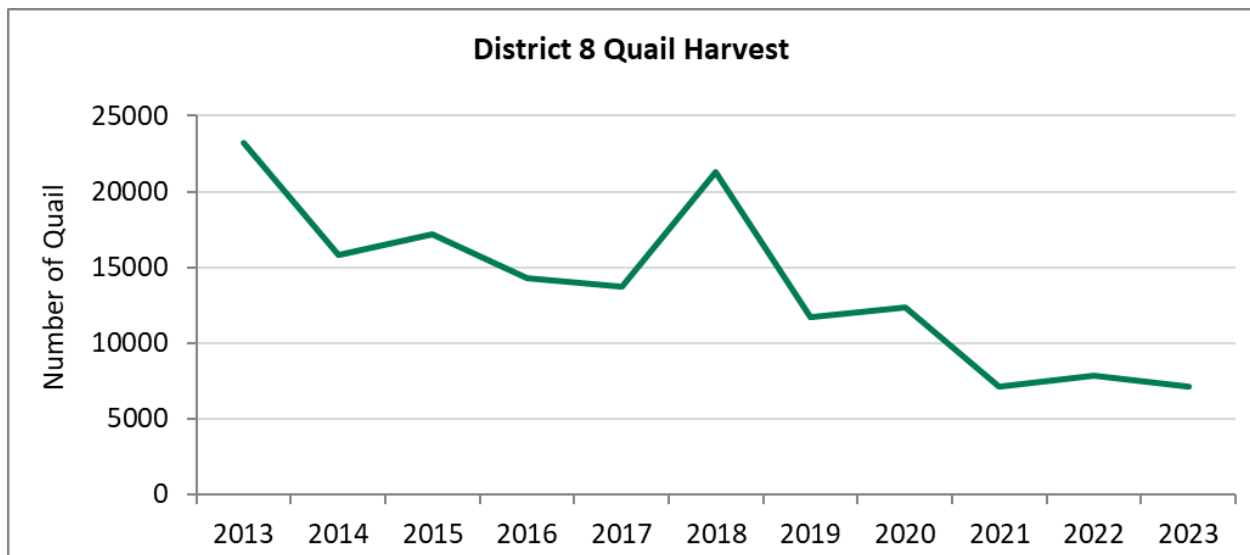
GMU	GMU Name	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
328	Naneum	25	17	27	24	11
329	Quilomene	16	11	25	3	10
334	Ellensburg	17	14	20	20	6
335	Teanaway	70	59	112	84	74
336	Taneum	20	26	42	33	26
340	Manastash	16	9	32	25	37
342	Umtanum	16	18	17	13	10
346	Little Naches	0	0	2	3	3
352	Nile	3	0	3	0	0
356	Bumping	0	3	0	0	0
360	Bethel	0	2	3	0	2
364	Rimrock	0	0	5	0	0
368	Cowiche	10	4	10	9	3
372	Rattlesnake Hills	2	2	7	3	2
	Total	195	165	305	217	184

Quail

California quail can be found in most non-timbered portions of the district. The best habitat and highest number of quail are typically in the lower Yakima Valley. The trend has been declining total quail harvest for the last ten years (Figure 20). 2021 was the lowest harvest ever recorded and has since remained stable. A variety of factors, from deep snow (2016 through 2017), drought (2020 through 2022), and fires (annually) have reduced quail populations. Additionally, closures of public land because of fires in the 2021 and 2022 season may have had some effect on the decline in harvest.

Quail in riparian draws surrounded by sagebrush are getting hard to find. Most of the quail habitat in the Wenas Wildlife Area has burned in recent years. The best chance of finding good coveys will be near rivers and irrigated land. The best quail hunting opportunity in District 8 can be found along the lower Yakima River on the [Yakama Nation](#). WDFW has parcels along the river on the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) (SSWA), but registration boxes show poor harvest. Roughly 87% of upland bird hunters are unsuccessful at harvesting quail on SSWA, and harvest averages 0.16 per day.

Figure 14. Harvest estimates for quail in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2013 through 2023.



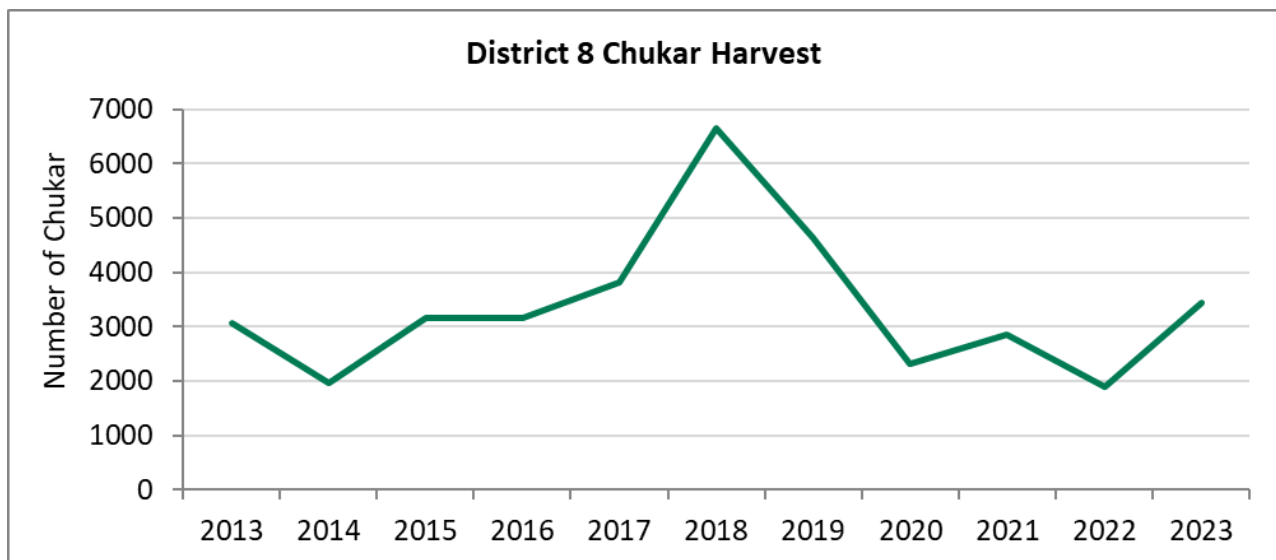
To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. Refer to the [Washington 2024 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

Partridge (Chukar/Hungarian)

The best hunting in recent years has been on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#), [Colockum Wildlife Area](#), and the [Yakima Training Center](#) (YTC). While the YTC is very popular with long-time chukar hunters, please note that access may be limited by military training activity.

Partridge harvest in the district has been decreasing since 2018 (Figure 17) with drier conditions. Abundant snow and a wet, cold spring increases available forage and has corresponded to increased in chukar abundance. Conditions from 2022 through 2024 have been favorable and populations are believed to have increased locally. Increase in harvest from 2022 through 2023 indicate an increase in opportunity; in combination with trends in population, hunters should anticipate a good season.

Figure 15. Combined harvest estimates for chukar and Hungarian partridge in District 8 from 2013 through 2023.



To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, nontoxic shot is required for all upland bird and dove hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). Use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas.

Forest grouse

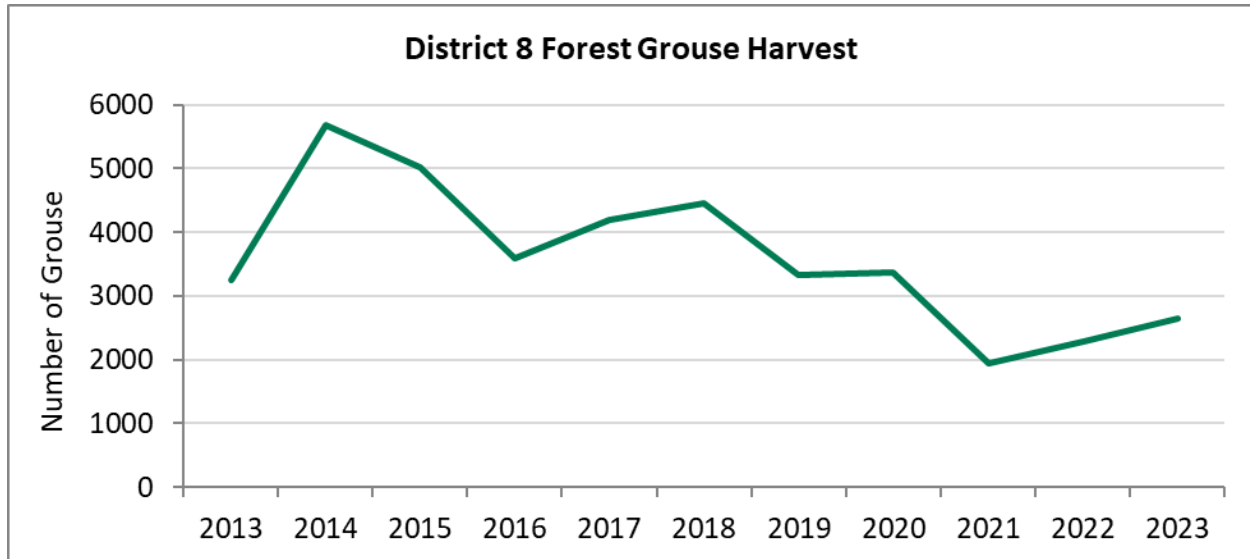
Traditionally, the harvest in District 8 was made up of primarily blue grouse. However, 45% of last season's harvest was made up of ruffed grouse. Around 30% of harvest was of blue grouse (sooty or dusky), and 5% spruce grouse. The remaining 20% of harvest was reported as unknown species. Grouse harvest in District 8 hit an all-time low in 2021 (Figure 18) but rebounded slightly during the 2022 and 2023 season.

A common tactic used by many grouse hunters is driving roads in the morning and evening, especially when the season first opens. Research suggests brood hens and young are most vulnerable in early September. During the 2021 through 2023 season setting rulemaking process, the WDFW Commission adopted a decision to delay the forest grouse season two weeks from the original opening date of Sep. 1 to the new season dates of **Sep. 15 through Jan. 15**. WDFW biologists recommended the rule based on harvest data and catch-per-unit effort, indicating that Washington's forest grouse populations are declining. Setting the season back to Sep. 15 helps protect brood hens that are more vulnerable to harvest during early September. More information is [available in this 2021 blog post](#). Hunters serious about finding grouse should look for areas with low densities of open roads and hike morning or evening.



A lone grouse hiding in the understory. Photo by WDFW.

Figure 16. Harvest estimates for forest grouse in District 8 for hunting seasons from 2013 through 2023.



WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection

Biologists collect wings and tails of hunter-harvested forest grouse throughout the season using designated collection sites. This collection effort contributes to a long-term statewide dataset that allows for a better evaluation of population trends and age-ratio data necessary for the local management of forest grouse species. Grouse hunters in District 8 can help with this effort by depositing one wing and the tail of each grouse they harvest into one of our collection barrels located statewide ([WDFW forest grouse wing and tail collection sites](#)). In District 8, collection sites are at the following locations:

- **Coleman Creek** - Coleman Creek Road at the entrance to Naneum State Forest.
GPS: 47.10453, -120.39865
- **Taneum Creek** - W Taneum Road, Entrance to L.T. Murray Wildlife Area.
GPS: 47.08702, -120.79056
- **Nasty Creek** - Junction of North Fork and Nasty Creek Roads.
GPS: 46.56476, -120.91966
- **Oak Creek Rd** - Junction of Oak Creek Road (1400) and Hwy 12
GPS: 46.72399, -120.81432

Please be sure to use the provided bags at the site and to fill out all necessary information. If these locations are inconvenient for hunters, we suggest looking through the statewide wing barrel site list on our website's [Forest grouse wing and tail collection](#) webpage or calling your local, [regional office](#) for information.



New grouse barrel style deployed in District 8. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasant

Released pen-raised pheasants are the District's main source of opportunity for hunters. Wild pheasants contribute little to the total harvest in the district. In Kittitas County (no wild birds), 480 pheasants were released, and harvest was estimated at 234 pheasants. Yakima county accounts for the majority of pheasants harvested in District 8. About 1,200 birds will be released at the [Sunnyside-Snake River Wildlife Area](#) and 500 birds at the Green Gate Entrance on the [Quilomene Wildlife Area Unit](#) (also referred to as Whiskey Dick).

The best pheasant hunting in the district is around the irrigated farmland along the Yakima River in Yakima County. A large part of the irrigated farmland in Yakima County is located on the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation. Hunters interested in hunting on tribal lands should contact the office of the Yakama Nation (YN) at 509-865-5121. For maps of WDFW-owned and managed land along the Yakima River, contact the Yakima Regional office at 509-575-2740.



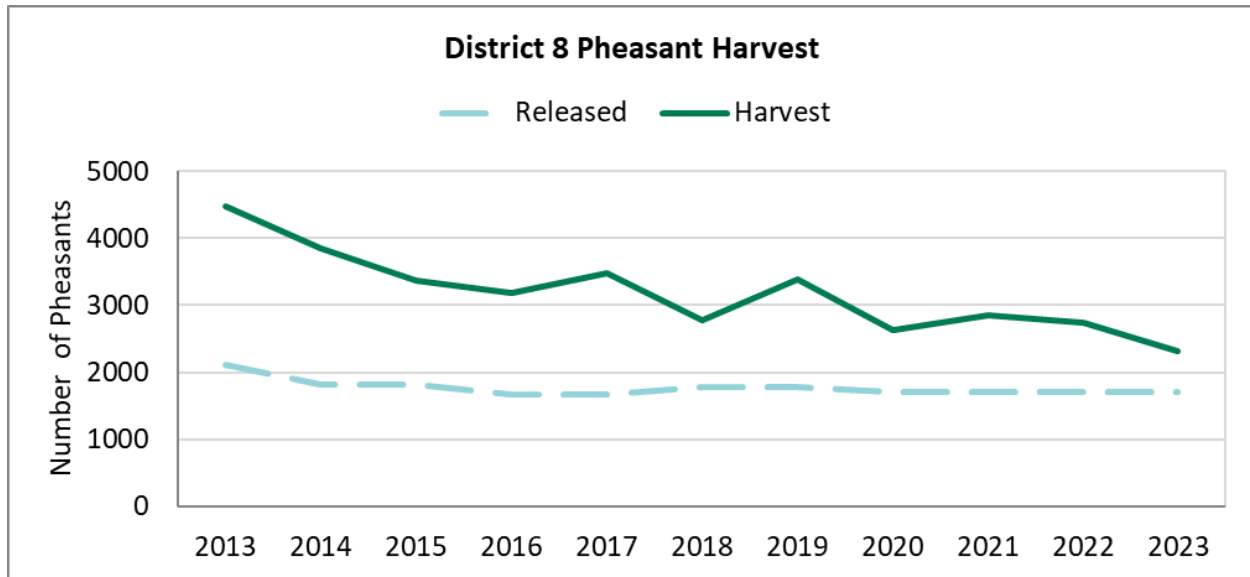
WDFW staff releasing pheasants at Whiskey Dick- Green Gate. Photo by WDFW.

Pheasant harvest in District 8 has declined about 50% over the last ten years and recently leveled out at very low levels (Figure 19). Habitat loss due to conversion from fallow land to crops has been identified as the reason for the decline as well as the decline of hunter participation.

To hunt pheasants in Eastern Washington a small game license is required. The small game license is \$40.50 or \$22.00 if purchased with any big game license. Youths under 16 can purchase the small game license for \$18.50, or \$8.80 with a big game license. Birds are released for youth and general season openers. To protect other wildlife species including waterfowl and raptors, non-toxic shot is required for all upland bird, dove and band-tailed pigeon hunting on all pheasant release sites statewide. More detailed information can be found in the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) pamphlet.

If you hunt any of these release sites, you may use only approved nontoxic shot (either in shotshells or as loose shot for muzzleloading). The use of lead shot is regulated on some wildlife areas. Refer to the [Washington 2023 Game Bird and Small Game Hunting Regulations](#) pamphlet for more information.

Figure 17. The number of released pen-raised pheasants and harvest estimates based on hunter reporting from 2013 through 2023 hunting seasons.



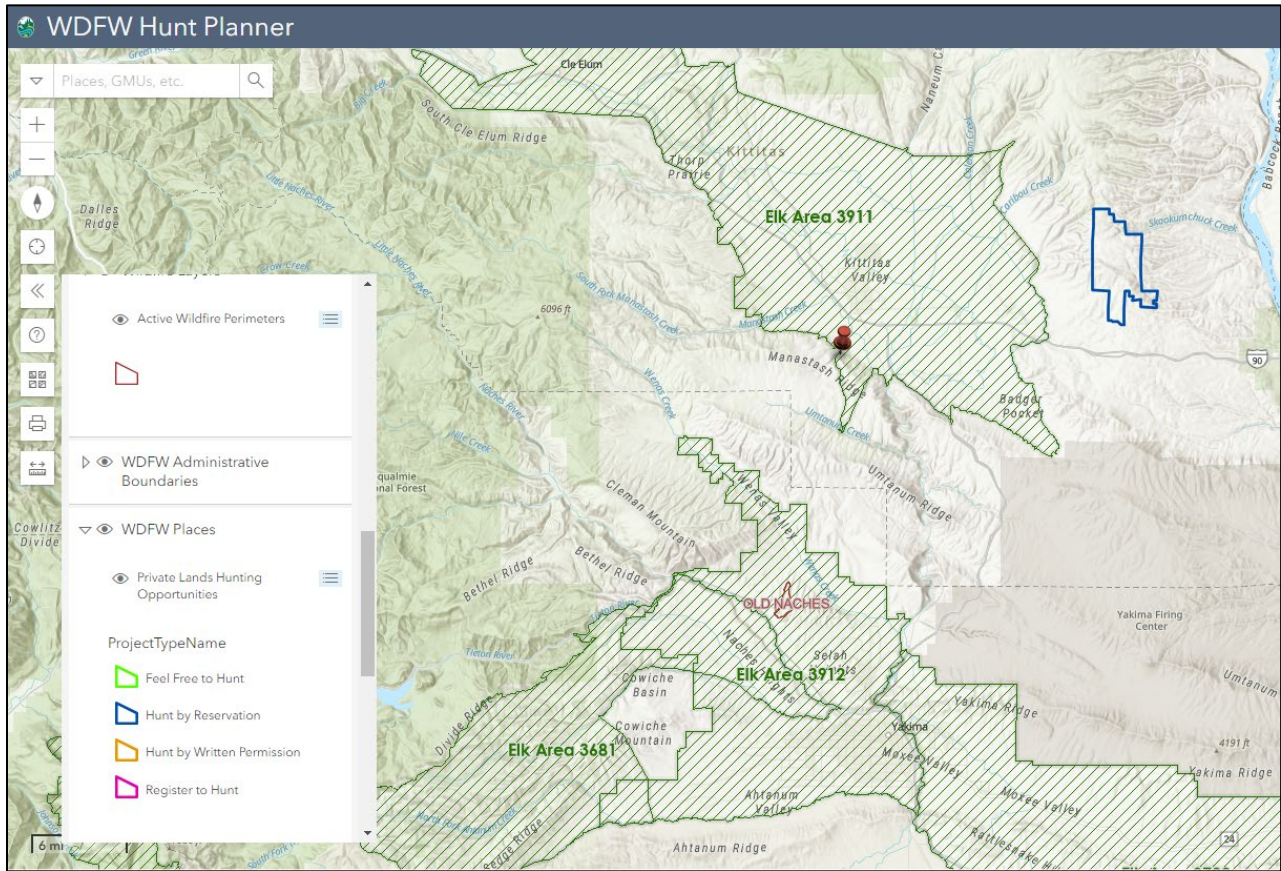
Online tools and maps

Harvest reports for past general seasons and permits for any GMU and Permit Hunt for all game species are online at wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/management/game-harvest.

Updated detailed information on population size, compositions, or trends of game species is available through annual [Game Status and Trend Reports](#). You can use the search tool on the online document to quickly find the species and population of interest.

WDFW has released a Hunt Planner Web Map to search for game seasons and private land access around the state: geodataservices.wdfw.wa.gov/huntregs/. A good starting point for hunters looking for a place to hunt is the Web Map, which provides hunters with information about public and private lands access points, GMU boundaries, species area units, hunting seasons, pheasant release sites, water access points, landscape features such as roads and topography, public lands, and much more (Figure 20).

Figure 18. Depiction of active wildfire perimeter, private lands access, and elk area layers in District 8 from WDFW's Regulations Web Map.



Pink, green, orange, and blue bordered parcels are lands in the various public lands access programs.