

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

March 16 to 31, 2021

## **DIVERSITY DIVISION**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**PHS Data and Ferruginous Hawk:** Biologist Azerrad (Wildlife Diversity Division) and Section Manager Folkerts (Ecosystem Services Division) co-led a workshop to develop a protocol for mapping occurrences of ferruginous hawk, a State Threatened species, into WDFW's Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) database. Attending the workshop was a technical advisory group (TAG) made up of species, management, and database experts who will guide and advise this work. The intent is to solve a problem with the way we present species data in PHS. Most PHS data is currently presented as points representing priority features such as nest sites. The problem is that points do not show the important habitat areas that species such as ferruginous hawk are using. This makes it difficult to use the data to provide meaningful information to guide management and land use decisions. The TAG began a discussion to develop a strategy for remapping ferruginous hawk as occupied habitat areas rather than points. The ferruginous hawk was selected as a pilot species that can ultimately be applied to other priority species. The TAG will be meeting for at least one or two more workshops to finalize a protocol.

**Incorporating Butterfly SGCN Data into WSDM:** Conservation Biologist and Insect Specialist Potter (Wildlife Diversity Division), and Biologist Gill are working with WSDM Insect Data Steward Jenkerson (Science Division) to incorporate butterfly SGCN (Species of Greatest Conservation Need) records into the agency database. The Wildlife Survey Data Management System, known as WSDM, now has the database structure and staffing to add these records, and the team is working to locate outstanding observation records, enter the record elements, create spatial data, and then bring these data into the agency's corporate database. The initial focus has been on data sets for both prairie and endangered species, including Taylor's checkerspot, hoary elfin, and Propertius' Duskywing, and includes data collected by WDFW and other researchers from the mid-1990s to 2020. Our team has worked very cooperatively, and since early-January prepared and incorporated hundreds of records.

**Award and Coordination on New Bumble Bee Grant:** Section Manager Taylor Cotten and Biologist Ann Potter (Wildlife Diversity Division) in partnership with Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation were awarded a new competitive state wildlife grant to work on bumble bees in the west. The grant includes maintaining and refocusing the existing Bumble Bee Atlas project that was started under the prior iteration of this project and adding targeting surveys for biologists including WDFW district biologists to collect data on the western bumble bee and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee.

Both species are petitioned for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act and are Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Washington. Field work will begin this summer and include trainings and opportunities for volunteers to contribute to the atlas. The prior Bumble Bee Atlas project was a huge success with hundreds of bee observations recorded.

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

## **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

## **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Shrubsteppe Acquisition Proposal:** Landscape Conservation Planner Teske assisted Lands Division staff members and Pygmy Rabbit Specialist Gallie in preparing a proposal for ESA Section 6 Acquisition funds for the acquisition of land adjacent to the Chester Butte Wildlife Area Unit. Biologist Teske provided a landscape assessment of the parcel's value, based on Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group connectivity data and Arid Lands Initiative priority core and linkage areas, specifically in deep soil locations. If awarded, this grant will provide the opportunity to further pygmy rabbit conservation by eliminating the potential for conversion and by protecting additional acres that neighbor already protected acres in a pygmy rabbit recovery area.

## **5) Providing Education and Outreach**

**Species Webpages:** Communications Consultant Anthony worked with species leads (Biologists Sato, Desimone, Stinson, Azerrad, Stocking, and Tobin) to fully revise six webpages for State Listed species – Common loon, fin whale, sei whale, Columbia white-tailed deer, woodland caribou, and Townsend's big-eared bat. Revised online pages include photos and species information to raise public awareness of species conservation needs and agency efforts and priorities.

## **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Implementing Farm Bill Programs:** Landscape Conservation Section Manager Gorrell and Farm Bill Coordinator Kuttel worked with Private Lands biologists and Regional Program Managers to clarify expectations of WDFW staff members and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in the annual Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) planning process, specific to the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Program and Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds. WDFW values this work and expects to play an integral role, centered around maintaining positive relationships with private landowners, in the development of effective conservation plans. Private Lands Biologists Braaten and Baarstad will join Gorrell in discussion with the NRCS State CRP Coordinator to communicate these expectations.

## 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

### **GAME DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

### **HUNTER EDUCATION**

Nothing for this installment.

### **LANDS DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

### **SCIENCE DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

### **REGION 1**

#### ***HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:***

##### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Raven and Raptor Surveys:** Biologists Atamian and Lowe each completed a point count survey for ravens and raptors in the Swanson Lakes and Twin Lakes area, where their populations have the potential to impact prairie grouse. Common raptor species observed included rough-legged and red-tailed hawks and northern harrier. More ravens were observed this week than on previous surveys.

**Lincoln Prairie Grouse:** Biologist Lowe searched one of the historical sharp-tailed grouse lek complexes in Lincoln County. The area burned last fall in the Whitney Road fire, leaving no cover or vegetation. No sign of grouse activity was found. Biologist Atamian surveyed the Reiber sharp-tailed grouse lek with Biologist Colvin, seven male sharptails were observed, but dancing was limited and sluggish. Hopefully it will pick up as nesting season approaches. Atamian also surveyed the sage grouse lek and only two males were observed, compared to the three seen by Lowe last week. One of the males was banded.



*Male sage grouse displaying at lone lek in Lincoln County*



*Male sharp-tailed grouse that remained after other six males had flushed*



*Three male sage grouse displaying on the burned lek site in Lincoln County*

**Photo Point Monitoring:** Biologists Lowe and Atamian located and took photos at several stations on/around Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area (WLA) as part of the habitat photo monitoring project started in 2012 by Biologist Schroeder.



*Example of a habitat photo monitoring point in 2014 (left) and 2021 post-fire (right)*

**Washington Ground Squirrels:** Biologists Atamian, Lowe, Westerman and Hugo (BLM) visited a known active Washington ground squirrel colony near Odessa to familiarize surveyors with alarm calls, burrow identification and data collection apps. Surveys for the state candidate species will be conducted in potential habitat April-May to locate new colonies.

**Ferruginous Hawk Surveys:** Biologists Lowe and Atamian checked several ferruginous hawk nesting territories in Lincoln and Whitman counties for occupancy. Territories were checked by locating historical nest sites, potential nest structures, and hiking through territories when possible to look for hawk activity. Neither of the two in Whitman had ferruginous hawks present and have not for over a decade. The territory checked in Lincoln County was active; two ferruginous hawks were observed repairing the nest and copulating.



*Nesting ferruginous hawk in Lincoln County*



*Hiking through a ferruginous hawk territory near Crab Creek in Lincoln County*



*Ferruginous hawk nest on rock spire*



*Female ferruginous hawk perched on nest while male is off picking up sagebrush sticks to add to the nest*

Biologist Vekasy reviewed changes to the Priority classifications and territory designations for ferruginous hawk territories in District 3 and sent corrections for the Master File. Vekasy conducted first occupancy checks at 13 Priority 1 territories: seven territories were occupied by pairs exhibiting breeding behavior (nest building, copulation, prey transfer, etc.), three territories were occupied by single birds, and two territories had no detections; these last five territories will be scheduled for second occupancy checks less than two weeks after the first survey. One territory with multiple historic nests in separate locust groves was occupied by incubating great-horned owls and red-tailed hawks. This territory has been checked nearly every year since the 2016 survey, has no ferruginous hawk detections and no alternative nest sites within the territory and will not be re-surveyed. Seven territories remain for first occupancy checks. District Biologist Wik spent one day checking territories, platforms, and a potential golden eagle nest with Biologist Vekasy.



**Predator-Prey Project:** Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock responded to a mortality signal from a cougar collared as part of the predator-prey research project. The dead cougar was located, and it was fairly obvious the adult tom had been killed by another cougar. Because the cougar was intact and fresh, it was transported to the Spokane lab for a full necropsy. In addition, Biologist Prince responded to a mortality signal from a white-tailed deer. The mortality was a false mortality and the collar is likely malfunctioning due to its age.

**Bighorn Sheep:** Biologist Cotterill organized GPS collar data for the Hells Canyon bighorn sheep project. The first of two mark-resight ground surveys took place for herds along the Wenaha and Grande Ronde rivers, the second of which is scheduled for next week. Biologists Wik and Vekasy, along with biologists from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) participated in the first round of this survey.

Biologists Prince and Turnock catalogued habitat improvement opportunities with Habitat Biologist Dotts. The trio of biologists looked at several Department of Natural Resource (DNR) parcels that could be improved with timber harvest in areas where the Vulcan bighorn sheep herd spends time. The three biologists recently provided information to update the Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) layer based on the areas used by collared sheep.



## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Spring Bear Hunters:** Biologist Turnock provided information to inquisitive spring bear hunters that were successful in drawing a permit. Biologist Turnock reminded hunters that they must take the bear identification test annually to hunt in most District 1 GMUs and that a new pelt check is required following a successful hunt.

## **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Human-Bear Conflict Avoidance Planning:** Wildlife Biologist Prince had a Teams meeting with Conflict Specialists Bennett and Samsill to develop strategies and next steps for helping Stevens County residents secure garbage around their homes. Next steps include reaching out to waste transfer stations and Sunshine Disposal to help us alert residents of ways to avoid conflict.

**Bear Concerns in Stevens County:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett and other staff members participated in a call where concerns of bear activity associated with trash in Colville was discussed. A flyer for disposal customers and the county dump was edited, along with radio announcements, and a targeted Facebook ad was planned. Coordination with a local disposal company and the Colville Mayor will continue.

**Reported Depredation in Stevens County:** WDFW staff members responded to a report of an injured bull. Three cattle were examined. One calf was classified as a Probable Wolf Depredation. The bull was classified as a non-depredation and the cow's injuries were too old to classify (unconfirmed cause of injury). Deterrents and next steps were discussed.

**Moose on the Loose:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Westerman assisted Fish and Wildlife Officer Spurbeck and Sergeant Leonetti with a juvenile bull moose that was slightly injured and not finding its way out of the city. The moose was darted and relocated to a better area.



**River Otter Issue:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade assisted Fisheries staff members with information gathering to address a rogue river otter that is killing steelhead in one of the Fisheries Biologist's fish weirs. Wade coordinated with Conflict Supervisor McCanna on this issue and provided the Fisheries Biologist Herr with information and contact information to assist with the situation.

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Asotin Creek WA – Weed Control:** Biologist Woodall spent about half the week spraying parking lots to keep them clean and weed free. He also oversaw a contract for aerial weed efforts in the uplands for areas that have been inundated with both yellow starthistle and Scotch thistle. Tech Stallcop sprayed the Post Office Field and two food plot fields at Joseph Creek.



*Aerial weed contractor flyover*

**Chief Joseph WA – Tree and shrub Planting:** Biologist Woodall burned off vegetation and flagged an area that will be planted into native riparian species in a couple of weeks. The site needs roto-tilled and fabric laid. This project is in mitigation for some work that will take place also this year in the stream to put structures in stream to divert water away from the road and also structure to harden road/stream bank to prevent the entry road from collapsing and washing way.



*Shrub planting site*

#### **5) Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

#### **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Snake River Local Working Group:** Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley completed a questionnaire regarding resource concerns for the upcoming Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Snake River Local Working Group meeting which will identify resource concerns and prioritize those resources for funding opportunities.

**Range Rider Coordination Meeting:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna facilitated another external range rider meeting with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Forest Service, and WDFW staff members for District 1. Director Susewind attended a majority of the meeting, answering questions and outlining expectations for daily/near daily range riding. NGOs and Forest Service heard the same thing from Director Susewind regarding daily/near daily range riding as WDFW have shared with them.

## 7) Other

**Conservation Reserve Program Meeting:** Private Lands Supervisor Earl and Private Lands Biologists Gaston and Thorne Hadley attended a joint-agency meeting between the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, multiple Conservation Districts, and WDFW. Workloads for spring Conservation Reserve Program work was discussed and many follow-up discussions need to be had to confirm the workload.

## **REGION 2**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Post-fire Restoration:** Biologist Jeffreys joined Private Lands Biologists Melinda Hughes and Nathan Cook in an effort to revegetate land burned in the September 2020 Pearl Hill fire. Much of this area experienced severe burning with no vegetation left standing except for a few charred and almost certainly dead sagebrush scattered across the landscape. Fortunately, biologists observed an encouraging amount of green up in the area with native grasses and even a couple of wildflowers popping up. Digging beneath the top layers revealed some soil moisture, as well. Among others, species planted included Wyoming sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis*) to benefit pygmy rabbit and grouse, as well as bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), golden currant (*Ribes aureum*), and Wood's rose (*Rosa woodsii*) for mule deer.



*Biologist Jeffreys plants Wyoming sagebrush on land WDFW is acquiring adjacent to the Chester Butte Unit of Sagebrush Flats Wildlife Area – Photo by Melinda Hughes*

**Cavity Nester Surveys:** As part of a project being carried out in cooperation with Chelan PUD, Biologists Comstock and Jeffreys went to several locations in Chelan County to ground-truth and assess access to model-selected survey sites for Lewis's woodpecker and white-headed woodpecker. Beginning in April, WDFW and PUD biologists will perform broadcast surveys for these two Species of Greatest Conservation Need at three survey areas within the Rocky Reach Wildlife Area (RRWA): Mills Canyon, Chelan Butte, and Apple Acres. These efforts are for a pilot project designed to assess occupancy of both woodpecker species in burned low- to mid-elevation conifer forests dominated by ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) throughout the RRWA. Biologists will look for evidence of breeding and make note of other cavity nesting species present, as well. In future years, biologists hope to expand these studies beyond the RRWA, as much remains unknown about the distribution and status of Lewis's woodpecker and white-headed woodpecker in Washington.



*Lewis's woodpecker and white-headed woodpecker habitat in selected survey grids at Chelan Butte (L) and Apple Acres (R) – Photos by Emily Jeffreys and Devon Comstock*

**Pygmy Rabbit Breeding Enclosure Checks:** The Pygmy Rabbit Team, with the assistance of District and Wildlife Area staff members, conducted capture efforts in each of our three breeding enclosures to estimate the number of breeding adults and their demographics and gauge winter mortality. Some males were transferred between the enclosures to balance the sex ratios better. All rabbits appeared healthy and females either appeared pregnant or nursing, so kits should be emerging from natal dens any day now.

Technicians Smith and Clements continue to monitor coccidia levels within the breeding enclosures. Fecal samples are examined under microscopy to determine eggs per gram (EPG) of feces within the rabbit sample. EPG levels above 2,000 require treatment. Only one of the samples this past month tested above 2,000 so we will treat that enclosure with Amprolium. Coccidia can be tolerated by adults but it is lethal to kits in the natal dens. Treatment was initiated just prior to normal birthing time.

**Rabbit Hemorrhagic Fever:** The RHDV2 virus, a highly lethal and contagious rabbit disease, has been spreading across the western United States over the past year and has now been detected in Boise, Idaho from recent die off of jackrabbits. This disease represents a tremendous threat to all rabbit species in eastern Washington. Coordinator Gallie is working with Veterinarians Mansfield, Haman (Public Affairs), and Washington State University (WSU) on outreach with the community to not release pet rabbits into the wild and to be vigilant in reporting dead rabbits. Given how fast this virus can spread, WDFW is developing plans to vaccinate wild pygmy rabbits this spring and summer to prevent a die off. Enclosure rabbits are already vaccinated and will alter our release efforts this year so kits will be vaccinated too. Rabbits must be at least 10 weeks old to vaccinate.

**Investigating the Potential for New Release Areas:** One of the biggest consequences from wildfire is the loss of suitable sagebrush habitat to reintroduce rabbits too. With the complete loss of the Burton Draw release sites, we are having to identify new areas for release efforts. This is challenging as there is no more available WDFW or Nature Conservancy land approved for releases. WDFW and USFWS have been in talks with local Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials and what steps are needed to utilize BLM lands as release sites. Large BLM land block occurs among our current release sites, making potential for improving patch connectivity. USFWS will address the cultural and environmental permitting aspects while BLM and WDFW address the outreach with the grazing lease. Suitable areas could be used in 2022 at the earliest.



*Potential future release sites on BLM land*

**Ferruginous Hawks:** Biologist Rowan spent most of March performing surveys for ferruginous hawks in Grant and Adams counties, which have experienced population declines over the past 20 years. Reasons for population losses include habitat loss, disturbance, and declines of primary prey species. The surveys entail searching for the birds, signs of the birds, and signs of production by hiking through their customary historic habitat. These surveys require a great deal of planning, making landowner contacts, coordinating with volunteers and other WDFW biologists, reviewing maps, and documenting findings.



*A well-camouflaged ferruginous hawk; a rainbow alongside the storm* – Photos by Ella Rowan

**Douglas County Grouse Surveys:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten conducted early morning surveys of known leks and looking for new leks. Private Lands Biologist found a new area holding sharp-tailed grouse and is monitoring to see if it's a new lek. Counts are getting better each day.



*Sharp-tailed grouse at Sunrise in Douglas County* – Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW

Biologist Rowan performed a second lek survey for sage grouse to help understand population persistence and production. Males were present in comparable numbers at this specific lek, although no females were seen and most of the males were not dancing and were off the lek. Grouse lek sites are kept confidential to prevent disturbance to the birds during an extremely vulnerable time.

**Washington Ground Squirrels:** Biologist Dougherty spent time organizing data to begin Washington Ground Squirrel surveys this spring. After identifying areas to survey, Biologist Dougherty met with Private Lands Biologists in Grant and Adams counties to discuss surveying on private lands. After the meeting a short field training session was organized to allow Private Lands staff members to become more familiar with ground squirrels and surveys techniques.

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Lake Lenore Target Shooting:** Lands Operations Manager Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson coordinated with DNR Land Manager Bohnet with regards to implementation of a target shooting development at Lake Lenore as DNR works to end target shooting by removing benches, gongs, and burn barrel on the section to the south on an active grazing lease. These actions will complement one another by bringing target shooting to the most appropriate location and where we intend to develop the site for improved user experience. Additionally, this will reduce fire risk and noise associated with the residences that occur much closer to the DNR section.

**North Potholes Target Shooting:** Lands Operations Manager Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson held a bi-annual coordination call with Reclamation staff members and Habitat Biologist Pentico to continue progress on investigating the potential for a target shooting range at the old Moses Lake sanitary landfill. First steps involve both agencies looking into policies and procedures for assessing the site for hazards and contaminants to determine what our options are.

## **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Wolf Workshops:** Specialist Heilhecker, along with other WDFW staff members, planned and facilitated the wolf history and management workshops. She worked with contractor Richard Thiel, a retired Wisconsin wolf biologist with 40 years of experience, to develop informational workshops for WDFW staff members. Each workshop includes two all-day sessions and covers topics including natural history, human values, predator-prey relationships, controversies, wolf behavioral norms, and more.

**Response to Wolf Sighting:** Specialist Heilhecker and Officer McCormick visited with a livestock producer who reported a wolf near his calving area. The private property is not within a known wolf territory, however, over the years, several radio-collared wolves have walked close to the area as they dispersed into Canada. Officer McCormick explained the producer's rights regarding "caught in the act", what to do if a suspected depredation occurs and maintaining a clean calving area. Specialist Heilhecker mentioned possible, yet limited, nonlethal deterrence measures and the importance of documenting his efforts.

#### 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

**Private Lands Habitat:** Biologist Hughes planted shrubs on two projects she developed. One project in Adams County will benefit mule deer and upland birds. Hughes coordinated with the landowner who will be doing field prep on this site and spraying on two habitat projects that were completed last year near Moses Lake. Hughes lined the landowner out with herbicide mixes for all three sites. Hughes planted sagebrush, bitterbrush, woods rose and golden currant on the Dormaier Acquisition site that WDFW is working to acquire grant funding to purchase. The site burned this past year in the Pearl Hill Fire. Before the fire the site had very high potential for pygmy rabbits to move onto the property. The shrubs were planted on north facing slopes, that retain slightly greater shade and moisture than other areas of the property. Help from additional staff members was greatly appreciated and made a big difference during the plantings. Private Lands and Conflict Supervisor Rickel, Biologist Cook, and District Biologist Jeffreys assisted planting shrubs within the two sites.



*Shrub planting on Dormaier Acquisition Site* – Photo by Hughes



*Bunch grasses coming back on Dormaier Acquisition site* – Photo by Hughes



**Douglas County Habitat Restoration Project:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten received plants this week and was able to start planting in areas within the Pearl Hill Fire on Private Lands. Water birch, Aspen, Douglas hawthorne, choke cherry, sagebrush, and golden current will be planted at several locations within the burn area in the next few weeks. Private Lands Biologist Braaten completed stock tank installation for wildlife on an unused freshwater spring developed initially in the 1930s.



*Planting trees in Douglas County on Private Lands – Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW*



*Douglas County - Water and Water birch*

## **REGION 3**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Elk Surveys:** Colockum Wildlife Area Manager Lopushinsky assisted in annual Colockum elk aerial surveys this month. A contracted helicopter and pilot flew two full days, covering survey units from Colockum Creek to Vantage.



*Colockum Wildlife Area elk surveys*

Biologists B. Oates and W. Moore completed aerial surveys of elk via helicopter for the Colockum herd and on the Yakima Training Center (YTC). The sightability model estimated the Colockum elk population to be 4,165 individuals, which is approximately an 11% increase from last year's estimate of 3,742 elk. Calf recruitment was estimated at 29 calves per 100 cows, which is also an increase from 25 in 2020. Some of the largest groups were on private land in between Vantage Highway and I-90, as well as Caribou Creek near the eastern edge of the Kittitas Valley. The elk population on the Yakima Training Center lands south of I-90 is estimated to be 852 individuals, and the Central Impact Area (central portion of the YTC) accounted for 94% of the total number observed. Elk use a larger portion of the YTC but have learned the area is secure from human ground activity.

**Colockum Elk Surveys**

	Total	Cows	Calves	Spike Bulls	Adult Bulls	Total Bulls	B:100C	C:100C
2012	5305	3924	1121	153	107	260	7	29
2013	5712	4057	1265	164	227	391	10	31
2014	6018	4517	1226	154	121	276	6	27
2015	6103	4275	1344	221	264	485	11	31
2016	5087	3530	1007	171	379	550	16	28
2017	4672	3528	676	113	355	468	13	19
2018	4289	2987	879	127	279	406	13	29
2019	4133	2895	731	117	390	507	17	25
2020	3742	2749	683	119	192	310	11	25
2021	4165	2990	861	97	216	313	10	29
10 YR AVG	4923	3545	979	144	253	397	11	27



*A Large Group of Elk Seen During the Colockum Aerial Survey*



*A Group of 340 elk Near Cape Horn on the Colockum Wildlife Area*

**Shedding Bighorn Sheep:** Biologists Bernatowicz, Oates, and Technician Leuck began efforts to remove the bighorn sheep found shedding *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (MOVI). There is significant help from Biologists Peterson and Wolterstorf (Yakama Nation) and volunteers. On the first day, all shedders were removed from the west side (Umtanum) of the Yakima River. There are now four left on the east side (Selah Butte).

**Elk Feeding:** L.T. Murray staff members finished up feeding elk at the Joe Watt and Robinson feed sites.



*Joe Watt elk feeding site – L.T. Murray Wildlife Area*

**Golden Eagle Nest:** A small, temporary closure area was established to protect nesting golden eagles in the Tieton River canyon. Oak Creek staff members and the District Biologists monitor this area every February and March to pinpoint where yearly nest sites occur. This is to mitigate potential impacts by recreationists since there is a popular trail and rock climbing in the area. This year, a previously unoccupied nest site had nesting eagles, thus necessitating the need to close a popular climbing area (The Bend) through the nesting season until mid-July.



*Golden eagle on cliff nest in the Tieton River drainage*

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Signage and Repairs:** L.T. Murray Natural Resource Specialist Nass checked on the Green Gate restoration sites and installed several signs in the area to make motorized routes more apparent.



*New sign warning that the end of a green dot road is ahead with limited turn around area*

L.T. Murray staff members also made repairs to a gate that had rotted along the Kittitas Reclamation District (KRD) canal road through WDFW property.



*Wire gate with repairs after old posts had rotted away*

**Shed Antlers:** Elk shed antler hunting is well underway on the Colockum Wildlife Area this month. Bulls started dropping antlers in early March, prompting a surge of vehicle traffic and hikers on the Wildlife Area (WLA).



*A local Wenatchee couple on a successful antler hunting trip, Colockum Wildlife Area*



*Another successful antler hunter on Colockum Wildlife Area*

**End of Bird Dog Training Season:** March 31 marks the end of the WDFW bird dog training season. Training bird dogs on wild birds is restricted from April 1 to July 31 to protect ground nesting birds and their young.



*A gorgeous Wire-Haired Pointing Griffon pointing chukar partridge on Colockum Wildlife Area*

### **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Elk Entry Gate Illegally Bent:** L.T. Murray Natural Resource Specialist Nass removed the snow markers from Robinson Canyon and discovered the elk entry gate had been tampered with by trespass shed hunters entering the winter closure area.



*Entry gate panel bent for illegal access during winter closure*

**New Cougar Trap:** Oak Creek staff members finished construction of a new prototype cougar trap for the Conflict program and it was received by Conflict Specialist Wetzel. This design is intended to be more mobile than traditional traps, but sturdier than previous versions. It is currently being tested for effectiveness.



*Cougar trap constructed by Oak Creek staff members*

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Weed Control and Drift Fences:** Project Manager Charlet is now full swing into planning and overseeing weed control measures on the new 4,000-acre land acquisition in the Cowiche Unit, as well as working with the grazing permittee to establish drift fences to manage livestock on the property.



**Pre-Commercial Thinning Units:** Forester Hartmann attended the virtual S-230: Single Resource/Crew Boss training hosted by the WDFW Prescribed Fire Team. Forester Hartmann also flagged pre-commercial thinning units at Rock Creek, and the South-Central Prescribed Fire Unit collected fuels data in the project area.



*South-Central Prescribed Fire Unit hikes into pre-commercial thinning area at Rock Creek to collect fuels data. By assessing the pre-thin condition, WDFW has a better picture of how management activities affect the land, influencing the type and timing of follow-up treatments*

On Saturday, March 27, firefighters from Yakima County Fire District 5 in Zillah and Grandview, along with firefighters Yakima’s West Valley Fire Department, came out to the Sunnyside Unit and burned the Brady wetland area. A total of approximately 40 acres of overgrown, dried cattails and kochia was burned that day.



*Firetrucks staged at south end of Brady wetland burn*



*Flames burning through dead kochia stands to the east of the Brady wetland area*



*Brady Wetland – Before prescribed burn*



*Brady Wetland – After*

**Prepping Habitat Plots:** Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin have begun the springtime work of mowing out last year's habitat/food plots and prepping them for this year. In order to improve soil health and reduce the invasive weed load, Ferguson and Wascisin are using a new tactic of spraying the initial flushes of weed growth followed by no-till seeding of the areas using a diverse mixture of upland bird/deer food crops. We are hoping to find which crops grow best together in these soils and continue building up organic matter in the soils while over time reducing the invasive weed seed bank and minimizing soil disturbance.

## 5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

## 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

**Camping and Packing in Whiskey Dick WLA:** L.T. Murray staff members found an unlikely herd of approximately 30 domestic animals consisting of two yaks, a camel, several llamas, sheep, and goats accompanied by three nomadic individuals camping and packing in the Whiskey Dick WLA. The group had planned to get to BLM property north on the Quilomene. They were discovered and reported by Wildlife biologists earlier in the week while conducting aerial surveys. Staff members encouraged them to pack/graze elsewhere as there was perceived conflict in our grazing regulations and risk to our bighorn sheep herd.



*A herd of 30 domestic animals grazing/packing in the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area*

## 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 4**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Elk Captures:** Wildlife Conflict staff members, Wildlife Biologists for District 14 (Skagit and Whatcom Counties), and WDFW Law Enforcement continued with efforts to capture and collar cow elk in Skagit Valley. The effort will aid in a better understanding of how elk use agricultural areas and adjacent upland forests. Nine cow elk were fitted with satellite GPS collars and released unharmed.



*(L) WDFW Enforcement Officer Wines assisted with a cow elk capture in Skagit Valley.  
(R) Natural Resource Technician Cogdal (left) and WDFW Enforcement Officer Miller  
(right) help process the final elk*

**Oregon Spotted Frog Surveys:** District 14 Wildlife Biologists Moore and Waddell and Volunteer Biologist Nyman conducted a survey for Oregon spotted frogs at a site in Whatcom County. Biologists counted and recorded data from egg masses deposited by breeding frogs. These surveys are conducted annually to evaluate the distribution and abundance of these State Endangered frogs.



*Biologists Moore (L) and Nyman (R) count egg masses deposited by Oregon spotted frogs on the side of a flooded road in Whatcom County*

**Harlequin Duck Survey:** District 13 Biologist Hamer and Sea Duck Specialist Evenson conducted a photographic survey of harlequin ducks in the San Juan Islands. The preliminary survey was conducted to establish methods for extensive future efforts to determine current age and sex ratios. Harlequin ducks were photographed to allow for later flock reference and to ease sex and age determination. Age and sex ratios will help biologists better understand the level of harlequin duck recruitment and whether or not recruitment has changed since the ratios were last established in the mid-2000s.



*Sea duck specialist Evenson photographs a flock of harlequin ducks near the shoreline*

**Purple Martin Management:** District 12 Biologists Smith and Anderson borrowed a boat from Fish Program to assist in annual maintenance of the largest purple martin colony in the district – within the Duwamish Waterway. The western purple martin is a Species of Greatest Conservation need. More information can be found [HERE](#).



*Purple martin stewards and District 12 Biologists Smith and Anderson working on gourds near Kellogg Island, Duwamish Waterway, Seattle – Photo by Elaine Chuang*

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

## **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

## **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Livingston Bay Interviews:** Project Coordinator Brokaw and staff members from the Whidbey Camano Land Trust reviewed applications and held interviews with consulting firms and selected Environmental Science Associates as the consultant to lead the feasibility study. The feasibility study will take place over the next year and will culminate in a decision whether to move forward with acquisition of property along Livingston Bay on Camano Island.

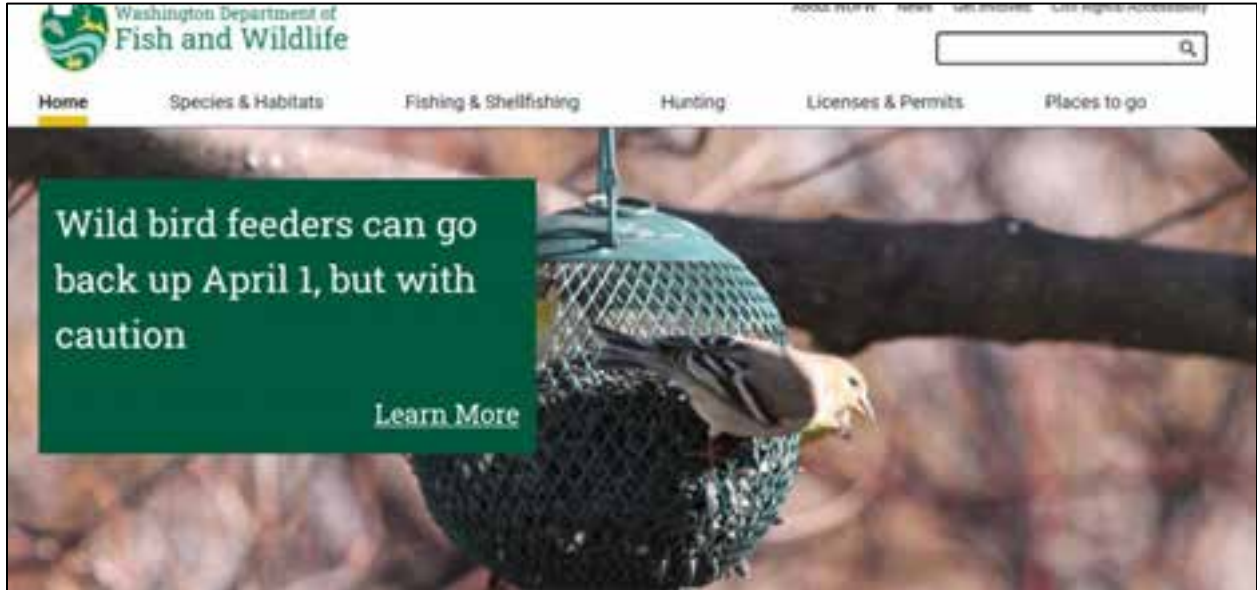
## **5) Providing Education and Outreach**

**Leque Island Presentation:** Project Coordinator Brokaw presented to a group of Snohomish County Beachwatchers. The talk was focused on the value of tidal marsh habitat and the story of restoration at Leque Island.



*The bull trout pictured here was captured in the Leque restoration area in late March. Bull trout are listed as federally threatened in Washington under the Endangered Species Act*

**Salmonellosis in Winter Songbirds:** Biologist Anderson collaborated with Public Affairs and Wildlife Health and Wildlife Rehabilitation regarding input, comment, and review for a March 26 update to the WDFW blog and messaging regarding the ongoing issues with salmonellosis in songbirds in Washington (bulk of which being pine siskin). The 2020-2021 salmonellosis epidemic hit multiple states in the lower 48, including all Pacific Coast states and lower British Columbia. More at the [WDFW FAQ site](#) and [Wildlife Health site](#).



*Feeders back up – but if you are willing just wait until next December – they don’t need the supplemental food. Reports are decreasing but still elevated. It is fun to watch them all in one spot, but it is best for the birds still if folks are willing to keep the petri dishes down*

## 6) Conducted Business Operations and Policy

**Parking Lot Upgrade:** Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm reports that the Stillwater North parking lot regrade project is completed. Potholes were removed and new gravel was spread and packed to improve the parking area.



**Island Marble Butterfly CCAA Report:** District 13 Biologist Hamer compiled the first annual island marble butterfly Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) report and submitted the report to USFWS. The report documents the level of CCAA enrollment, the size and location of enrolled properties, the size and configuration of created habitat patches, and additional conservation measures taken by CCAA enrollees.

## 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 5**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Oregon Spotted Frog Surveys:** District 9 Biologists Wickhem and Bergh, Herpetologist Hallock, and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff members conducted their annual coordinated survey for Oregon spotted frog egg masses outside Trout Lake. Oregon spotted frogs are federally threatened and endangered within Washington state, and the egg mass surveys are a means of estimating their population. Unfortunately, for at least the fourth year in a row, the survey areas had low water levels which reduces the habitat available for egg laying. As a result, the number of egg masses recorded was low compared to historical numbers. The crew is hoping for more water in the coming years!



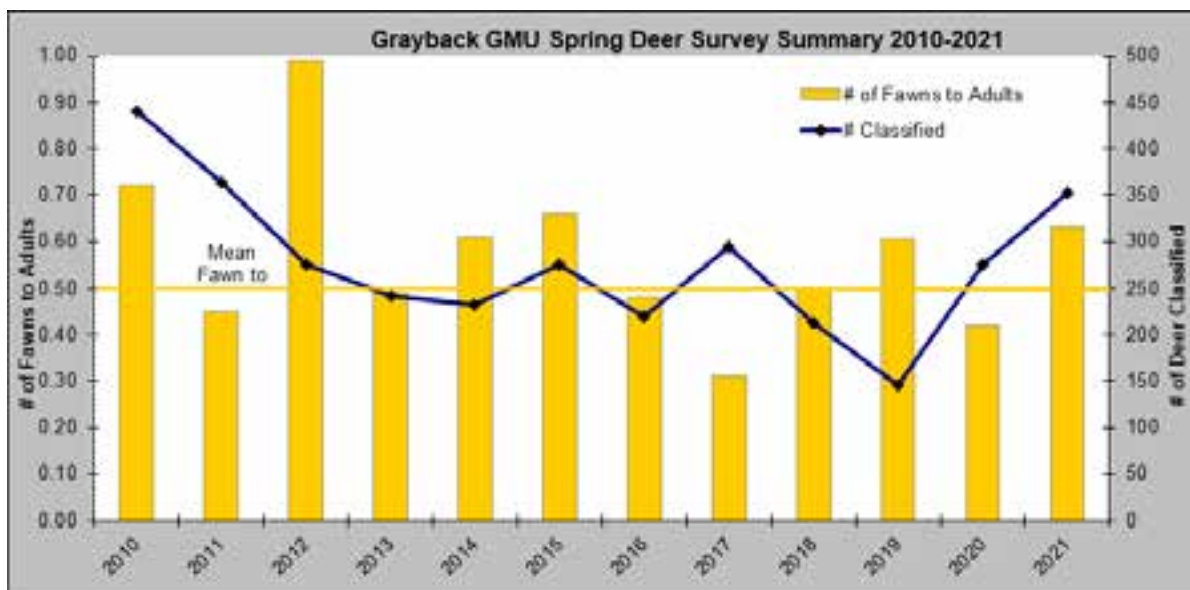
*Herpetologist Hallock regulates the team with interesting Oregon spotted frog facts while she records a cluster of egg masses*





*A pair of Oregon spotted frogs in “amplexus” or the act of laying and fertilizing eggs. This pair is surrounded by several already-laid masses*

**Klickitat Wildlife Area Spring Road Survey:** Biologists Wickhem, Bergh, and Jacobsen and Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven took part in the annual spring road survey to count and classify mule deer on and around the Klickitat Wildlife Area. These same routes have been surveyed each spring for more than 40 years! This season, the team counted 472 deer and classified 352, the most on this survey since 2011 (363 classified)! They recorded a productive fawn-to-adult ratio of 0.63, which is well above the 0.50 average for this survey since 1980, and also above the 10-year average of 0.57. Great job to all the momma does out there! We did see a bit of an uptick in instances of hair loss syndrome, but not enough to be overly concerned. Also, for the first time ever, a sasquatch was observed along one of the survey routes. The team will coordinate with WDFW Sasquatch Biologist Moore to develop a formal monitoring strategy.



*Klickitat Wildlife Area spring survey results 2010-2021*



*Sunset & Mt Adams view on the Klickitat Wildlife Area*



*Klickitat Wildlife Area sasquatch sighting!*

**Private Lands Oregon Spotted Frog Surveys:** Biologists Bergh, Wickhem, Ferris, and Jacobsen, along with Volunteer Flick, completed two days of surveys on private lands in the Glenwood Valley for Oregon spotted frog egg masses. On the second day, WDFW joined forces with Conboy NWR staff members to search both private land and NW Refuge land. The crew searched many acres but only found one egg mass. Last year’s drought along with low late summer water availability likely combined for a very difficult year for frog survival. Oregon spotted frogs are a Federally Threatened and State Endangered species that rely on areas with short vegetation, sun exposure, and shallow water for laying their egg masses in late winter/early spring.



*Private Lands Biologist Ferris and PLB/Conflict Specialist Jacobsen searching for Oregon spotted frog egg masses on private land in the Glenwood Valley*

**Dusky Canada Goose Survey:** Biologist Bergh completed her final monthly survey of the season for dusky Canada geese in Clark County. Several groups of dusky geese were observed but no red neck collars were read. Assistant Wildlife Manager Breitenstein and Technician Fox have observed and read quite a few red dusky collars in the past couple months, which has greatly increased this season's sightings. These neck collars have a 3-digit alphanumeric code to identify individual geese. When re-sighted, these collars provide an estimate for dusky goose survival, which is one of the metrics used by the USFWS to determine regulations surrounding goose hunting seasons.



*Cackling Canada geese in their natural habitat in Clark County*

**April Mudflow Elk Survey:** Biologist Stephens conducted a survey of elk on the Mudflow Unit of the Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area. This survey is done around the first of each month during the winter. This was the final survey of the season. A total of 246 elk were counted; of which 150 were bulls, 75 cows, and 28 calves. This was slightly below the high total for this season which was 255 elk in March.

**Region 5 Grouse Wing Bee:** Biologists Wickhem and Stephens, with Research Scientist Schroeder and volunteer Leslie, went through all of the grouse wings and tails deposited by hunters at grouse collection barrels in the Region during the 2020 hunting season. The purpose of the wing bee is to examine all of the samples and identify the species, age, and sex of the birds the samples were collected from. A total of 137 samples were submitted by hunters to Region 5. Biologists would like to thank the hunters for taking the time to submit these voluntary samples so that wildlife managers can learn more about the composition of grouse harvested in Region 5.



*Biologists Schroeder and Wickhem examine a grouse wing*



*Ruffed Grouse Wing*

**Cougar Seal:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey met with a successful cougar hunter to collect a tooth and DNA sample from the animal, as well as to place a permanent seal on the hide of the cougar. The hunter was extremely excited to have harvested his first cougar.

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Turkey Hunting Information:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen provided turkey hunting information to a new turkey hunter. The hunter planned to travel from Seattle to Klickitat County to hunt turkeys.

**Vancouver Lake, Shillapoo, and Langsdorf Landing Access Sites:** This week access staff members Rhodes and McKinlay took advantage of the great weather to begin painting parking lot stripes and ADA emblems. All sites were previously power washed in preparation for painting. Three restrooms were tagged with graffiti, two out of the three too offensive to show. In addition, 780lbs. of trash was picked up and hauled away in one day from Vancouver Lake, Shillapoo, and Langsdorf Landing along with over 100 needles that were picked up.



*Painting parking lot stripes and ADA emblems*



*Graffiti and needles at access sites*

**Access Sites:** Access staff members Rhodes and McKinlay began power washing all paved parking lot parking stripes. This is done to remove moss and dirt to prepare for repainting. More restroom vault pumping had to be done due to the increase in site usage. Many of WDFW’s vault restrooms are having to be pumped out sooner than normal and more often due to increased use. Unfortunately, the restroom on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area was vandalized this week. Someone cut the lock off the vault door, broke the door off, threw trash down into the vault, and tagged the back of the restroom with graffiti.



*Vault pumping at County Line Access*



*Vandalism at Shillapoo Access*

### **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Elk Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a landowner in Trout Lake to issue elk hazing supplies and a roll of patch fencing. With agricultural fields greening up, elk damage to these fields has been steadily increasing.

**Deer with “Mange”:** A concerned citizen contacted WDFW to report a deer in White Salmon with “mange.” Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen discussed the observation with the citizen and determined that the deer was likely affected with Hair Loss Syndrome (<https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/hair-loss>). Jacobsen provided information on the nature of the infection (caused by a non-native louse species) and indicated that the deer would likely survive since the weather was warming up. Jacobsen advised the citizen to contact WDFW again if the deer’s condition deteriorated to the point where the deer could no longer stand up on its own.

**Youth Damage Hunt:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by a landowner who was having extensive elk damage to the new plant growth in his irrigated hay fields. The landowner had been observing 30-50 elk in the field almost daily. At the landowner's request, Jacobsen deployed a youth hunter from the Damage Pool hunter list. After leaving in the middle of the night and driving four hours to get to the hunt location before shooting light, the youth hunter was escorted by Jacobsen and the hunter's father on the hunt. Shortly after daybreak, the young hunter was able to harvest his first elk!



*A happy youth hunter and his father after a successful damage hunt!*

**Deer Fencing at Peach Orchard:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a landowner in Ridgefield to inspect his deer fencing. The fencing materials were supplied by WDFW as part of a cost-share agreement to protect the landowner's peach trees from deer damage. Last fall (prior to the fence construction), the landowner lost 70 peach trees due to rubbing by some of the bucks on the property. Jacobsen completed the Final Fencing Inspection Report for the project.



*Completed deer fence at a peach orchard*

**Deer Damage to Organic Farm:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a producer to inspect deer damage to organic crops in the Ridgefield area. The producer has almost year-round deer damage to various crops and is also dealing with issues surrounding deer droppings near her produce. According to new food safety regulations, if any animal fecal matter is detected, the producer must refrain from harvesting any crops within a certain, wide, radius of the droppings for a 4-month period. The presence of deer droppings on the small property, in addition to the browsing damage (the producer lost approximately \$3,000 in crops in one night), can put a substantial financial strain on a produce operation. The producer signed a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement and will work with Jacobsen on long-term approaches to keep deer off the property. The farm is located within the “no shooting” zone of Clark County, so traditional non-lethal and lethal hazing methods will not be applicable in this situation. Additionally, the surrounding (former) farmland in the Ridgefield area is being converted to housing developments at an extremely rapid rate. This development further exacerbates the problem by crowding deer on to remaining green spaces, such as the creek bottom at the end of this producer’s property.



*Deer browsing damage to collard greens on an organic produce farm*

**Deer Damage to Nursery:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a nursery owner in the Ridgefield area to enroll him in a Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement for deer damage.

**Dead Deer in Yard:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen fielded a phone call of a dead deer in a landowner's yard. However, when Jacobsen called the landowner to discuss the deer, the landowner reported that he had already contacted the Klickitat County Sheriff's Department and they were on-scene with a houndsman and hounds looking for a possible cougar on the property that could have killed the deer. Jacobsen advised the landowner to remove the deer carcass from the property to discourage whatever killed the deer from returning, but the landowner indicated that he wanted to put a trail camera over the carcass instead.

**Injured Dogs:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen followed up with a landowner that had two dogs that were attacked (one injured, one killed and partially consumed) by some animal. Officer Moats made the initial contact at the time of the incident and Jacobsen contacted the landowner to provide additional advice on securing livestock and pets. Based on the description of the incident, the dogs were most likely attacked by coyotes while the dogs were let outside at night to do their business. Jacobsen advised the landowner that coyote attacks on pets and livestock are not uncommon during this time of year, as coyotes are denning and preparing to have their pups and are more protective as well as more willing to take risks for additional food. Jacobsen has investigated multiple incidents where landowners have let their small- and medium-sized dogs out at night to relieve themselves, only to have an encounter(s) with coyotes. This often results in injury or death to the domestic dogs. Jacobsen would like to advise all pet owners to keep their dogs on a leash or in an enclosed dog run when the animals are taken out at night to relieve themselves.

**Coyote Depredations and General Concerns:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by four different landowners in various parks of Clark County regarding coyote depredations and general concerns about coyote proximity to humans. One landowner lost eight lambs/yearling lambs to coyotes over the last couple of weeks. The landowner had been leaving his sheep out in the pasture at night rather than penning them up, and knew that he needed to pen them up at night to protect them from coyote depredation, but had issues with his rams breaking down previous night pens and even breaking out of his barn. Jacobsen recommended utilizing a Fox Light, as well as looking into purchasing a livestock guardian dog, to protect his sheep. USDA Wildlife Services trapping options were also discussed.

A similar situation occurred in another part of Clark County where a landowner recently lost four lambs to coyotes. Night penning and additional deterrent measures were discussed. A third landowner contacted Jacobsen to complain about coyotes lurking about on her property. The landowner has livestock but also has large dogs to protect her livestock. Additional husbandry and deterrent measures were discussed, and Jacobsen scheduled a site visit to inspect the operation and to provide additional advice.

A fourth landowner contacted WCS Jacobsen to report that her 5-year-old son saw a coyote and heard it growling a short distance away while both the landowner and the son were out in the yard. Jacobsen provided advice on coyote behavior and biology as well as information on living with wildlife. Jacobsen requested that the landowner share his contact information on the neighborhood social media page and to contact WDFW if coyotes were again seen acting abnormally or if they were in close proximity to humans.



**Cougar Under House:** Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Dispatch was contacted regarding a cougar that had been found resting under a house in central Klickitat County. The landowner was alerted to the presence of the cougar by their wiener dog, which was barking at the cougar just a few feet away. The landowner shot and killed the cougar at the time it was discovered. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen arrived at the scene to take possession of the carcass, as the landowner did not have a valid cougar tag. Jacobsen pulled a tooth from the cougar for aging purposes as well as a tissue sample for DNA analysis. The house was located in the middle of an expansive grassland with pasture and plowed farm fields on all sides, but other than the trees and shrubs in the yard of the house, no vegetative cover existed for at least a 5-mile radius from the house. The cougar – a subadult male likely dispersing from its mother to locate and establish a new home range – probably found itself out in the open around daylight and took shelter under the house for the time being.



*Crawlspace under the house where the cougar was found to be resting*

**Injured Eagle:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey responded to a report of an injured eagle in a neighborhood in Longview. The eagle was still on the ground and Aubrey was able to capture the eagle with the help of one of the homeowners nearby. The eagle was transported to a rehabilitation facility.



**Baby Owl:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey picked up a baby owl that was found in a building that was partially collapsed. The reporting party (RP) was unable to find any remnants of a nest in the remaining structure to renest the owl. Aubrey transported the owl to a rehabber to be raised and released.

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Klickitat Wildlife Area - Fence Inspection and Repair:** Almost no fence inspection or repair occurred on the Soda Springs Unit in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and one staff member position being vacant. This year all fences are being inspected and repaired as needed. This week Assistant Manager Cochran took care of approximately 5 miles of fences, mostly along property boundaries.

**Klickitat Wildlife Area - Game Camera Setup on Simcoe Mountains Unit:** Two game cameras were placed on the Simcoe Mountains Unit to capture photos of upland game birds, to help in identifying the species. A grouse was observed in February that did not appear to be one of the species known to occur in the area.



*Setting up game cameras*

**Klickitat Wildlife Area - Water Trough Repair:** Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven and Assistant Manager Cochran added reinforcement pieces to the edge of a water trough in Sheep Canyon. Two holes in the trough were plugged as well. This trough is a reliable water source all year and has high value for wildlife.



*Trough in Sheep Canyon*

**Klickitat Wildlife Area - Simcoe Unit:** Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven and Assistant Manager Cochran checked on the Simcoe Unit this week. The roads were surprisingly clear of trees. In an instance of especially good fortune, VanLeuven discovered that the new reader board that was installed along Box Canyon Road only 1-1/2 years ago was spared by a large pine snag that had been looming over the spot and finally crashed down during the past month. The branches scraped the back of the reader board but did no damage.



*Reader Board missed by fallen snag*

## 5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

## 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

## 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 6**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Dusky Goose Surveys:** Biologists Novack, Sundstrom, and Michaelis conducted dusky goose surveys in Grays Harbor and Pacific counties. Dusky goose numbers seem to be dropping along the Naselle and birds are probably moving north.

**Mudminnow:** Biologist Tirhi and Butler assisted with Olympic mudminnow (State Sensitive) surveys at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area. The District 11 staff members considered this a day of training, conducting Oregon spotted frog surveys which use the same habitats as mudminnows. With the help of volunteer Terry and Wildlife Area consultant Butch, the group were able to deploy 46 minnow traps. Although significant numbers of salamanders and one red-legged frog were captured, no mudminnows were captured.



*Volunteer J terry preparing mudminnow traps (right) and Wildlife Area consultant Butch Setting traps*



*Salamanders but no mudminnows captured during mudminnow trapping at the Skookumchuck Wildlife Area 2021*

**Oregon Spotted Frog:** State and Federally Endangered Oregon spotted frog surveys began in late February and are keeping District 11 staff members busy with surveys from Mid-February to mid-April as usual. Staff members are doing egg mass counts in 2021 only at known breeding locations undergoing habitat management. The remainder of the time is spent searching for new locations. Of particular interest are finding new breeding locations in geographic locations that can contribute specimens to a 2022 genetic study. Tirhi and volunteer Terry spent several days counting egg masses at Salmon Creek, Hopkins Ditch, and Fish Pond Creek oviposition sites as well as searching for new locations at those locations and Michelle Creek. Staff members will continue with surveys until April 1.



*Wetlands associated with Michelle Creek that were searched for the elusive Oregon spotted frog*

**Low Water Levels:** Tirhi has noticed some of the lowest water levels ever observed this February and March. For the first time, Tirhi had to move a number of masses at the Salmon Creek oviposition site that were completely above water level and would have left tadpoles and froglets isolated with no way to out migrate to deep water habitat. This stranding occurred despite recent heavy rain events over a few days. Egg masses also run the risk of freezing when above water given current low temperatures. District 11 has funding in 2021 to pay for part-time technician assistance, who will be tasked with measuring water levels across the Salmon Creek site and froglet out migration.



*Excessive low water levels in 2021 at Oregon spotted frog oviposition sites*



*Oregon spotted frog egg masses above water level and isolated from nearby deep-water habitat, thus leaving them stranded if not moved by staff*

**Streaked Horned Lark Nest Surveys:** Biologist Tirhi has been negotiating with WDFW Diversity Program Manager Anderson, Ecostudies Institute Biologist Slater, and USFWS staff members to conduct a pilot project on state and federally listed lark nest surveys on the Olympia Airport. This project follows similar work that has been ongoing on Joint Base Lewis McChord and has been successful at decreasing the number of larks that are killed during mowing operations on the airfields on which they breed. The team is continuing to negotiate conducting this project which they hope to begin by April 1. District 11 will assist once per week with nest surveys.

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Humptulips River Thorberg:** During the last wind and high-water event a large portion of a Cottonwood tree blew down, blocking the launch ramp. The tree also pushed brush and debris into the way of the launch. The water access team, using saws, hedge trimmers, and a tractor, removed all debris and silt from the ramp. The logs and debris were pulled using a tractor and put in place to block an unauthorized 4x4 path from the parking area accessing the woods.



*Before & After*

**Mason County Lakes:** The water access team, along with help from Statewide Water Access Coordinator Shane Belson, brushed out the Cady Lake access road to the launch. Due to property disputes, this road had not been brushed out for many years. Using pole saws, chain saws, hedge trimmers, and a tractor this road only took three hours to make passable again. The crew also serviced Tee, Panther and Tiger Lake, brushing fence lines with hedge trimmers, picking up limbs, scraping and blowing asphalt, and replacing regulatory signs.



*Before*

*During*



*After brush out*



*Panther Lake*

**Sutherland Lake Clallam County:** Two large, dangerous, dead trees (overhanging the restroom and powerlines) were taken down by a licensed faller. This project was above the experience and equipment level of the access staff members. After securing the tree falling area from the public entrance, the access team scraped and blew off the asphalt parking, cut and removed low hanging limbs with pole saws, removed all limbs in parking areas, and replaced regulatory signs.





**Other Work Performed:** Staff members have been busy treating moss on all restrooms, clearing and cleaning roof vents, then pressure washing the structures.



### **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Osprey and Cell Towers:** Biologist Tirhi completed three permits to allow cell tower operators to conduct necessary repairs on cell towers on which osprey had constructed nests. While implementation can vary slightly between districts, WDFW requires companies to obtain a permit for any nest removal and specifically encourages the removal outside the nesting season, which is October through February.

### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Lands 20/20:** Biologist Novack met with a local operator, talked with landowners, and provided a brief presentation to Grays Harbor County Commissioners regarding proposed acquisitions in the Elma area.

**Elk River Unit – Uplands Restoration:** Wildlife Program staff members continue removing Scotch Broom at the newly acquired Elk River Unit properties. Any underlying trees are left in place, but much of the cleared areas were nearly 100% broom or Himalayan blackberry. Work will continue through April 5 and possibly beyond.



*WDFW Elk River Unit - Lands recently cleared of Scotch Broom and Blackberry infestation*

**Centralia Mine Acquisition:** Biologist Tirhi continues to lead the CMATT (Centralia Mine Acquisition Technical Team). Tirhi arranged a third site visit, this time for CMATT staff members to assess water bodies and creeks/streams and to a work with Ducks Unlimited staff members to assess wetland creation and/or enhancement for waterfowl on the mine.



*Wetlands and ponds under consideration for recreation including waterfowl enhancement on the Centralia Mine and CMATT members discussing future pond management for the mine*

**5) Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

**6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

**7) Other**

Nothing for this installment.