

2024 District 17 Hunting Prospects

Pacific and Grays Harbor counties



Washington
Department of
**FISH &
WILDLIFE**

July 2024

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Pacific and Grays Harbor counties

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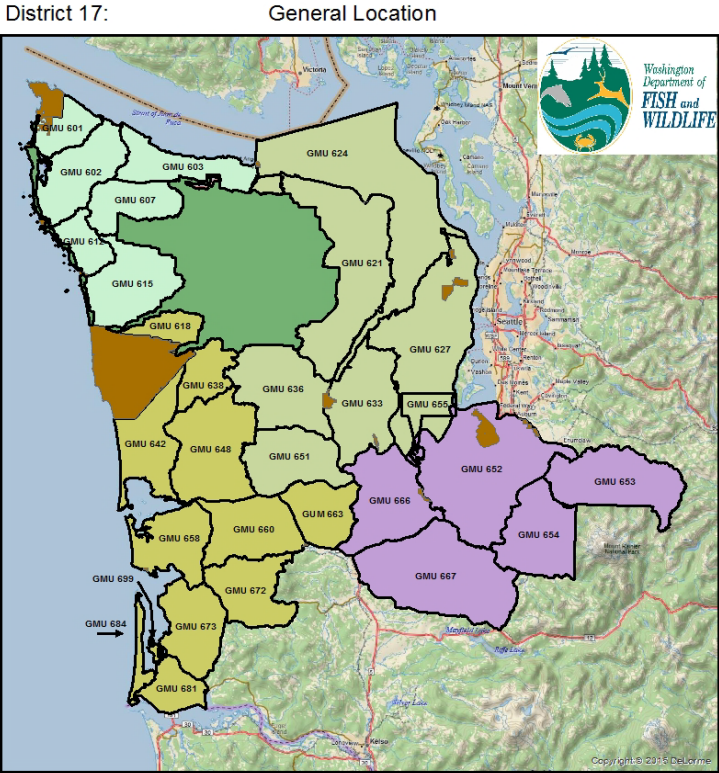
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District 17 general overview

District 17 includes all of Pacific and Grays Harbor counties and is one of four management districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that constitute the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) Coastal Region, or Region 6. The northern portion of District 17 (north of Highway 12) includes the southwestern portion of the Olympic Mountains, while the southern part of the district is situated in the Willapa Hills.

District 17 is in southwest Washington and consists of 12 game management units (GMUs): 638 (Quinault Ridge), 648 (Wynoochee), 660 (Minot Peak), 672 (Fall River), 681 (Bear River), 699 (Long Island), 618 (Matheny), 642 (Copalis), 658 (North River), 663 (Capital Peak), 673 (Williams Creek), 684 (Long Beach).

Figure 1. Four administrative districts and their associated GMUs within WDFW Region 6.



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 Due to the dynamic nature of data the need to rely on outside sources of information, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions in the data and information contained in and products produced from this application. There are no warranties which accompany the maps and information information contained in or produced by this application. For legal definitions of hunting regulations, seasons, and boundaries, the user should refer to Chapters 232-12, 232-16, and 232-26 of the Washington State Administrative Code (<http://www.leg.wa.gov/wac/>).

The District 17 landscape is dominated by intensively managed industrial forest land characterized by second- and third-growth forests. These lands are primarily dedicated to producing conifers such as Douglas fir, western hemlock, and occasionally cedar. Some tree stands focus production on red alder.

Other habitats in the district range from sub-alpine in areas adjacent to Olympic National Park to coastal wetlands along the outer coast.

District 17 is best known for elk hunting in the Willapa Hills and waterfowl hunting around Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and in the Chehalis and Willapa river valleys. High-quality hunting exists for other game species, including black-tailed deer, black bears, and forest grouse. The following table shows the estimated harvest for the three most popular big game species in District 17 during the 2018-2023 seasons. For more information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Table 1. Hunter harvest for selected game species during 2023 and previous five years in District 17.

Species	Harvest (2023)	Harvest (2022)	Harvest (2021)	Harvest (2020)	Harvest (2019)	Harvest (2018)
Elk	565 Total 416 Bull 149 Cow	636 total	768	766	748	856
Deer	1,499 Total 1,308 Buck 191 Doe	1310 total	1562	1476	1674	1542
Black bear	159	190	142	139	202	123

Elk

Summary

Success rates: Range widely depending on weapon type, GMU, and land access.

Recent trends: Decrease in harvest and hunter effort. Slight decline in archery elk hunters.

GMUs with highest elk harvest in rank order: 673, 658, 660, 681.

General information, management goals, and population status

The subspecies of elk in District 17 are Roosevelt elk. Unlike other areas in Western Washington, Rocky Mountain elk were never introduced into the district, and Roosevelt-Rocky Mountain elk hybrids do not occur. Washington has 10 distinct elk herds. A portion of two elk herds occur in District 17:

- Olympic elk herd (GMUs 618, 638, 642, and 648)
- Willapa Hills elk herd (GMUs 658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, and 699)

District 17 elk hunting varies from marginal to excellent depending on the GMU. GMUs associated with the Willapa Hills elk herd, specifically 658, 672, 673, and 681, offer the greatest harvest opportunities.

WDFW manages elk at the herd level and sets regulations at the GMU level. In general, each herd occupies several GMUs that collectively define the range of a population that minimizes interchange with adjacent elk populations.

WDFW manages District 17 with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing elk herds. To meet that goal, WDFW's objective is to maintain herds at a minimum ratio of 15 bulls to 100 cows in the pre-hunting season population and a minimum of 12 bulls to 100 cows in the post-season population. Portions of the district (such as GMU 684) must balance overall herd objectives with the equally important mission to minimize human-wildlife conflicts. Elk can cause severe impacts to commercial crops such as hay or cranberries.

WDFW doesn't use formal population size estimates to monitor elk populations across the entire district. Instead, the Department uses harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort to supplement formal indices or estimates. This approach has limitations for monitoring trends in population size. Therefore, WDFW has a more detailed monitoring strategy specifically for the Willapa Hills elk herd to:

- Determine elk population trends
- Quantify cow to calf ratios
- Quantify bull to cow ratios

No surveys were conducted in spring 2024. In 2023, WDFW conducted surveys across the northern and southern portions of the Willapa Hills, including portions of Region 5, District 10, to estimate overall abundance and ratios of calves and bulls to cows at the GMU, sub-herd (i.e., north vs south), and herd scales. Typically, limited funding and the large herd area requires surveying the north and south sub-herds in alternating years (reference map). This year, the Department had sufficient funding to survey the entire herd area. Results from the 2023 Willapa Hills elk surveys are in the table below.

Figure 2. Willapa Hills elk herd area map.



Table 2. South sub-herd GMU ratios.

GMU	Calf/cow ratio	Bull/cow ratio
506 Willapa Hills	32:100 = (32 calves per 100 cows)	11:100 = (11 bulls per 100 cows)
530 Ryderwood	41:100	18:100
681 Bear River	36:100	18:100
673 Williams Creek	26:100	15:100
Willapa South Total	34:100	15:100

Table 3. North sub-herd GMU ratios.

GMU	Calf/cow ratio	Bull/cow ratio
658 North River	29:100	18:100
660 Minot Peak	31:100	15:100
672 Fall River	30:100	16:100
Willapa North Total	29:100	17:100

Survey results from 2023 showed a healthy and stable elk population throughout the Willapa Hills. Both calf to cow and bull to cow ratios are robust, indicating a productive herd with decent harvest opportunities. WDFW will conduct annual or semi-annual surveys of the Willapa Hills elk herd to sample different segments of the landscape.

Which GMU should elk hunters hunt?

Probably the most frequent question the Department gets from hunters is “which GMU should I hunt?” The answer depends on the hunting method and the target hunting experience. For example, GMU 699 is a small unit closed to modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters. Another example is that archery hunters are not allowed to harvest antlerless elk in every GMU.

Some hunters are looking for an opportunity to harvest a mature bull. Large mature bulls are found in District 17 but aren’t very abundant. WDFW directs hunters seeking mature bulls to spend their efforts in either the Quinault Ridge (638), Matheny (618), or adjacent Clearwater (615) GMUs. All three GMUs are adjacent to Olympic National Park (ONP) and have the reputation of producing some very nice bulls. The best success for five-point or better bulls is garnered by the September rifle permit hunters in either the Quinault Ridge (638) or Matheny (618) GMUs.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high elk densities, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario doesn’t readily exist in any GMU open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 17. Those GMUs with the highest elk densities tend to have the highest hunter densities. For many, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of elk. Others might prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of elk if that means there are also very few hunters. Note that many industrial timber companies have begun limiting access or charging a fee to access their land. This change has effectively, and sometimes dramatically, reduced hunter density on those lands.

Archers should consider that antlerless elk seasons are not uniform across all GMUs. Antlerless elk may be harvested during the general season in six GMUs, and three GMUs are open during early and late archery seasons. These differences are important when comparing total harvest or hunter numbers among GMUs. Muzzleloader seasons are not uniform either. Some muzzleloader seasons are open during the early muzzleloader season, while others are only available during the late muzzleloader season. Hunters should keep these differences in mind when interpreting the information provided in Figures 3 and 4.

What to expect during the 2024 season

Elk populations do not vary much from year to year, especially in District 17, which lacks the severe winter weather conditions that might result in a die-off. Consequently, WDFW expects the number of elk available for harvest to be similar to the 2023 season. . Hunter numbers do not typically change much from one year to the next, but recent actions by private timber companies to charge for access have reduced hunter numbers in those areas affected.

Weather can dramatically differ from year to year and has the potential to influence harvest rates. For example, 2012 and 2021 were hot, dry summers by Western Washington standards, which produced extreme fire danger warnings and caused many timber companies to close their lands to public access during the latter part of the general early archery season and the entire early muzzleloader season. Washington witnessed some very high temperatures in early summer this year, so conditions could result in extreme fire dangers in fall 2024. The best predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success.

Long-term harvest data (along with survey data) generally indicates that elk populations are stable in District 17. However, 2023 saw the lowest total elk harvest since 2008. This dip could indicate that even more elk are available in 2024. One possible factor: the Department noted fewer modern firearm hunters were afield in 2023. For more information related to the status of Washington’s elk herds, reference the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Figure 3. Elk harvested in District 17 during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2023. Totals do not include tribal harvest.

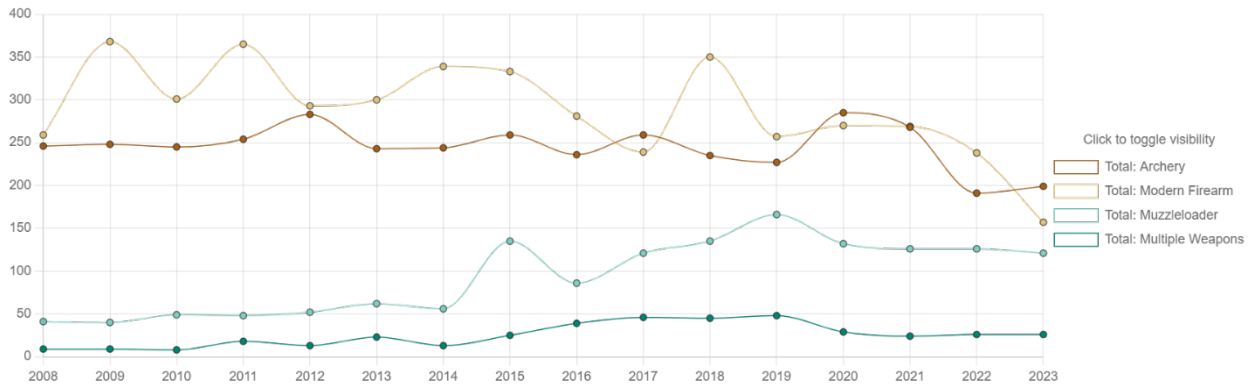
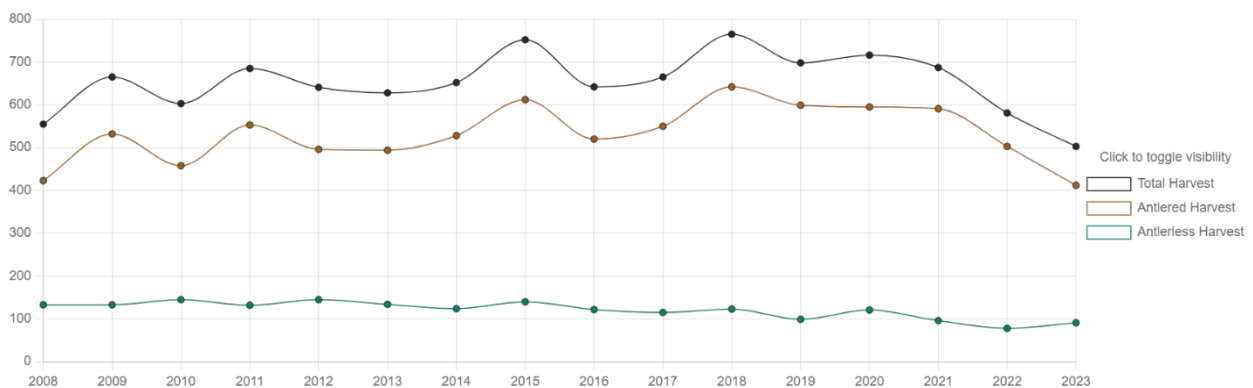


Figure 4. District 17 harvest totals for antlered and antlerless elk. Total elk harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Totals do not include tribal harvest.



How to find elk

When hunting elk in District 17, hunters should research and spend time scouting before the season. Predicting where elk are located is especially difficult after hunting pressure increases. Many hunters spend their time focused on timber harvests. Elk often forage in timber harvests and are highly visible when they do. Those highly visible elk often attract other hunters. Consequently, timber harvests can get crowded in a hurry. Many elk (especially bulls) will infrequently visit timber harvests during daylight hours. Instead, they may spend most of their day in closed canopy forests, swamps, or regeneration stands.



Corey Bronckhorst with elk taken from GMU 673 during the 2016 archery season.

Some generalities can be made about the landscape that will increase the odds of locating elk. When going to a new area, hunters are encouraged to cover as much ground as possible. Note areas where you see signs along roads and landings. Landings are often not graveled, making it easy to see fresh tracks. Scouting will reveal which areas hold elk and where to focus more intensive efforts.

After identifying areas with abundant elk signs, hunters should focus on areas that provide cover and are near timber harvests. During early seasons, when it is warm, these cover areas often include swamps, creek bottoms, river bottoms, or any place near water. Once the season progresses and temperatures cool, elk are less attracted to water, and locating them becomes more difficult. Hunting pressure also can force elk to use areas that provide thicker cover or are more inaccessible to hunters because of topography.

Later in the season, consult a topographic map and find benches located in steep terrain with thick cover. Elk often use these benches to bed down during the day. Finally, don't let a locked gate (provided that non-motorized access is allowed) keep you from going into an area to search for elk. Frequently,

these areas hold elk that have not received much hunting pressure, making them less skittish and easier to hunt. A popular approach to hunting behind gates is to use mountain bikes with trailers. Biking on timber company lands is facilitated by high densities of maintained gravel roads, but e-bikes are frequently restricted.

Roosevelt elk do not tend to move very far. If you found some animals but discovered that they have left the area, they are more than likely within one or two miles from where you first found them.

Elk areas

There are two elk areas in District 17: Elk Area 6010 (Mallis or Raymond) and Elk Area 6064 (Quinault Valley). Nearly all permit opportunities in District 17 are antlerless elk hunts and are associated with these elk areas. Elk Area 6010 was established in a location with chronic elk damage problems, and its primary purpose is to provide antlerless harvest opportunities to help control the growth of herds in localized agricultural areas.

Elk Area 6064 was established to help foster solutions between landowners and elk hunters. Special restrictions apply in each elk area. In Elk Area 6064, only Master Hunters are allowed to hunt elk during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons.

Elk Area 6010 was established to alleviate elk damage on private agricultural lands. Elk Area 6010 also contains tracts of public or private timber company lands where elk are not problematic. For the best opportunities, hunters are advised to visit and scout the area well in advance of their hunt and make the effort to speak with farm owners in the area regarding accessing their property.

Notable hunting changes

Several private timber companies in District 17 charge a fee to access areas previously open to the public. Property ownership changes irregularly. Hunters should contact landowners in areas they intend to hunt and determine the company's current policy. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

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, including within the Olympic and Willapa elk herd areas. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something different altogether. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 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 of cattle, sheep, and goats 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 also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area.

Hoof disease is found throughout District 17 in both the Olympic and Willapa Hills elk herd areas. TAHD appears to be more prevalent among elk in the Willapa Herd area and southern end of the Olympic Peninsula. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease 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.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help

To help combat TAHD in elk, hunters can:

- **Harvest a limping elk** from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.
- **Report elk:** Help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the Department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires:** 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.

Hunters can participate in the **TAHD Incentive Program** by harvesting a limping elk and submitting the hooves to WDFW. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (i.e. abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit.

WDFW continues working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. The Department's website has more information about [TAHD](#). Additional information on TAHD and the incentive program can be found on page 65 of the [Big Game Hunting Regulations](#).

Deer

Summary

Success rates: Depend on weapon type and GMU. For the entire district, hunter success generally ranges from 15-20%.

Recent trends: Observable increase in harvest last year compared to the year prior. GMUs with highest harvest include 660, 663, 672, and 648.

General information, management goals, and population status

Columbian black-tailed deer (black-tails or black-tailed deer) are the only deer species in District 17. Deer hunting opportunities in District 17 range from marginal to very good. The best opportunities to harvest a black-tailed deer in District 17 occur in GMUs 663, 648, 672, and 660.

In Washington, black-tail harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. All areas of District 17 are managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing deer populations while minimizing conflicts with people. Management objectives include maintaining deer populations to have a minimum of 15 bucks per 100 does in the post-hunting season population.

WDFW does not attempt to survey deer populations to estimate their total numbers in District 17. Harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort help to supplement a formal population size estimate. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor population size trends, and the agency is currently evaluating new approaches to monitor black-tailed deer populations.

Finding an effective way to monitor black-tailed deer populations has been an ongoing management challenge. Black-tailed deer are secretive and use densely vegetated habitats. Their ability to remain unseen substantially lowers the probability of detection through aerial surveys. The small number of deer observed results in insufficient sample sizes to monitor population trends or demographics (buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios).

Overall deer harvest has varied widely over the long-term (2008-2023) with a low point of 1,095 animals harvested in 2011. The most recent high point was 2016 when 1,837 were harvested. That was followed by another low of 1,258 deer in 2017, then varied between 1,476 and 1,674 deer through 2021. Last year (2023) was a total estimated 1,499 bucks and does. Long-term trends in harvest data seemed to indicate somewhat stable deer populations. The seemingly steep decline from 2016 to 2017 is surprising and without an obvious biological cause. For more information on the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should reference through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trends Report](#).

Antler points and age

Prior to mandatory reporting in 2001, WDFW staffed field check stations to gather information of age structure. Hunters have frequently asked if there is a correlation between age and antler points. During the fall of 1979, tooth samples were collected from bucks harvested in Western Washington and sent in for cementum annuli aging. Of the total of 36 buck deer tooth samples collected, 25 (69%) were spikes and two points. The remaining bucks sampled were at least three points or better (31%), with four of the three-points being 2.5 years old at time of harvest.

A more accurate assessment of the age of buck deer harvested in Western Washington has occurred recently. WDFW collected hundreds of tooth samples from successful black-tailed deer hunters during the 2019 and 2020 seasons. Reported number of antler points was submitted with each tooth, and samples were sent to a laboratory for analysis of cementum annuli to determine age. A table of the results is plotted below. Generally, the number of antler points increases with age. However, a 3-year-old buck may still be a spike, and an 11-year-old buck could be a two-point. Conversely, a yearling could have four points.

Table 4. Average age of black-tailed bucks harvested in Washington compared to the highest number of reported antler points.

Max antler points (1 side)	Average age – Rounded to nearest ½ year	Total submissions
1 (Spike)	1 Year	65
2	3 Years	120
3	4 Years	97
4	4 ½ Years	65
5	5 Years	30
6	6 Years	4

Which GMU should deer hunters hunt?

The best GMU to hunt deer depends on the hunting method and target hunting experience. Some hunters are looking for the best chance to harvest a large, mature buck, while others want to harvest any legal deer or simply be in an area with few hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have:

- High numbers of deer
- Low numbers of hunters
- High hunter success rates

Unfortunately, the perfect scenario does not exist in any GMU that is freely open to the public during any season within District 17. GMUs with the highest deer numbers tend to have the highest hunter numbers.

For many, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them to avoid a GMU with many deer. Others prefer to hunt areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if they can avoid other hunters.

What to expect during the 2024 season

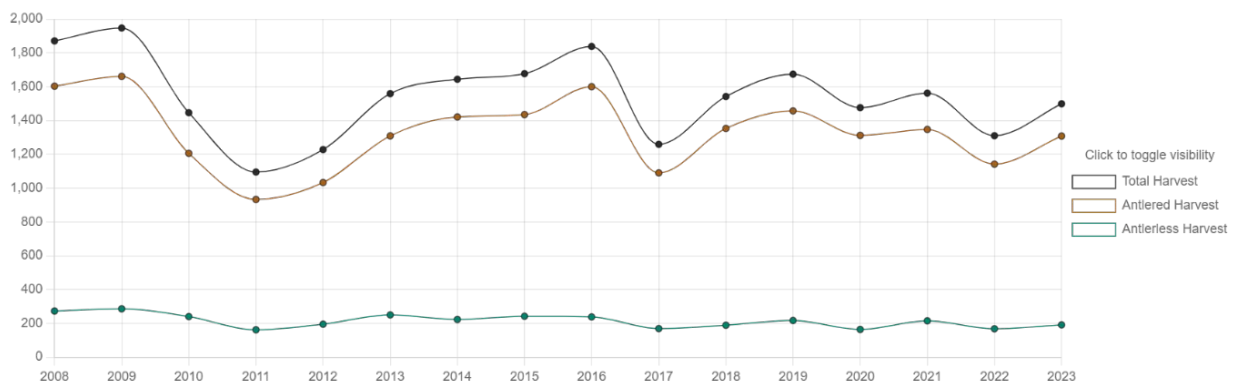
Deer populations do not change dramatically between typical years. Winter weather conditions rarely cause die-offs within District 17. Consequently, the Department anticipates the total quantity of deer available for harvest to be similar to previous seasons.

Hunter numbers do not change dramatically between typical years unless regulations are significantly modified or access is closed. The best predictors of expected general season harvest are recent trends in:

1. Harvest
2. Hunter numbers
3. Hunter success

The following chart provides trend data for harvest statistics. Total harvest is consistent with low harvest years occurring in 2011 (1,095 deer taken) and 2017 (1,259 deer taken). Boom years occurred in 2009 when almost 2,000 deer were harvested and 2016 when an estimated 1,838 deer were harvested.

Figure 5. Buck and antlerless deer harvested in District 17 during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2023. Harvest totals include special permits but not tribal harvest.



How to find and hunt black-tailed deer

The key to harvesting a black-tailed deer in District 17 is scouting. Black-tailed deer are present throughout the district and in nearly every habitat. Deer numbers differ among habitats and the highest densities are frequently associated with 3- to 9-year-old timber harvests. These young tree stands provide large amounts of cover and food.

Many hunters focus efforts on new timber harvests. Deer in these areas are much more visible than most other habitats. However, deer know they are exposed and typically visit timber harvests at night, early dawn, and dusk. Hunters should also explore areas near these openings. Areas with decent cover are more likely to contain deer for most of the day. Large amounts of deer sign in an area indicate deer are in close vicinity.

Over several years, WDFW fitted female deer in Capitol State Forest (GMU 663) with GPS collars as part of a larger study throughout Western Washington. The goal was to better understand the effects of timber management practices on deer survival and productivity. These GPS collars automatically upload the deer's location via satellite several times a day. The data gives biologists a detailed look at black-tailed deer movements and habitat use.

None of the deer monitored in WDFW's doe study used an area larger than .38 square miles (243 acres). The average home range size was .14 square miles (86 acres). Some deer used an area no bigger than 45 acres for an entire year. If a hunter sees signs of deer in an area, but no deer, they should be patient or change their approach.

Traditional approaches to hunting black-tailed deer include still-hunting or sitting patiently in high-use areas (timber harvests, highly traveled trails, or funnels) until the deer appears. A less well-known, or less-used, technique is rattling and grunting to simulate two bucks fighting over a doe. The rattling technique is more common with white-tailed deer but can be effective on black-tailed deer as well. A quick internet search on the technique yields plenty of evidence to illustrate its effectiveness when conditions are right.

Buck movements tend to increase during the rut, and they are less wary than other parts of the year. The last week of October and first week of November seem to be when male deer are most susceptible to harvest.

Notable hunting changes

Several private timber companies in District 17 are shifting to fee-access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Typically, these companies post signs at primary roadways, but hunters should be aware of changes. WDFW advises hunters to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the current policy regarding land access. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

Black bear

General information, management goals, and population status

Black bears are present throughout District 17. Numbers vary among GMUs, and harvest can change noticeably from year to year. The best places to harvest bears are usually in GMUs 648, 660, and 663. Other GMUs worth mentioning are 618, 638, 658, 660, 672, and 681.

Bear seasons are primarily designed to maintain stable populations.

Existing bear populations are not expected to have much impact on big game herds. Three statistics used to assess black bear harvest are:

- Proportion of females harvested
- Median age of harvested females
- Median age of harvested males

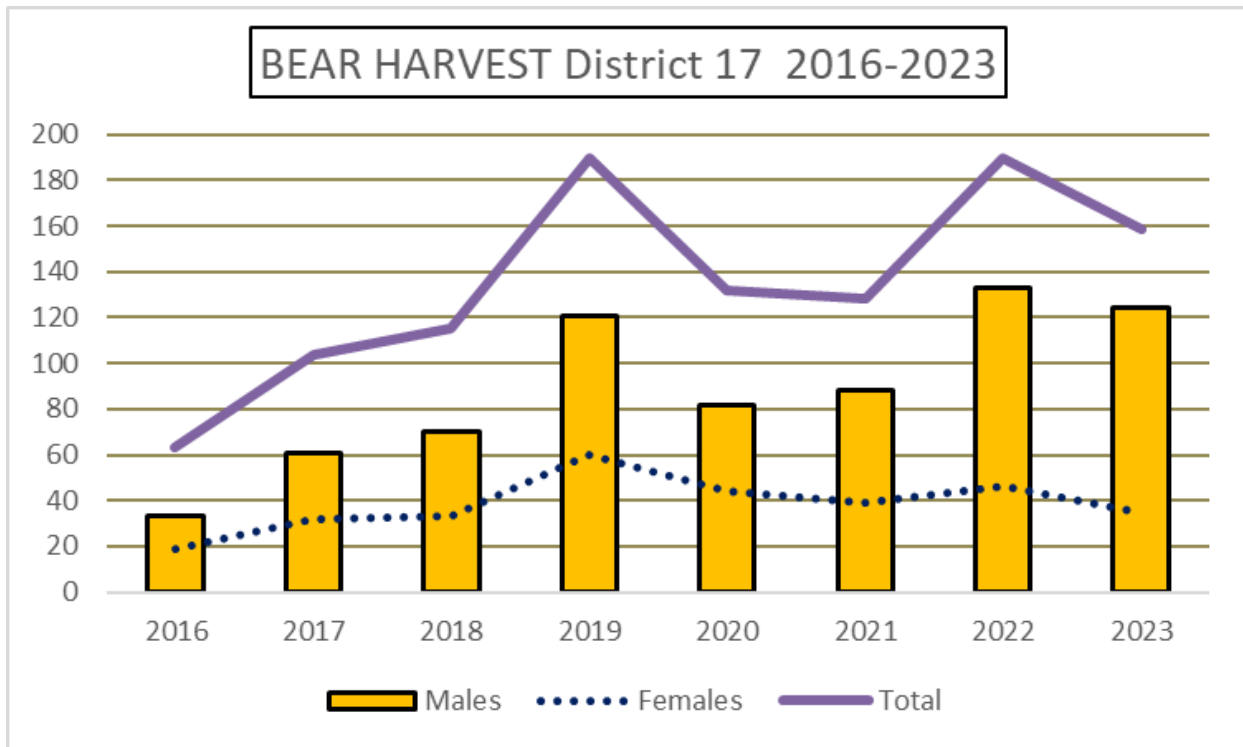
WDFW initiated surveys in 2019 to estimate bear density in portions of Region 6. The initial study area was in the Fall River GMU (672). The resulting estimates are expected to help the agency formulate management objectives and understand the relationship between the number of bears in the area, habitat characteristics, and annual harvest rates. For Fall River, bear density was estimated at just under eight bears per 100 square kilometers of habitat in the summer of 2019, one of the lowest densities in the state.

What to expect during the 2024 season

Most bears are probably harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Overall hunter success is low, but annual harvest can vary widely from year to year, and 2019 and 2020 had some of the highest harvest rates for the past 10 years. Depending on the GMU, between 4% and 15% of District 17 bear hunters were successful in 2019. Since 2001, the district's overall hunter success has typically ranged from 4% to 8%. District-wide, bear hunter success in 2019 was 11%. Hunter success rates are likely higher for those that specifically hunt bears compared to those that take bear incidentally during deer or elk season.

Annual bear harvest in District 17 increased from 2002 to 2008. Harvest declined sharply during the 2009 season but rebounded in 2010. Bear harvest has since remained generally stable to increasing, although 2014 was a low year while 2019 and 2022 were high years.

Figure 6. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 17, 2016–2023. Estimates do not include bears harvested during historic spring permit seasons or removed because of conflicts with people or timber damage.



More bears are typically harvested during the general season in GMU 648 than any other GMU. GMUs 642, 658, 660, 663, 673, and 681 are also regular producers of bears during the fall general season.

How to find black bear

Black bears are common and occur at high densities in some locales. However, bears in District 17 are seen infrequently because of thick vegetation dominating the landscape. Consequently, scouting is extremely important when hunting for black bears.

Black bears occupy a variety of habitats, and it can be difficult to narrow down where to find them. Because bears have an incredible sense of smell, hunters should focus on open terrain. When out in the open, a bear can be seen from a distance without alerting it. In dense cover, a bear is likely to smell a hunter before being seen and move to avoid an encounter. Bears are often located in timber harvests with a lot of berry-producing shrubs. Examples include:

- Elderberries
- Salmonberries
- Huckleberries
- Blackberries
- Salal berries
- Cascara

During the fall, hunters should seek timber harvests with these types of shrubs and search for bear sign. Fresh signs indicate a bear is visiting that stand. Patient hunters who watch these areas for extended periods of time can increase their chances of harvesting a bear.

Notable changes

Since 2023, bear season starts Aug. 1 across the state and hunters can purchase up to two bear tags during the license year.



Bear photo from GMU 672 survey site. Photo by WDFW.

Cougar

General information, management goals, and population status

Cougars occur throughout District 17, but densities vary among GMUs. WDFW manages cougar populations in District 17 primarily to maintain a stable population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW shifted away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested and implemented a standard season coupled with harvest guidelines.

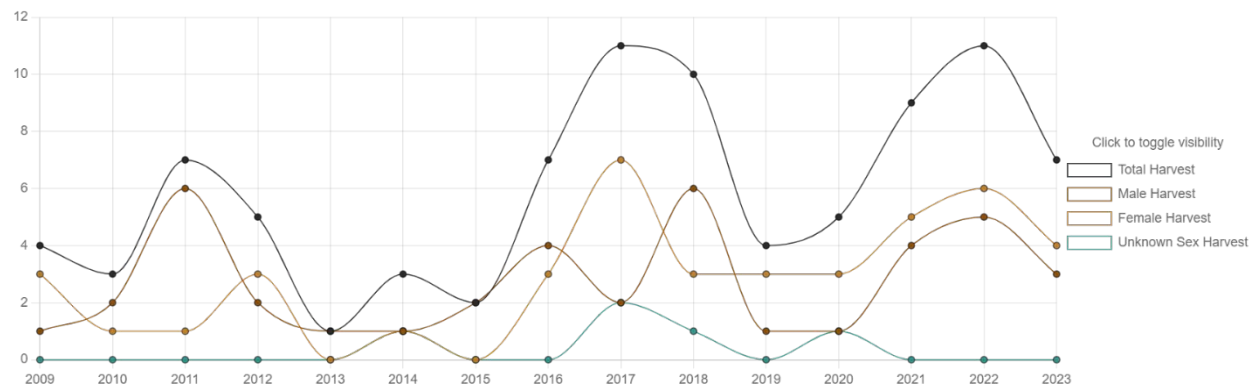
WDFW established harvest guidelines with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population. Cougar season rules changed for the 2024 hunting season and are summarized in the Notable Hunting Changes section below. Anyone planning to hunt cougar should confirm the season is open by calling 1-866-364-4868.

What to expect during the 2024 season

In 2024, the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted several changes to cougar management guidelines that may affect hunting in several areas. These changes are described in the Notable Hunting Changes section below. It is most important for hunters to know that the season may close at any time in any hunt area, depending on the amount of cougar removals that occur. So, hunters should check the hotline regularly before and during the hunting season to make sure the season is still open.

Cougar harvest in District 17 varies greatly. Deer and elk hunters harvest most cougars opportunistically. Since 2001, the average number of cougars harvested in District 17 is six. Young animals are overrepresented in the harvest. Most cougar harvest in District 17 (Figure 7) has occurred in GMUs 642, 648, and 651.

Figure 7. Trends in the number of male and female cougars harvested during the general cougar season in District 17, 2009–2023.



Notable hunting changes

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted several rule changes for the 2024 cougar hunting season. This season setting structure or rule may change for future seasons as discussions about cougar hunting in Washington continue. To summarize the changes for the 2024 cougar season:

- Season dates: Sept. 1 – March 31 or when the cap is reached, whichever comes first.
- All population management units (PMUs) or hunt areas currently with a harvest guideline will now have a harvest cap.

- The cap is based on an estimated cougar density of 2.3 cougars per 100 square kilometers and a 13% intrinsic growth rate.
- All known human-caused mortalities of cougars 18 months old and older will count toward a 13% or 20% cap.
- The count of cougars removed starts April 1 and includes removals associated with depredation, conflict, public safety, hunter harvest, and the like.
- If total removals reach the 13% cap, the hunt area will close to hunting.
- If total removals reach the 13% cap before the hunting season, the cap increases to 20% and the hunting season will open, but could close at any time if removals reach the 20% cap.
- None of the rule changes prohibit the removal of cougars associated with depredation or public safety concerns.
- Finally, the Department may close hunting in any hunt area before the cap is reached, upon consideration of factors such as disease, suspected additional mortality, or any other issue affecting the cougar population.
- Call the cougar hunting season hotline, 1-866-364-4868, before you hunt.

Table 5. Harvest cap for hunt areas in District 17.

Hunt Area	13% Harvest Cap	20% Harvest Cap
618, 636, 638	5	7
642, 648, 651	7	11
658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, 699	11	16

Ducks



Hunting dog in action. Photo by WDFW.

Common species

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 17. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, mallard, green-winged teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, and common goldeneye, occur in low numbers. Nesting wood ducks are often in the Chehalis River Valley early in the season and provide a unique hunting opportunity. Hunters occasionally find sea ducks, including scoters and long-tailed ducks, in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor.

Mallards are Washington's most abundant duck species. Consequently, they constitute the majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically $\geq 50\%$). In contrast, American wigeon are the most abundant duck species in District 17. During previous aerial surveys of Willapa Bay, American wigeon typically comprised 50% to 60% of ducks observed. Hunters should expect to primarily harvest American wigeon, northern pintail, and mallard. Green-winged teal are abundant early in the season but decrease as the season progresses.

Migration chronology

Hunters find very few ducks during late spring and early summer. Beginning in mid to late September, birds within the Pacific Flyway migrate south from Alaska. (Hunters have harvested banded ducks marked from the Central Flyway along coastal Washington, indicating that some movement between flyways exists.) Duck numbers continue to increase until peaking in late October and early November. Migrating ducks do not appear to remain in District 17 for long, instead using the district for stopover (resting) sites on their journeys south.

Consequently, the number of ducks located inside District 17 likely varies daily. Total duck numbers decline precipitously once the flow of migrants from Alaska has stopped. By the December holiday season, duck numbers are typically 5% of what they were at the end of October. Unlike Eastern Washington, weather doesn't alter migration chronology in coastal Washington. Regardless of the weather, duck numbers decline at about the same point each year.

Concentration areas

In general, waterfowl concentrations occur in Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and the Chehalis and Willapa River valleys. The exact locations where duck concentrations occur depend on many factors (hunting pressure, weather, food, etc.) that can change daily.

Waterfowl concentrations shift around the bay each winter. Small, forested wetlands also provide areas where migratory ducks may congregate. In the river valleys after large soaking precipitation events, hunters can find dabbling ducks in areas where sheet water has accumulated. The number of ducks using these small bodies of water can be surprisingly high. Hunters should scout a few days before hunting to locate where ducks are congregating and/or where sheet water is likely to occur.

Population status

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species. Breeding duck populations in Western Washington weren't monitored until 2010, when WDFW developed and began flying established transects in five areas. WDFW flies surveys in April and early May. One of the selected areas occurs in District 17 and is associated with the Chehalis River Valley. There was a two-year gap in flights due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but flights resumed in 2022.

In 2024, the breeding population in the Chehalis River Valley was estimated at 8,519 ducks. This is up from the 7,383 estimated ducks in 2023 and similar to the 8,442 in 2022.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Breeding duck numbers in Alaska are the biggest factor affecting duck hunters in Washington. Historic harvest can provide insight into probable hunting opportunity. Overall, harvest trends since 2016 have risen slightly and are more similar to the average total number of ducks harvested since 2010. The 2023 duck harvest in Pacific County was the lowest since 2004 (Figure 8), whereas harvest in Grays Harbor County was the highest since 2014 (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Trends in Pacific County duck harvest, 1997–2023.

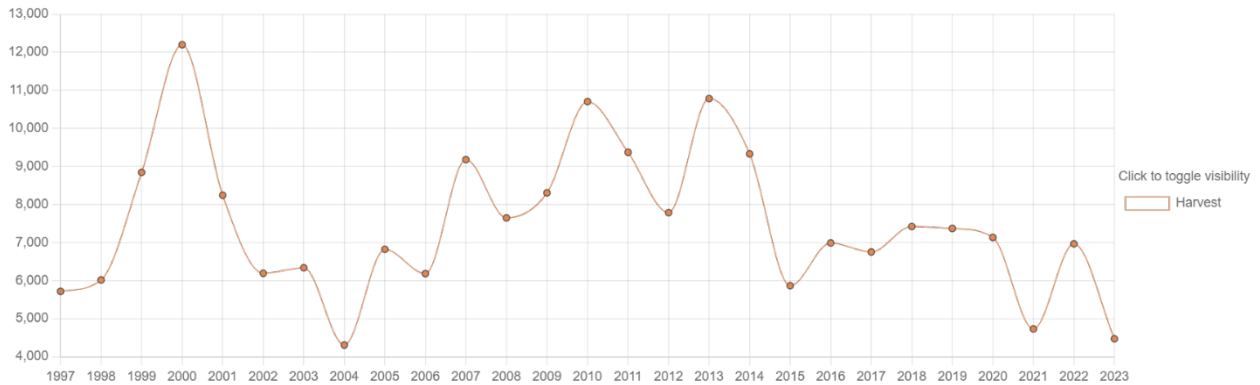
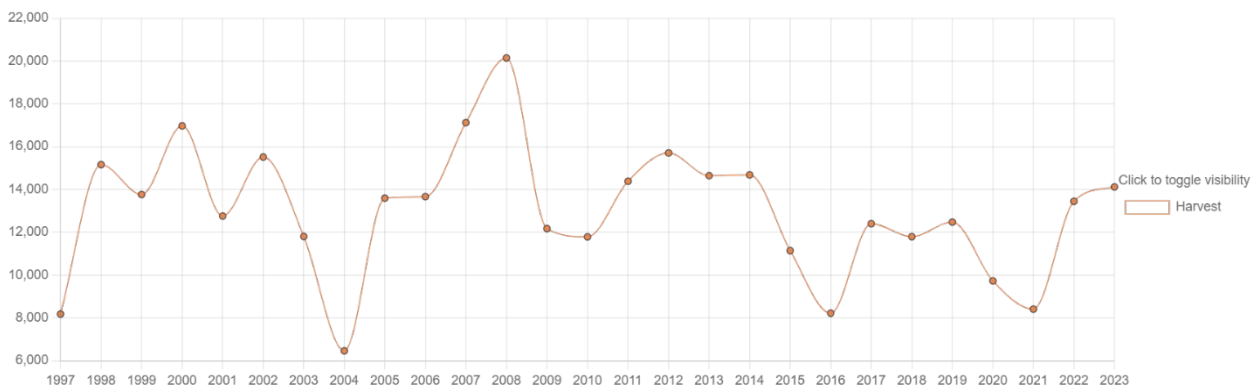


Figure 9. Trends in Grays Harbor County duck harvest, 1997–2023.



Hunting techniques

Duck hunting techniques should vary depending on where hunters choose to hunt. Traditional setups work best when hunting inland waters around ponds, rivers, or feeding areas. Birds are most active in early morning and late afternoon, as they move between resting sites and feeding areas.

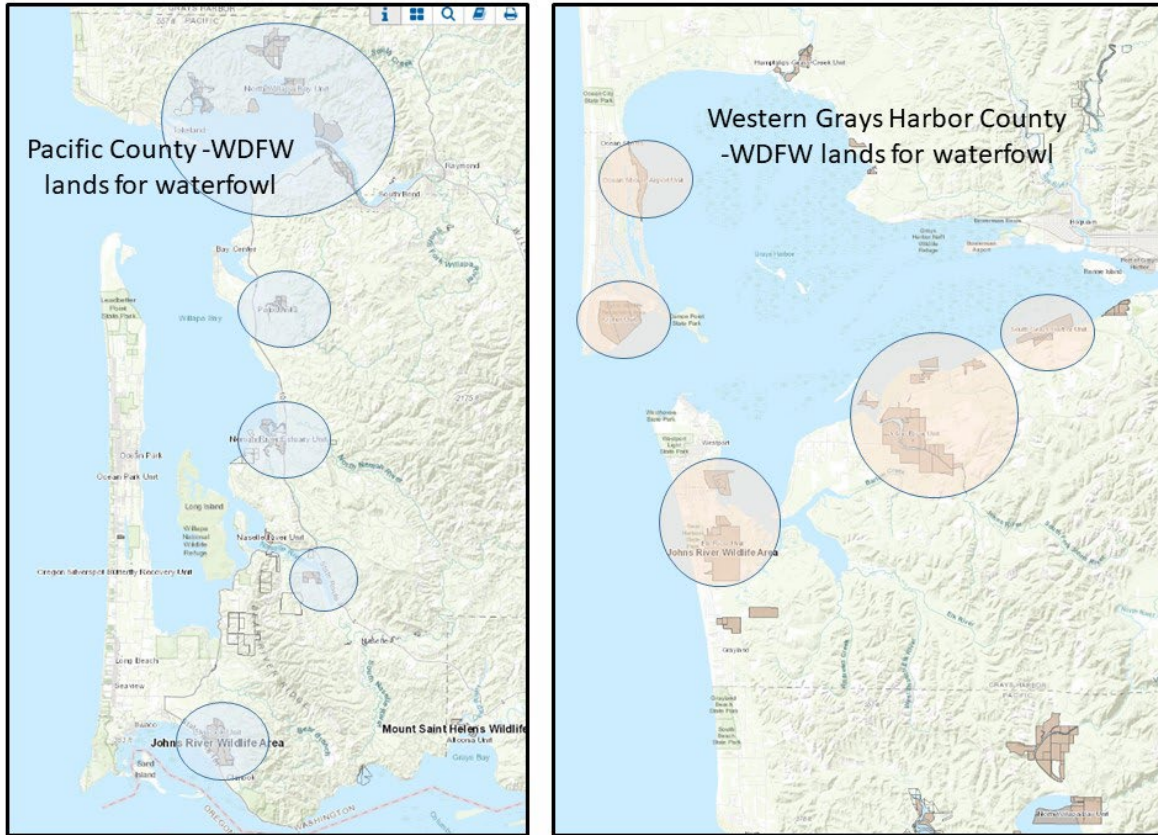
Tides influence hunting the coastline of Willapa Bay or Grays Harbor. Regardless of the time of day, ducks along the coastline tend to move very little at either low or high tide. Hunters can expect very little movement during tidal extremes. However, bird activity and opportunities increase when the tide is going out or coming in. A perfectly timed tide can provide success to coastline hunters at 3 p.m., unlike traditional waterfowl hunting areas that are typically limited to early morning and late afternoon. For more information, reference the [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#) webpage.

Public land opportunities

Many WDFW wildlife areas in District 17 offer good waterfowl hunting. The following map (Figure 10) is intended to provide hunters with the general location of these wildlife areas, but hunters should visit the [WDFW waterfowl hunting page](#) or the Go Hunt application for more information.

The website includes waterfowl information related to location, current management activities, and common species. Other public land opportunities occur on the [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#).

Figure 10. WDFW lands and waterfowl hunting areas within western portion of District 17.



Notable hunting changes

WDFW has approved 38 harlequin duck permits for the 2024-2025 duck season. These permits will be distributed through a drawing that all eligible applicants may enter.

Thirty-eight permits were made available to eligible applicants through an August drawing; the application period was July 1 to Aug. 14. To apply for a Harlequin duck permit, each applicant must have a valid Washington small game hunting license, migratory bird permit, AND migratory bird authorization. For more information, visit the WDFW [Harlequin duck hunting permit page](#). **Harlequin permit hunters should look to other portions of Region 6 to fill their permit. District 17 does not have high numbers.**

Geese

Common species

Four subspecies of Canada goose can be found in District 17: western, dusky, lesser, and Vancouver. Three subspecies of cackling goose include cackling, Taverner's, and Aleutian. Hunters can find large numbers of black brant in Willapa Bay beginning in late January and early February. Occasional flocks of snow geese and white-fronted geese occur.

Migration chronology and concentration areas

The timing of migration for geese in District 17 is nearly identical to that described for ducks. Few geese reside locally in the district. Starting in September, waves of migrant geese begin showing up from Alaska. One distinct difference between ducks and geese is that goose numbers do not decline in late November as sharply as duck numbers. Many geese choose to stay the winter in the agricultural areas of District 17, where they find food. Brant are distinct from other goose species and are mostly found in Willapa Bay starting in the latter half of December or early January.

Most geese aggregate in agricultural lands around the Willapa and Chehalis river valleys. Some properties routinely have geese. Generally, the specific fields where geese concentrate changes on a weekly basis. The Willapa and Chehalis river valleys are not expansive, so relocating geese is not difficult. Hunters are likely to find brant, in contrast to other geese, almost exclusively in close vicinity to where eel grass is found.

Population status

Very few geese breed in District 17. Consequently, WDFW does not survey for breeding geese within the district. Long-term goose nest surveys have occurred elsewhere in Washington. Portions of the lower Columbia River have small but relatively stable breeding populations.

Wintering populations are hard to survey effectively, because geese forage widely in agricultural areas that make them difficult to locate. The number of geese observed in Washington during the midwinter waterfowl surveys has been relatively stable since the early 2000s.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Historically, most goose harvest has occurred in Grays Harbor County during the regular season. A decline in goose harvest for Grays Harbor County in 2015 may partially be attributed to its inclusion into Goose Management Area (GMA) 2. Pacific County goose hunters have long been required to obtain southwest goose authorizations, and the number of Pacific County hunters has not changed significantly. The Department expects the number of Grays Harbor County goose hunters will gradually increase as hunters obtain their southwest goose authorization.

Given the current trends in populations farther north, goose hunting opportunities in District 17 are expected to remain consistent. Hunters can expect to harvest an average of one or two geese per day.

Hunting techniques

Goose hunting is almost standardized. Goose hunters find agricultural areas where geese feed and set up well before daylight in portions of the field where geese are known to concentrate. In District 17, feeding geese tend to congregate in pastures containing cattle operations. Most goose hunting opportunities occur on private property. Hunters must obtain permission before hunting private lands.

During the early September goose hunting season, noticeable concentrations of western Canada geese have been observed in and around Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay. These areas tend to congregate molting geese earlier in the season, and those recently molted birds seem to continue to use those areas throughout the early season. Goose surveys previously conducted around Baker Bay, near the community of Chinook, documented many geese. Many areas where geese are found require boat access, but favorable goose hunting can occur near shore using traditional methods.

Inclement weather may force local and migratory geese farther upland and into river valleys. This tends to occur more frequently during the regular goose season that starts in October. High easterly winds may force birds to land in fields where they become less exposed to the wind but are more vulnerable to hunters.

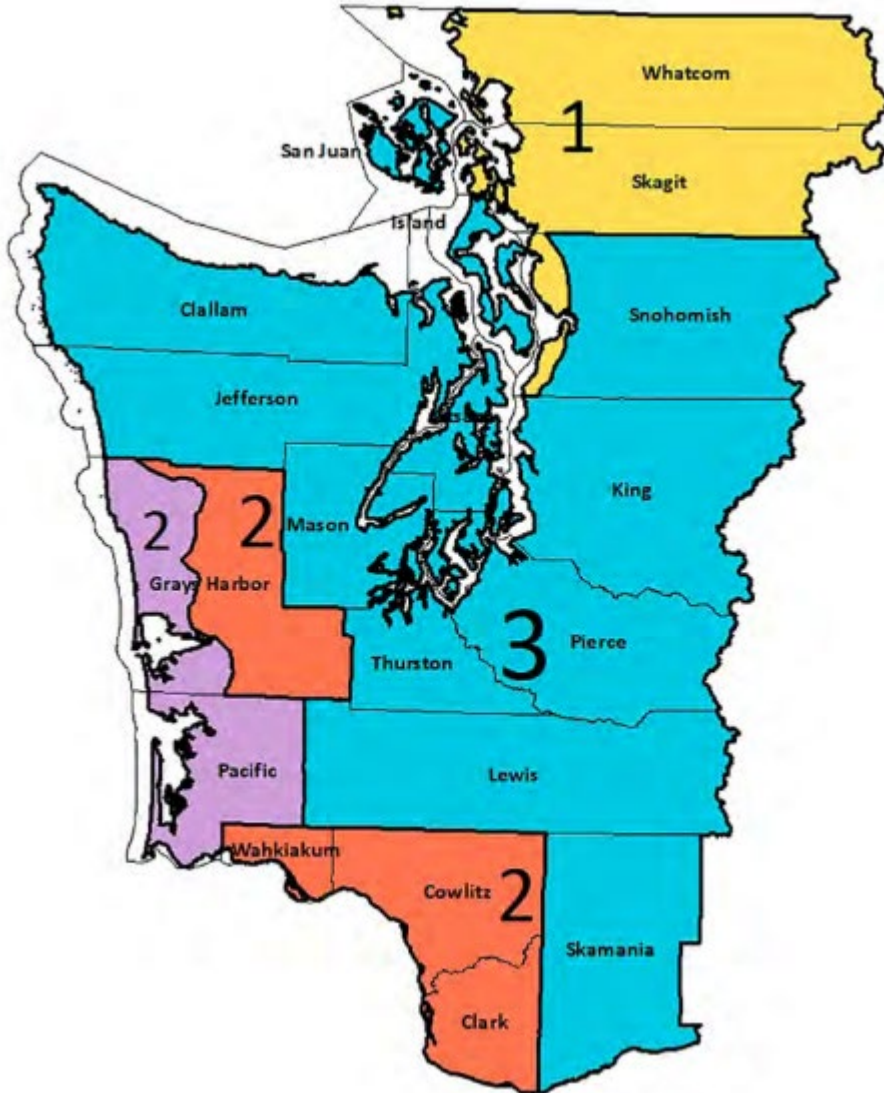
Special regulations

Both Pacific and Grays Harbor counties are contained within **GMA 2** (Figure 11). Special regulations apply in this GMA to prevent harvest of dusky Canada geese. These special regulations include:

- Hunters must possess a valid migratory bird hunting authorization for **GMA 2** to hunt geese, except during the September goose season.
- February and March seasons are closed on WDFW wildlife areas and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) wildlife refuges.
- Hours are 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours to 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours. If a hunter takes a dusky Canada Goose, the authorization will be invalidated and the hunter will not be able to hunt in GMA 2 for the rest of the season, including the special late goose season.
- A mandatory Harvest Report Card is issued for hunters to record the number and species composition of their daily bag. Hunters are required to report their harvest onto this card as soon as practical after harvesting a goose.

WDFW strongly recommends that hunters review the most recent [Game Bird and Small Game Regulations](#) pamphlet to ensure they are following current regulations. Pamphlets are available at WDFW's website and at any retailer that sells hunting licenses.

Figure 71. Western Washington goose management areas.



Public land opportunities

Many wildlife areas in District 17 provide a chance to hunt geese. Check the earlier map or review WDFW’s [“Let’s go waterfowl hunting”](#) publication for more details. Additionally, some landowners have enrolled in WDFW’s Private Lands Access Program. Those lands provide additional hunting opportunities for the public. Reference the private lands section for more details or visit the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#).

Notable hunting changes

Canada and cackling goose daily bag limits for GMA 2 were reduced to three geese per day starting in the 2022-23 season.

Forest grouse

Species and general habitat characteristics

District 17 has two species of grouse: ruffed and blue (sooty). Ruffed grouse are the most abundant and occur at lower elevations and valley bottoms. Throughout the west, ruffed grouse typically prefer habitats that support abundant deciduous shrubs or small trees, particularly along stream corridors and other areas along rivers. These thick, somewhat impenetrable habitats provide protective cover for ruffed grouse. West of the Cascades, stands of red alder can provide suitable habitat for ruffed grouse.

Blue grouse can be found in higher-elevation habitats, but overlap does occur. Blue grouse are usually found in the uplands at elevations above 1,000 feet and may be found above 6,000 feet. Across Oregon and Washington, blue grouse prefer coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir and true fir. At higher elevations, birds are primarily found in western and mountain hemlock, lodgepole pine, and white bark pine. The Ruffed Grouse Society has developed an interactive map for blue and ruffed grouse habitat on national forest land. *The map only includes a small portion of land in District 17 that belongs to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). State and private lands are not portrayed. The map is only a guide to habitat and may not accurately predict where grouse can be found.*

Population status

WDFW no longer conducts surveys to monitor ruffed grouse populations in District 17. The Department uses harvest data trends to supplement formal population estimates. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch per unit effort (or “grouse per hunter day”) is the best indicator of population trend. In District 17, grouse harvest per hunter day last year was 0.32 birds per hunter day in Grays Harbor County and 0.22 birds per hunter day in Pacific County.

To obtain better information on grouse population status and demographics, WDFW conducted a pilot effort in 2016 to collect grouse wings and tails from harvested birds in portions of Grays Harbor County. Results from the 2018 season are listed below (Figure 9). This collection effort is expected to continue through 2024 with collection barrels at strategic locations in the district.

Table 6: The number, sex, age, and species of forest grouse harvested in Grays Harbor County during the 2018 hunting season, Sep. 1 – Dec. 1.

Species	Female	Male	Unknown Sex	Juvenile	Yearling	Adult	Breeding Age*	Total collected
Ruffed	1	3	8	8	0	0	4	24
Blue	25	19	0	31	2	9	2	88
Totals	26	22	8	39	2	9	6	112

*Breeding age denotes birds with molt patterns that showed they were of breeding age but could not be distinguished as yearling vs adult.

Collecting grouse wings and tails helps the Department to monitor species, sex, and age ratios in the harvested population to inform production and composition. WDFW encourages hunters to contribute to these collections. Hunters can find wing collection barrel locations on the [WDFW website](#). The table below identifies the percentage of birds harvested throughout Washington by species. Hunters in District 17 will either be in the Olympic or Southwest zone.

Table 7: Percentage breakdown of grouse species harvested across the different geographic zones of Washington derived from hunter harvest submissions in 2018 to grouse wing collection barrels.

Zone	Blue	Ruffed	Spruce
North Central	52%	29%	20%
North Puget Sound	38%	62%	0%
Northeast	16%	78%	6%
Olympic	44%	56%	0%
South Central	76%	24%	0%
Southwest	22%	78%	0%
Unknown	53%	47%	0%
Total	36%	59%	5%

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Grouse harvest in District 17 declined from 2019 to 2022; however, harvest more than doubled from 2022 (1,792 birds) to 2023 (3,601 birds). Hunters harvest most grouse in Grays Harbor County. Grouse wing samples reveal that hunters harvest a higher percentage of blue grouse in Grays Harbor County compared to Pacific County. This higher take of blue grouse may be related to the amount of Grays Harbor County's higher accessible terrain, which tends to be more characteristic of blue grouse habitat and has a significant amount of USFS lands.

Hunting techniques and where to hunt

A generally effective way to hunt grouse is by walking roads and shooting birds as they flush or after they roost in a nearby tree. Grouse are present in higher densities along roads with little traffic. Consequently, hunters should target roads behind locked gates or those that have been decommissioned. To learn more about hunting grouse, please reference [WDFW's upland bird hunting publication](#).

Notable hunting changes

No notable changes. The season runs from Sept. 15, 2024, to Jan. 15, 2025.

Pheasants

The Western Washington Pheasant Release Program provides all pheasant hunting opportunities in District 17; the district doesn't have self-sustaining pheasant populations. The release program primarily provides an upland bird hunting opportunity and encourages participation from youth and senior hunters. Each year, 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released at 25 sites, two of which (Chehalis River and Chinook) are in District 17. The Chinook Release Site is in Pacific County, and the Chehalis River Release Site is in Grays Harbor County. Reference the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) publication to learn more.

In a typical year, the program releases around 1,000 pheasants from the Chinook site and at Brady. A special youth hunt will occur in September as well as a senior hunt (65 and older). Pheasant releases end Dec. 15. Hunters should be aware that special regulations apply on Western Washington pheasant release sites. Notably:

- Hunters must buy a Western Washington pheasant license.
- Non-toxic shot is required.
- Hunting hours are between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The Department has additional information about pheasant release sites at: wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/locations/pheasant-release.

Quail

Mountain quail rarely occur in District 17. This district doesn't contain any sizable population, and sightings are rare. The few sightings that occur are usually located in 5- to 10-year-old timber harvests with abundant shrub cover and pine saplings. Some sightings occur in brushy cover near agricultural land. In 2023, hunters reported very few quail harvests in Grays Harbor County and none in Pacific County.

Turkeys

District 17 doesn't feature any turkey populations. Generally, hunters report fewer than 30 turkey harvests for all southwest Washington during any given year. The only area wildlife managers knew to have any number of birds in District 17 was in the Willapa River Valley on Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) managed land in the southern part of GMU 672. Any other flocks in District 17 are small (<15 birds), occur on private agricultural lands, and are thought to be pen-raised birds that nearby landowners release.

Most turkeys previously found in District 17 were eastern wild turkeys. About 400 eastern wild turkeys were introduced into southwest Washington from 1987-2000. Introduction was discontinued because turkey populations did not grow or expand, and suitability models indicated southwest Washington habitats were unlikely to support viable turkey populations.

Band-tailed pigeons



Band-tailed pigeon. Photo By WDFW.

General description

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest pigeon species in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

Population status and trend

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. Surveys occur at 16-plus mineral sites where band-tails congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.

Harvest trends and 2024 prospects

Band-tailed pigeon harvest in District 17 once measured thousands of birds. Bag limits were 10 birds per day until 1950, when statewide harvest was estimated at 90,000 birds. However, overharvest and habitat changes caused significant decline in overall numbers. Harvest in District 17 previously accounted for 30% of the statewide harvest. Annual harvest in Grays Harbor County averaged 80 birds for the decade following 2002, which was the highest average annual harvest among the 19 counties where band-tails are harvested. The maximum total harvest for District 17 since hunting resumed in 2002 was 265 birds. The total statewide harvest has never exceeded 2,100 birds.

Where and how to hunt band-tailed pigeons

Band-tailed pigeons frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in 5- to 10-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests that band-tails use is difficult. Hunters should locate feeding and roosting sites. Upon finding a good site, sit patiently and wait for harvest opportunities.

Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season.

WDFW wildlife managers knew of only one mineral site within District 17 prior to 2021, when WDFW invested effort to discover additional sites as part of new research. We've discovered at least four mineral sites in District 17 since the start of this research. Please contact WDFW if you know of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Pacific or Grays Harbor counties.

Special regulations

Since band-tail seasons re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization and submit their harvest to the Department using harvest cards after the season has closed. These regulations will apply in 2024 as well. Hunters should review the 2024 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

Research

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of Districts 16 and 17. WDFW has fitted 36 birds with transmitters that are programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.

This project will help the Department to expand knowledge of band-tailed pigeons in areas where mineral sites have not been identified, allowing WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

- More accurately index the statewide population via mineral site surveys.
- More expertly manage our band-tailed pigeon harvest seasons to potentially allow an expanded hunting opportunity.
- Provide detailed information on resource selection to inform how to manage habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research has helped the Department identify new mineral sites in Grays Harbor County. Hunters and members of the public fund this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. The project is expected to continue through 2025 across various districts within Region 6.

Other small game

Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 17, but aren't covered in detail, include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot.

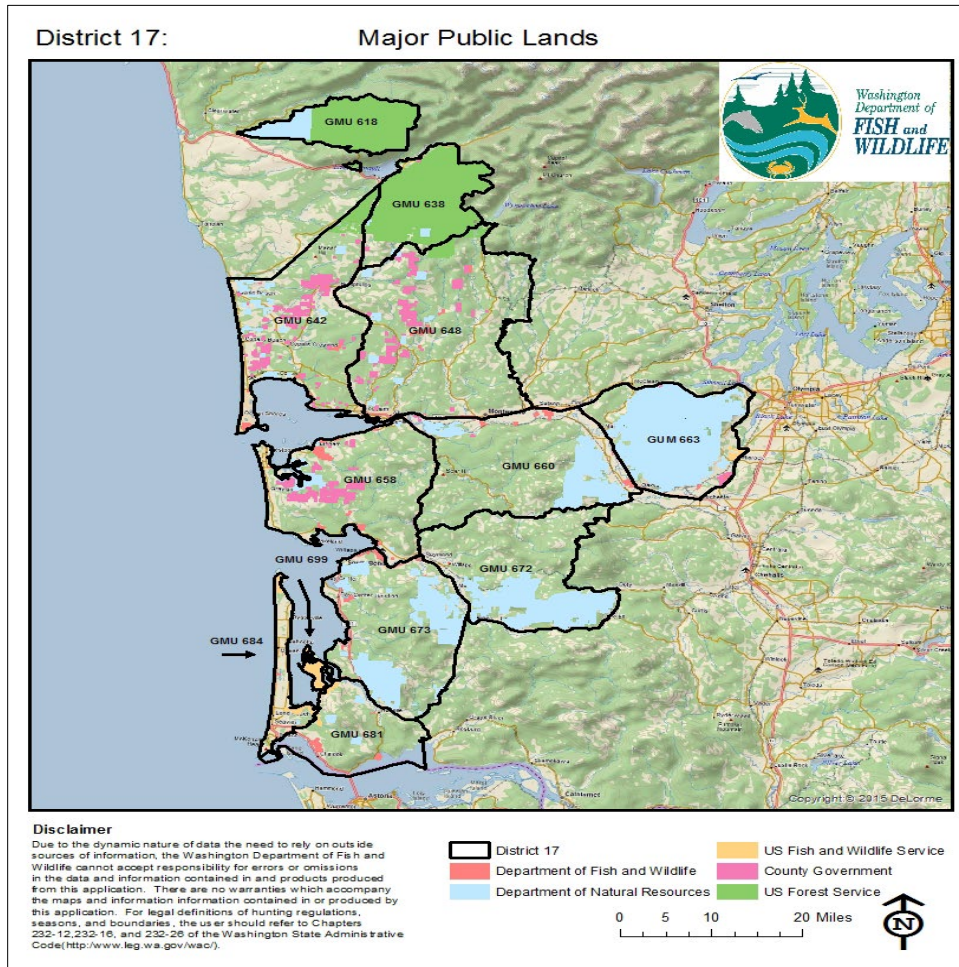
Major public lands

District 17 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities, though they do exist on lands administered by USFWS, DNR, USFS, WDFW, and Grays Harbor County.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include 618, 638, and 663. Large tracts of DNR-managed lands also occur in GMUs 660, 672, and 673. Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occurs in portions of GMUs 681 and 684. GMU 699 is an island, and the entire unit is part of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

Most other public land opportunities in District 17 occur primarily on WDFW wildlife areas or on lands managed by Pacific and Grays Harbor counties. For more information on WDFW wildlife areas, visit [the Department website](#). For resources available to locate public lands, please reference the Online Tools and Maps section below. Figure 18. Location of public lands open to public access within each District 17 GMU.

Figure 19. Location of public lands open to public access within each District 17 GMU.



Private industrial forestlands

General information

Most hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, occur on private industrial forestlands. Timber companies that own large tracts of land and are the most well-known include Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Manulife, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global. However, hunters should be aware that there are many other smaller timber companies with operations in District 17.

WDFW recognizes that some great hunting opportunities occur on private industrial forestlands and works cooperatively with private timber companies to maintain reasonable public access during established hunting seasons. Private industrial forestlands have always been open for public access, but hunters should always remember that access to private property is a privilege.

Increasingly, timber companies have restricted public access and shifted toward a permit system to limit the number of hunters on their lands. A primary reason for access restrictions is hunter disrespect of the landowner rules. WDFW reminds hunters to remember the following when on private industrial forestlands:

- Hunting on private lands is a privilege; treat them with respect.
- Obey posted signs.
- Leave gates as you found them.
- Pack out trash.
- Be courteous.

Important notes about access for the 2024 season

A variety of fee access programs are in place and vary by area and company. However, all programs at the time of this writing fall into three general categories: permit-unlimited, permit-limited, and leases. These fees also apply to other outdoor recreational activities, including hiking, camping, mountain biking, and fishing. General descriptions of these three programs are as follows:

Permit-unlimited

Hunters must purchase an access permit, but an unlimited number of permits are available. Only valid permit holders are allowed to recreate in areas associated with the permit.

Permit-limited

A set number of permits are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Only people who have secured one of the limited permits are allowed to recreate in areas associated with that permit. Permits are anticipated to cost several hundred dollars. Weyerhaeuser implemented this type of system in their Pe Ell Unit (GMUs 672 and 506) during the 2013 season.

Leases

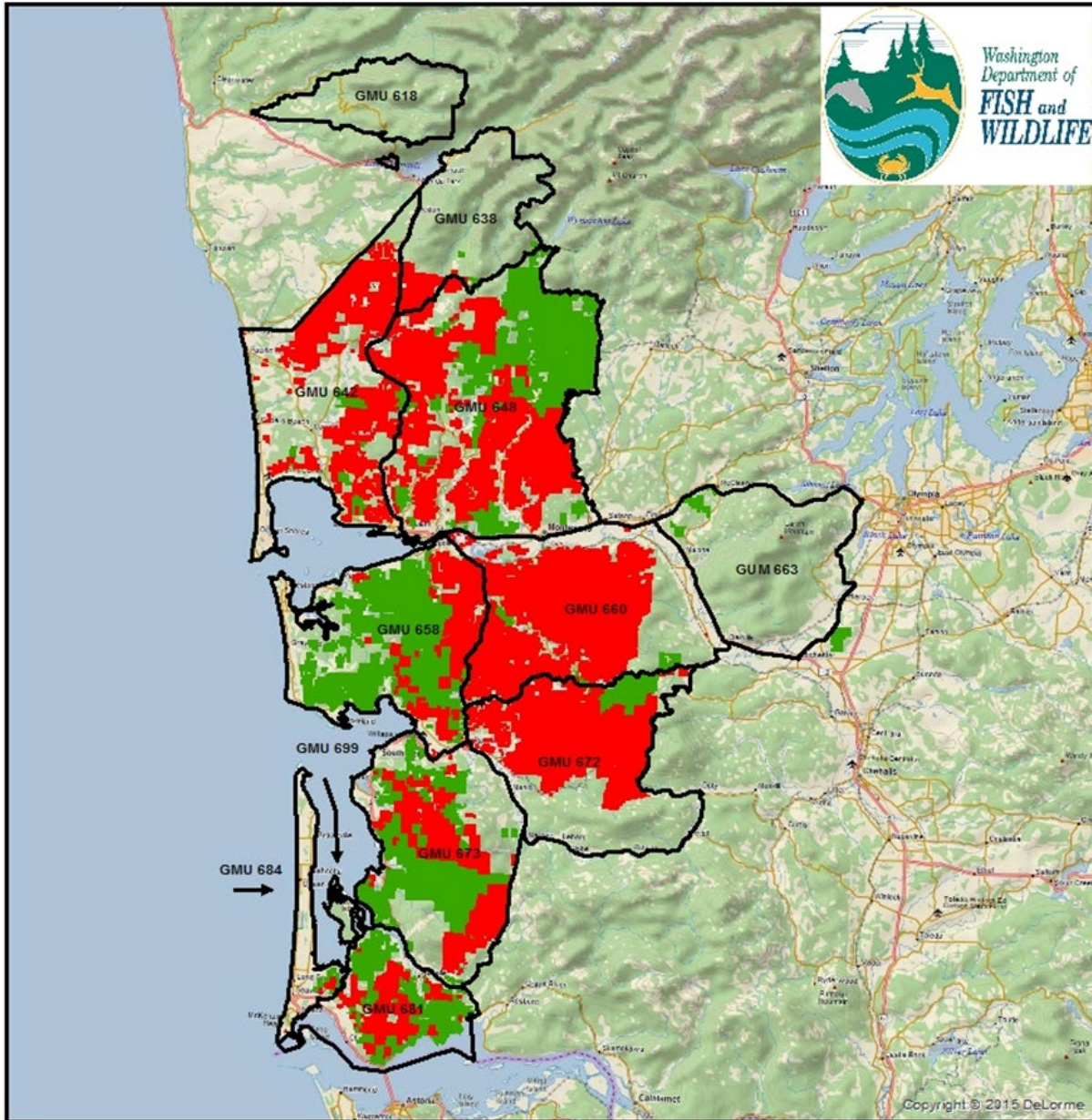
Designated tracts of land are leased to an individual or group, and only the lessee and their family are allowed to access that land. The cost of a lease can be several thousand dollars.

Many timber companies are charging access fees in areas where they have historically offered free access. Consequently, it is very important that hunters take the time to contact landowners in areas where they plan to hunt, so they know whether the company's access policy for that area has changed.

The following map represents areas in District 17 where WDFW knows timber companies will require a fee to recreate on their property. However, the broad implementation of access programs by several timber companies since the 2013 season has been a very dynamic process. The map represents what has been presented to WDFW as of Aug. 4, 2017. Some areas presented as free access (green) could become fee access (red) when hunting seasons begin Sept. 1. Thus, hunters should use this map as a general reference and understand it is ultimately their responsibility to contact the appropriate timber company to determine how hunter access will be managed in the areas they plan to hunt.

Figure 110. Private timber company ownership in District 17, including free access (dark green) and permit and fee required (red) lands. The map represents data available Aug. 4, 2017, and may change at any time.

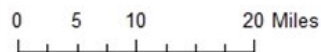
District 17: Private Forest Lands Access



Disclaimer

Due to the dynamic nature of data the need to rely on outside sources of information, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions in the data and information contained in and products produced from this application. There are no warranties which accompany the maps and information information contained in or produced by this application. For legal definitions of hunting regulations, seasons, and boundaries, the user should refer to Chapters 232-12, 232-16, and 232-26 of the Washington State Administrative Code (<http://www.leg.wa.gov/wac/>).

-  District 17
-  Private Forest Lands - Fee Access
-  Private Forest Lands - Free Access



Basic access rules

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forestlands vary by company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide rules on signs at access points (gates), on their website (if they use one for public communication), or to hunters who call to inquire about access (review contact information below). However, WDFW encourages hunters to follow some basic rules if they find themselves in an area they are unfamiliar with and are in doubt about specific landowner criteria. The following are intended to be general guidelines of the basic access rules that are commonplace on many private industrial forestlands. Timber companies may have restrictive rules in place, and it is ultimately the responsibility of hunters to make sure they are familiar with those rules.

- Respect the landowner and other users.
- Obey all posted signs.
- A logging road without a sign does not mean it is open for public access.
- Drive slowly with headlights turned on when on roads open to public access.
- Avoid areas of active timber harvests.
- No camping, littering, off-road-vehicles (ORVs), off-road driving, target shooting, or forest product removals.
- An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.
- Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors that propel or assist the rider.
- Private forestlands are usually closed to public access during hours of darkness.

Failure to obey landowner rules can result in prosecution for trespassing and or even a *persona non grata* from the landowner.

General overview of access allowed by major timber companies and nonprofits

Manulife

Manulife industrial forestlands have different levels of access based on management areas. All Manulife industrial forestlands in GMUs 658, 673, and 681 are only open to non-motorized access. During modern firearm seasons, some key main lines are opened to disperse hunters and allow access to interior areas.

Rayonier

Rayonier currently has three levels of access: seasonal permit, recreational lease, and general permit access. For seasonal permit and recreational lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to access rules established by Rayonier. Areas under general permit access require the purchase of a permit from the company. District 17 GMUs with Rayonier lands include 638, 642, 648, 658, 673, and 681. Maps and other information are available on their website.

Forest Investment Associates (FIA)

FIA owns large blocks (more than 30,000 acres) of former Rayonier land primarily in Pacific County (GMUs 673 and 658) with some parcels in Grays Harbor County. FIA respects leases and permits associated with those Rayonier lands. Other FIA lands are open for hunting. American Forest Management administers the permit system for much of the FIA holdings.

Green Diamond

Green Diamond manages hunter access using the dot system and posts access rules at their gates. All of their lands in District 17 are currently open to non-motorized public access. As hunting seasons approach, they usually begin opening additional roads to public access if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Green Diamond ownership are 642, 648, 658, and 660.

Campbell Global

Campbell Global uses the dot system to manage hunter access and posts access rules at their gates. As hunting season approaches, Campbell Global normally opens some roads to motorized access if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Campbell Global-managed timberlands are 648, 658, 672, 673, and 681.

Weyerhaeuser

Weyerhaeuser currently has three levels of access in District 17: general access permit areas, enhanced permit areas, and lease areas. For permit and lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to rules established by Weyerhaeuser. District 17 GMUs with Weyerhaeuser ownership are 648, 658, 660, and 672.

The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy owns more than 6,000 acres in Pacific County in GMU 681. There is open walk-in access during most of season. Vehicles are not allowed.

Special notice for archery and muzzleloader hunters

Private timber companies have traditionally opened their lands to modern firearm hunters during established seasons. Archery and muzzleloader hunters may not have full access, particularly in vehicles. Access levels change and can vary by season, year, or landowner. Most often, access is influenced by industrial fire classification issued by DNR. Hunters are urged to respect landowners and adhere to any access restrictions they have implemented.

General description of the “dot” system

Several timber companies in District 17 use the dot system, including Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global. This is a system of colored dots posted at the start of a road to indicate

what level of access is allowed beyond that point. It is intended to give the public a clear understanding of what roads are open to public motorized access.

Normally under the dot system, access is granted for daylight hours only. Landowners usually understand that some hunters go in an hour or so early to get to their hunting areas and sometimes may come out a little late. Hunters should always stop and read signs. While several landowners use the dot system, they all have minor differences. In some cases, landowners close gates in the evenings to prevent unauthorized access.

- Red Dot – No motorized access
- Yellow Dot – Motorized access on weekends only
- Green Dot – Motorized access for licensed vehicles on maintained roads
- No Dot – No motorized access

Contact information for major timber companies

Some landowners have hotlines and/or websites where hunters can find information about public access. However, many do not have staff members dedicated to answering hunter questions. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to public access on private industrial forestlands.

Table 7. Contact information for District 17 timber companies.

Timber Company	GMUs	Phone Number
Manulife Investment Management (no website)	658, 673, 681	360-795-3653
Manulife	Various other GMUs	800-782-1493
Rayonier	Various	360-533-7000
Green Diamond	Various	360-426-3381
Weyerhaeuser	Various	800-636-6531
Forest Investment Associates	658, 673	404-261-9575
Grays Harbor County	642, 648, 658	No phone number
Olympic Resource Management	642, 648, 658, 673	No phone number
Lewis and Clark Timberlands	684	No phone number

General overview of hunter access in each GMU

One of the most common questions the Department gets from hunters is, “what is hunter access like in the GMU I want to hunt?” Generally, this question refers to the amount of motorized access and not access in general. It is important to differentiate the two, because hunters enjoy a high level of access in all District 17 GMUs. However, the type of access varies between motorized and non-motorized.

The Department developed the following rating system for District 17 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they are thinking of hunting. Access ratings are specific to the level of motorized access allowed and does not refer to the level of access in general. Several GMUs have fee access areas that grant the permit or lease holders a higher level of access. The following ratings are based on a hunter not having a lease or permit.

More information about each rating is available below:

- **Excellent** – Most, if not all, of the main logging roads are open, as well as most of the spur roads.
- **Good** – There is a mix of open and closed roads, with some main logging roads open, but many of the spur roads are closed to motorized access.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is closed to motorized access but may be open to non-motorized access.

Information provided is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Information is updated when available. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have other questions related to hunter access.

GMU 618 (Matheney) – Access Rating: Excellent

GMU 618 is dominated by federal lands included in the Olympic National Forest. The minority of land not managed by USFS is under state management via DNR.

GMU 638 (Quinault Ridge) – Access Rating: Good

The majority of GMU 638 is associated with the Olympic National Forest and managed by USFS. There are numerous small landowners in areas outside of the national forest. Many of the more productive areas are private lands not considered industrial forestlands. The Quinault Valley is not recommended for hunters who are not familiar with landownership boundaries. Rayonier also has some signed recreational lease areas.

GMU 642 (Copalis) – Access Rating: Poor

The primary landowner in this GMU is Rayonier, with recreational lease, seasonal permit, and general access areas.

GMU 648 (Wynoochee) – Access Rating: Poor

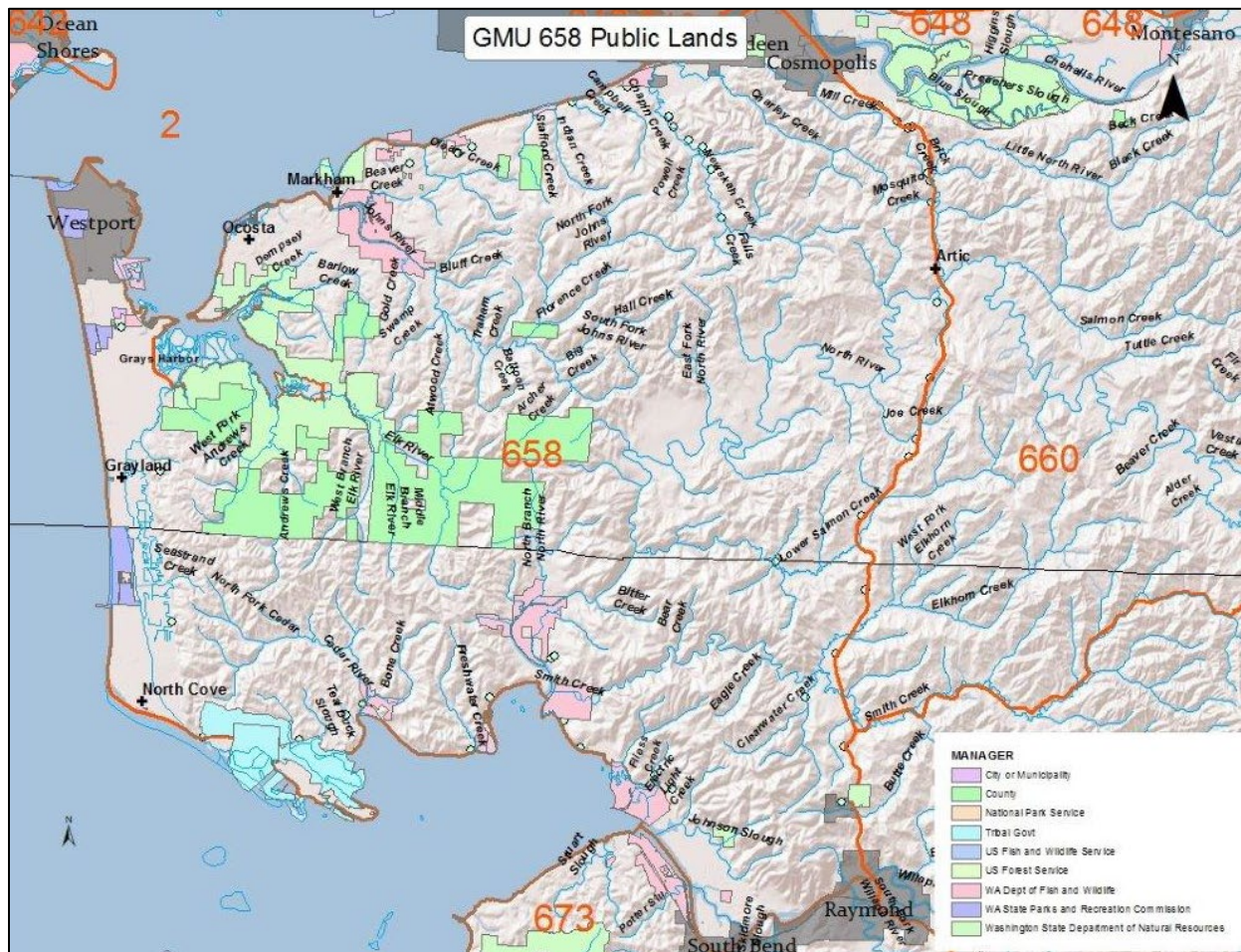
Overall, GMU 648 consists mostly of private industrial forestlands, but there are also several smaller landowners. Primary landowners in GMU 648 include Weyerhaeuser, Rayonier, Green Diamond, Fruit Growers, Grays Harbor County, and Campbell Global. A portion of the GMU is comprised of the Hoquiam and Aberdeen watersheds, which are closed to public access. In addition, several landowners have a cooperative road management agreement with WDFW. Hunters should follow all posted signs. Rayonier has a few signed lease access areas in this GMU. Most Rayonier lands in this GMU are managed under their general access program.

GMU 658 (North River) – Access Rating: Good

Primary landowners in GMU 658 are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Grays Harbor County, Campbell Global, Green Diamond, and DNR. Overall, access is good but varies among landowners. The majority of Hancock property is gated, but some main logging roads are open during the general modern firearm season. DNR lands in this GMU are surrounded by private forestlands but accessible by non-motorized access across private timberlands. Many landowners surrounding the public lands open gates for reasonable access once fire seasons end. Rayonier has some recreation leases and general access areas in this GMU. Access to Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU is restricted to permit and lease holders.

WDFW recently added 1,500 acres to the Elk River Unit just south of Westport and east of Twin Harbors State Park. These lands are not yet included in the following map.

Figure 111. Map of public and tribal land ownership in GMU 658.



GMU 660 (Minot Peak) – Access Rating: Poor

The primary landowner in GMU 660 is Weyerhaeuser. All their lands in this GMU are managed under their general access permit program. DNR owns a small portion of this GMU. To prevent elk from being pressured onto farms in the Chehalis Valley, motorized access is limited on DNR-managed lands.

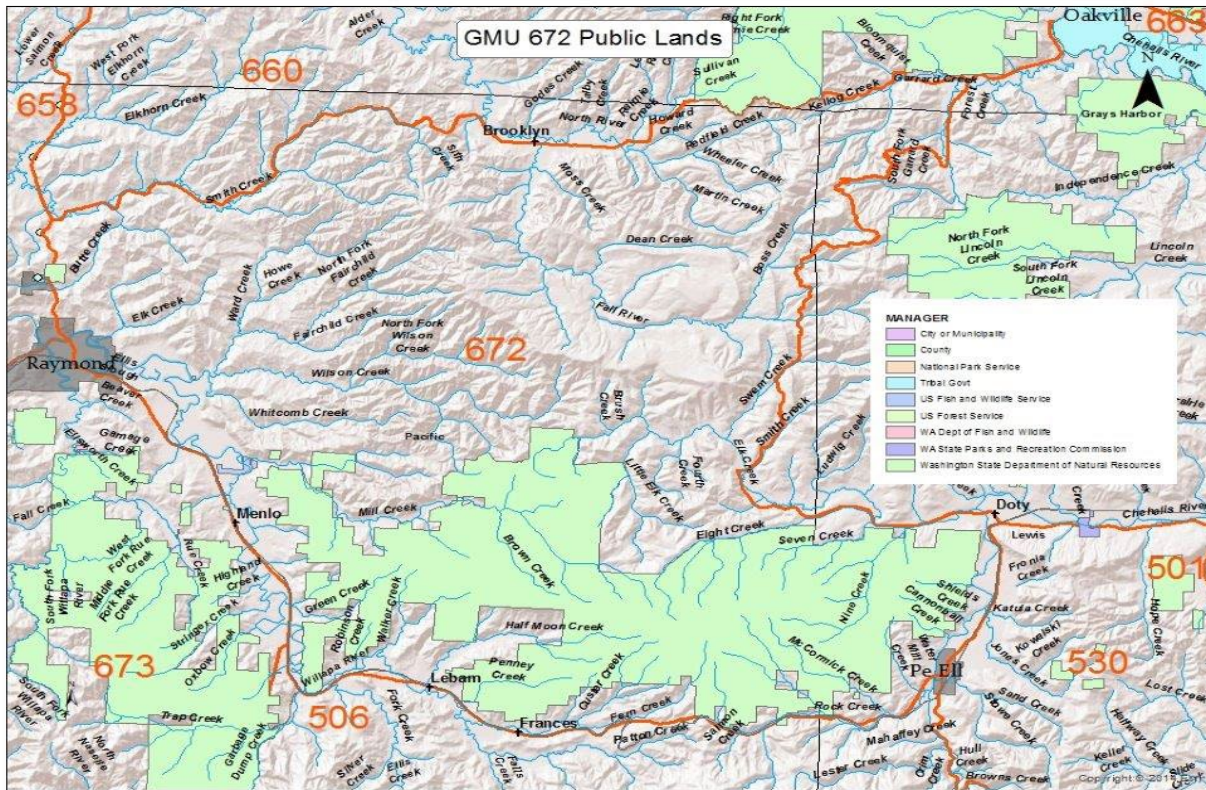
GMU 663 (Capitol Peak) – Access Rating: Excellent

DNR owns and manages the majority (more than 80%) of GMU 663, and most roads are open to motorized access during the modern firearm deer season. This area also has ORV trails. Hunters should adhere to all posted rules.

GMU 672 (Fall River) – Access Rating: Good

The primary landowners in GMU 672 are Weyerhaeuser and DNR. All Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU are only accessible to permit holders.

Figure 112. Map of public land ownership in GMU 672.



GMU 673 (Williams Creek) – Access Rating: Poor

Access in this GMU is quite variable and depends on the landowner. Primary private timberland owners are Hancock, FIA, Hampton, and Campbell Global. DNR also owns large tracts of land. In most areas, Hancock limits access to non-motorized but opens a few main logging roads during the general modern firearm season to disperse hunters and allow some interior access. FIA has recreational lease and fee access areas in this GMU available through [American Forest Management](#).

GMU 681 (Bear River) – Access Rating: Good

Hunters can expect a lower level of access than in the past. The dot system is used by some owners, but it is not consistent because of the checkerboard ownership. Primary private landowners are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, and the Nature Conservancy. Rayonier has some leased lands in this GMU and some general permit access areas. Portions of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 681, and hunters should [contact the refuge](#) before hunting on the refuge, as special regulations apply in some areas. Hunters can also call the refuge at 360-484-3482. Nature Conservancy lands are open to hunting, but motorized access is restricted. Weyerhaeuser has recreational lease and permit access areas in this GMU.

GMU 684 (Long Beach) – Access Rating: Poor

Except for Leadbetter Point, the majority of this GMU consists of private property. Hunters should make sure they have permission to access private property in GMU 684. Portions of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 684, and hunters planning to hunt on the refuge should [contact the refuge](#) beforehand or call 360-484-3482, as special hunting regulations apply.

[Lewis and Clark Timberlands](#) owns some property in the unit. Access is allowed via a no-cost permit found at: <https://nncpermits.com/PermitHome.aspx>

GMU 699 (Long Island) – Access Rating: Poor

USFWS owns and manages the entire GMU. Access is by boat only, but camping is allowed in designated areas. Hunters should contact [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#) for details or call 360-484-3482.

Private Lands Access Program

Several private landowners in District 17 are enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, cooperative agreements with these landowners have not been finalized. Most landowners are expected to renew their cooperative agreements for the 2024 hunting season. Hunters are encouraged to check or call the Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) to periodically check for updated information.

Online tools and maps

Most District 17 GMUs are a checkerboard of ownerships, and it can be challenging to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. Fortunately, several online tools and resources are available. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources:

DNR public lands quadrangle (PLQ) maps

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

Online parcel databases

Hunters can search Pacific County tax parcels using [Mapsifter](#), a mapping program that allows users to zoom in to their area of interest, click on a parcel, and identify who owns that parcel.

Hunters can search Grays Harbor tax parcels on the [Grays Harbor County website](#).

Private industry has downloadable mobile applications, which can be user friendly and highly functional when afield.

WDFW's "Places to go hunting" webpage

WDFW's updated webpage includes additional information on "[Places To Go Hunting](#)." This page includes large format printable GMU maps.