

# Wildlife Program

Week of December 5, 2011

## **GAME DIVISION**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Canada Goose Research Project:** Wildlife Biologist Moore is working with the contracts office to receive the Arctic Goose Joint Venture grant for \$33,000. The grant is intended to purchase additional satellite platform terminal transmitters (PTTs) and help pay for veterinary and data expenses from the project. The project seeks to identify the nesting grounds of small Canada geese wintering in eastern Washington and pinpoint the most important wintering locations of the geese. Moore also recently updated the website with month-by-month maps of goose locations (October and April are particularly interesting). New maps can be found at: [http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/research/projects/waterfowl/canada\\_geese/location\\_map\\_index.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/research/projects/waterfowl/canada_geese/location_map_index.html)

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Pacific Flyway:** Waterfowl Section Manager Kraege attended two Pacific Flyway related meetings. Pacific Flyway is working with other flyways to evaluate potential for more harvest opportunity on pintail, and inclusion of the B.C. and Washington new breeding duck surveys in western mallard population estimates and modeling. Pacific Flyway is continuing to refine cackling Canada goose estimates from mark-resight surveys and develop a new population index technique for brant.

**Winter Waterfowl Surveys:** Biologists Mikal Moore and Rich Finger completed a two-day survey of wintering waterfowl in the North Columbia Basin. They estimated 298,574 total waterfowl and coots on the survey, including 240,006 total ducks, 152,624 mallards, 48,914 scaup, and 18,754 Canada geese. The greatest concentrations of mallards occurred on traditional reserves and private hunt clubs, particularly North Potholes, Winchester, Columbia Basin National Wildlife Reserve, and Eagle Lakes. Divers, particularly scaup, were most numerous on Wanapum and Wells Pools. Detailed results are posted on the Region 2 website at: [http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region2/waterfowl\\_surveys.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region2/waterfowl_surveys.html). Results of the South Basin survey conducted by Mike Livingston and Heidi Newsome (USFWS) are posted on the Region 3 website at: [http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region3/waterfowl\\_surveys.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region3/waterfowl_surveys.html). The next winter waterfowl survey will be the annual Midwinter Waterfowl Survey, conducted the first week of January.

#### **Private Lands/Access**

**Waterfowl Hunting Information:** The Corn Stubble Retention program map is now available from the Region 2 office, courtesy of John Cotton (Private Lands). We have received numerous calls on this topic. Hunters also appreciate the electronic copy of the map – program information and map are located through the following site: [http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/waterfowl/where\\_to\\_go.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/waterfowl/where_to_go.html).

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## **LANDS DIVISION**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Oak Creek Wildlife Area Addition:** WDFW has completed the purchase of 3,806.76 acres for the Rock Creek block of the Heart of the Cascades project. This property is located approximately 25 miles northwest of Yakima just west of the Oak Creek and Wenas wildlife areas. Four federally-listed and fifteen state-listed species occur in this area. This has been a partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The acquisition was funded jointly by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program under the Critical Habitat category and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under a Habitat Conservation Plan grant. The property will be managed as a unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area.

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES***

**Lake Sutherland Access:** After significant public outreach and coordination, the Lake Sutherland Access gate has been re-opened after a five-year fishing moratorium related to the removal of the two Elwha dams.

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## **OUTREACH**

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES***

**WildWatchcams:** The Vaux's swift cam was recently highlighted in a Smithsonian.com article *The Disappearing Habitats of the Vaux's Swifts*. Chimneys may be obsolete in modern buildings; however, they are crucial habitat for the bird species on the West Coast. The article's focus is on the Department's Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) funded wildlife cam. This cam is located in Monroe, Washington, within Franklin Elementary School's massive 40-foot chimney. The two 'chimney cams' capture the swift's action when 30,000 birds are present; the cameras are one of many operated by the Department as part of the WildWatch Cam project. To read more on the Vaux's Swifts in Monroe: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/The-Disappearing-Habitats-of-the-Vauxs-Swifts.html#> .

### ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE***

**Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Conservation Education Strategy Meeting:** AFWA's Conservation Education Strategy for kindergarten through grade 12 education culminated in a national meeting of education leaders of the federal natural resource agencies, National Science Foundation, and National Geographic Society, along with leaders of national environmental education organizations in Washington D.C. on November 30, 2011. Dr. Brad Smith (Fish and Wildlife Commissioner, Dean of the College of Environmental Studies at Western Washington University, and board member of the National Environmental Education

Foundation) hosted the meeting. Margaret Tudor, Environmental Education Project Coordinator for the Department, presented Washington State's Science Education approach, which now includes *field investigation*, both in science education standards and state tests. AFWA's Conservation Education Strategy also highlighted several resources, created by the Department and partners, which are available in a free downloadable format on the AFWA website for educators.

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## **WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

**Western Governors' Association Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool:** Land Conservation Section Manager Rodrick, Surveys and Forests Wildlife Section Manager Thompson and Biologist Sato represented the Diversity Division at a cross-program meeting on Phase 2 of this Western Governors' Association (WGA) project. Much of the discussion centered on reconciling western region needs and policies with state needs and policies. WGA Project Leader Hatch sent out a request for species and habitats of concern selection criteria, both including State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) and Connectivity. Audrey and Biologist Sato will meet next week to go over what information is needed for this effort. More information on this project is available at <http://www.westgov.org/wildlife>.

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## **REGION 1**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

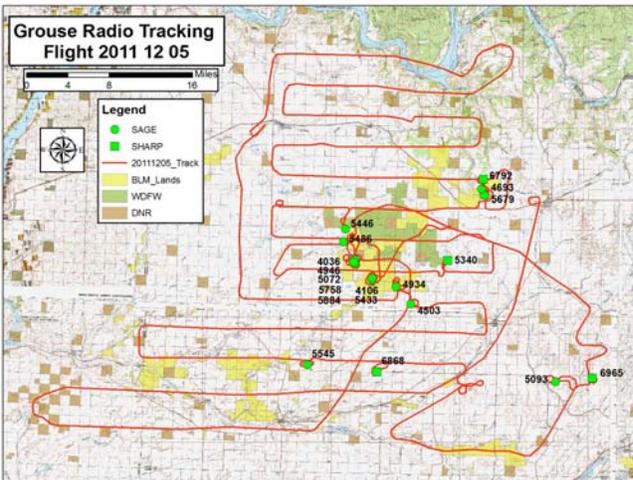
**Northeast Washington Moose Aerial Survey:** District Wildlife Biologists Jay Shepherd and Dana Base carried out three days of helicopter surveys of moose this week. A total of 21.1 hours flight time was accrued covering 30 quadrants within Game Management Units 101, 113, 117, and 121. Altogether 372 moose were observed including 172 bulls, 140 cows, 59 calves, and 1 unclassified moose, yielding a ratio of 123 bulls: 100 cows: 42 calves. Other game animals observed on the survey included 27 elk, 31 bighorn sheep (at Vulcan Mountain), a number of white-tailed and mule deer, coyotes, and 2 cougars.



*Bull moose photographed from helicopter survey on 12/06/2011.*



*Cow and calf moose photographed from helicopter survey on 12/07/2011.*



**Lincoln County Prairie Grouse Project:**

Biologists Atamian and Finch conducted a radio tracking flight for 26 missing sage and sharptail grouse. Nineteen of the missing birds were found, and three of the seven that were not found are likely wearing dead radios. Of note, two of the birds, one sharptail and one sage grouse, were found in the Bluestem drainage, which is farther east than birds have ever been found before.

## **Wildlife Areas**

**Blue Mountains Wildlife Area – Elk Fence:** Staff checked the last remaining section of elk fence in the Baker's Pond Area on Monday. There were a few trees on the fence, but other than that, there was no major damage. Monday's work completed a check and repair of all 23 miles of elk fence. Biologist Woodall also completed nailing wire to the new posts he installed in the Iron Springs area. Wildlife Area staff will go over the fence again in a few months, or sooner if major storms damage the fence.

## **Private Lands/Access**

**Lower Snake River Wind Energy Project:** Biologists Earl and Wik reviewed the Habitat Mitigation Agreement for Phase 1 of the Lower Snake River Wind Energy Project between Puget Sound Energy, WDFW, and Garfield County. Puget Sound Energy is required to fully address both temporary and permanent impacts to habitat from the construction of the wind farm. They have identified 140 acres along South Deadman Creek where they are proposing habitat enhancements and water developments in lieu of losses by the creation of roads and turbine pads. Earl, Wik, and other members of the District Team participated in a phone conference regarding the project. Several concerns were addressed, and afterwards WDFW staff decided not to stamp approval for the mitigation proposal.

## ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

## **Wildlife Recreation Notes**

**Colville District:** An immature Snowy Owl has been observed regularly by local birders all this week just outside of Colville in fields and pastures on the valley bottom. Although not a new record for northeastern Washington, this appears to be the first documented occurrence of Snowy Owls in at least Stevens County in many years and is also coincidental with a widespread southerly irruption of this species this winter.

**Spokane District:** Now is your opportunity to still go bird watching and see large flocks of Tundra Swans at local lakes. Also, if you are lucky you can visit Welch Canyon Rd near Lincoln and see Bighorn Sheep.

**Blue Mountains District:** An eruption of boreal birds is occurring throughout Washington. Numerous snowy owls and gyrfalcons are being reported throughout the grassland habitats.

**Blue Mountains Wildlife Area:** Steelhead fishing remains the hottest item on the wildlife areas. Fishing on the Grande Ronde River remains good. Upland bird hunting at the George Creek unit of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area is also fair. Meyers Ridge would be a good bet, though recreationists should use caution trying to drive up on Meyer's Ridge due to winter weather conditions.

## **Winter Conditions**

**Colville District:** Little measurable precipitation has fallen in District One since the last big snowstorm on about November 19<sup>th</sup>. This makes the third week since then in which most days

have been sunny, but with cold temperatures that have typically ranged from the teens to low 30's in degrees Fahrenheit. Moose that were surveyed by helicopter this week were often observed near the highest ridges at elevations well above 4,000 feet, another indication of snow depth not yet limiting to their movements and inducing moose migration to lower elevations.

**Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area:** No precipitation this week, clear early in the week turning to low cloud cover/heavy frost by late week. 30's and 40's during the day, down as low as 10 degrees overnight. No snow on the ground.

**Blue Mountains District:** No significant weather to date. Snow level is still minimal on the upper winter ranges.

***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Wildlife Areas**



**Revere Wildlife Area – Hay for Rancher:** Lincoln County rancher Mike Linstrum and his son Garrett took delivery of a harrow-bed load of hay from Revere Wildlife Area, on December 8<sup>th</sup>. Wildlife Area Manager Juli Anderson and Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Mike Finch accompanied the Linstrums to the site. This donation was arranged by WDFW Region 1 Enforcement as a one-time offer, to offset deer damage to Mr. Linstrum's hay grounds this year.

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**REGION 2**

**Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Coulee Creek Trail:** The Scotch Creek Wildlife Area manager enlisted the help of the Wenatchee WCC crew this week, in addition to two seasonal employees from the Wells Wildlife Area to continue working on the Coulee Creek trail. Work accomplished to date includes building the rock retaining wall to support added fill, and adding approximately 50 yards of clean fill.



Crews also cleared the trail tread of all loose rocks, and mowed grass and weeds. The rock slide was previously a barrier to some horse travelers. The slide has now been cleared of all large rock, with clean fill added. The long snow free fall and winter has provided us excellent working conditions. The frozen ground has proved valuable for equipment and vehicle travel and to haul tons of fill material to the trail site without any soil damage. Staff plan to finish for the year on December 15th. They are also working with the Okanogan Historical Society, and Mike O'Malley (WDFW) to develop interpretive signs to be installed next spring at trailheads and along the trail route.

**Sinlahekin Wildlife Areas – Recreational Opportunities:** Winter time scenery and recreation is upon us with ponderosa pines covered with frost and ice skaters reporting superb conditions on Conners Lake. Open water is difficult to come by with recent cold temperatures, thereby swans, geese and other migratory birds are pushing out of the Sinlahekin in search of open water. Cedar and bohemian waxwings can be seen in the valley, along with bald eagles, ravens and turkey. The following winter wildlife photos were taken by Biologist Haug:



*Bald eagles at Blue Lake*

*Brown Creeper*



*Bighorn sheep on Mt Hull east of Driscoll Island*

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## **REGION 3**

### **GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE**

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Waterfowl:** District Wildlife Biologist Livingston compiled waterfowl aerial survey data from last week's survey. A total of 58,000 ducks, 83% of which were mallards, were observed. In comparison, last year approximately 44,000 mallards were counted; however, the Snake River and Hanford Reach were not surveyed due to weather constraints. American widgeon, gadwall and goldeneye made up the majority of the other ducks observed. Slightly over 9,000 Canada geese were also observed.

#### **Winter Conditions**

Snow that fell before Thanksgiving has melted off at the lower and mid-elevations and deer and elk are still ranging across the landscape. There are several hundred elk in the vicinity of most feed sites, west of Ellensburg and Yakima, but natural forage is still available and feeding hasn't started. Temperatures have been in the 30's during the day, with lows in the teens and 20's. For the upcoming week, temperatures are expected to be in the 30's during the day, with lows in the teens and 20's, and sunny to partly cloudy throughout the week.

## **REGION 4**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Cougar 3-Year Package:** Biologist Kertson compiled and analyzed data from his western Washington study area to estimate cougar densities part of the science team's efforts to estimate cougar populations and harvest limits throughout the state. His estimates of 0.23 males  $\geq 2$  years of age per 100 km<sup>2</sup>, 1.35 females  $\geq 2$  years of age per 100 km<sup>2</sup>, and 1.59 cougars  $\geq 2$  years of age per 100 km<sup>2</sup> are nearly identical to cougar density estimates for northeast Washington and the total density estimate is similar to all of the Washington study areas. The data was made available to the other members of the science team and will be used in future discussions and analyses as needed.

**Lake Forest Park Coyote Outreach Open House:** Biologist Anderson represented WDFW at Lake Forest Park at an open house regarding recent nuisance coyote incidents. The event provided opportunity to discuss urban coyote, raccoon and other urban wildlife species that occasionally will have a local individual animal develop unnatural, nuisance behavior. These individual animals have a propensity for human-wildlife conflict due to their altered behavior. Unfortunately, these problem animals are most often a result of direct and indirect human feeding. Staff from city planning, police, council members and WDFW were all there to discuss appropriate conflict-reduction techniques and preventative considerations with local community members.

**Lower Snoqualmie Valley Stillwater Wildlife Management Unit Bat Blitz:** Biologist Anderson and members of Bats Northwest who volunteered earlier this year to conduct a pilot area "bat blitz" at Stillwater Wildlife Management Unit met to go through bat call data with Biologist Falxa. Although this type of effort only provides a late season snapshot and partial list of species present, it was very helpful in initiation of a list of what species do occur on that property. Species determined from the effort include Townsend's big-eared bat, Western long-eared myotis, California myotis, Yuma myotis, little brown bat, and big brown bat. A big thanks to Biologist Falxa for assistance in the screening of bat calls and call analysis.

**Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study:** District 14 Biologist DeBruyn worked to get Sci. Tech Frank Lapsansky on board as the swan specialist. DeBruyn and Lapsansky were trained how to take swan organ samples by Tech Otto and sampled 20 Swan carcasses that had accumulated. DeBruyn and Lapsansky responded to reports of sick and injured swans and surveyed roost areas. DeBruyn consulted with local tribes regarding protocols for their receiving of swan parts for ceremonial purposes.

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Stillwater Riparian Restoration Project:** Manager Paulson met with the Sound Salmon Solutions conservation group that has been mobilizing volunteers to restore riparian areas on the Stillwater unit. The Harris Creek project is funded by a King County Conservation District grant, Ducks Unlimited, REI and Boeing. Volunteers will be planting trees and shrubs along Harris Creek for an Earth Day celebration. Manager Paulson also discussed future restoration projects on the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area.

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE***

## **Wildlife Management**

**WDFW Outreach to Elementary Students:** Biologist Anderson presented “Urban Wildlife in the Burien area - How to Keep Wildlife Wild” to a hundred students in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades at Gregory Heights Elementary in Burien. The hands-on presentations to each class provided opportunity for the students to study specimens of local wildlife closely, ask questions, and learn how to work with their family and community to keep urban wildlife from developing nuisance patterns.

**Shorebird Monitoring Training Session:** District Biologist Milner, partnered with Pilchuck Audubon Society’s project coordinator, conducted a training session for citizen science volunteers who will be evaluating the occurrence of over ocean flying by shorebirds in Skagit and Port Susan Bays this winter.

**Winter Marine Waterfowl Surveys:** Despite the continuing foggy weather, Biologists Cyra, Evenson, and Murphie were able to successfully continue the annual winter waterfowl surveys in the marine waters of the Salish Seas. Areas in central and southern Puget Sound, Admiralty Inlet, and north Hood Canal were flown. These annual surveys provide trend data on the health of marine waterfowl populations wintering on the Salish Sea, and are also used in the annual harvest setting negotiations in the Pacific Flyway for waterfowl.

## **Private Lands/Access**

**Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Programs:** Biologist Roozen and Technicians Otto and Deyo continued repair and maintenance of Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program parking and blinds. Biologist Roozen and Technicians Otto and Deyo continued public use surveys for Waterfowl Quality Hunt Units.

## **Wildlife Areas**

**Island Unit:** Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Schuster and Natural Resource Tech Hacker met with local landing craft vendors to examine the potential for transport of farming and mowing equipment to and from the Island Unit in the Skagit River delta. Local waterfowl hunters are working with Wildlife Area staff to identify the most efficient route into the Freshwater Slough from Skagit Bay Estuary.

**Wiley Restoration Project:** Restoration Coordinator Windrope facilitated the Wiley Work Group meeting on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>. Key outcomes include that the new pump will be installed in mid – January. There is a plan for additional pumping capacity if we have heavy rains before then. The tide gate inspection revealed that all pipes are assumed to be damaged and the group is ready to begin discussing design alternatives to fix the tide gate.

## ***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

## **Wildlife Management**

**Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program:** Biologist Anderson provided for Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary requests. In conversation with a new graduate student at University of Washington who is gearing up to conduct a citizen-scientist based pollinator study, Anderson offered backyard data for her study area. The student later relayed that the WDFW backyard data has been a huge help in increasing her sample size and participation effort.

#### ***GOAL 4: MAINTAIN A HIGHLY SKILLED AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE.***

##### **Wildlife Management**

**Geospatial Modeling Environment:** Biologist Kertson spent some time teaching himself how to use Geospatial Modeling Environment (GME) to conduct spatial and landscape analyses. GME is a part of a software package that replaces the very popular ArcMap extension, Hawth's Tools, which is not compatible with ArcMap 10. Biologist Kertson with the assistance of Westside GIS Analyst Duff successfully conducted a number of spatial analyses that will be very helpful in his duties as a District Wildlife Biologist.

**Pollinator Conservation Planning Course:** Biologist Anderson; along with Biologist Milner and Managers Kessler and Schuster; attended the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation short course on pollinator conservation planning. The course went through current issues in native pollinator populations, integration of techniques to attract and provide habitat for native pollinators in agricultural and backyard settings, and other related topics. The course was very popular with a full lecture room, held at the Mount Vernon WSU Extension Research Center.

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## **REGION 5**

#### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

##### **Wildlife Management**

**ALEA/Volunteers:** Biologist Anderson met with a private citizen in White Salmon that is interested in applying for an ALEA grant to build wood duck nesting boxes in Skamania and Klickitat counties. Over the past year he has been volunteering at the at Conboy National Wildlife Refuge building and placing wood duck and bluebird nest boxes on refuge lands. His current proposal would expand the program to other sites in the Columbia River Gorge.



**Western Pond Turtles:** Biologist Holman initiated work on the annual report to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), summarizing work done related to western pond turtle management in the Columbia River Gorge area. This year various tasks were undertaken, including continuation of the head-start program which resulted in collection of 74 juvenile turtles. Other activities included significant habitat improvements at all four pond turtle sites, mark/re-capture population investigations, environmental education, turtle releases, increased

predator control efforts, etc. Thanks to BPA for their 2011 funding of the Western pond turtle work. Please see photo of BPA's Ms. Branum (center) and her associates at the Beacon Rock State Park pond turtle release during the summer of 2011.

**Western Pond Turtles:** Biologists Van Leuven and Holman poured over data in the Regional archives to collect information needed by Science Division that will help generate a population estimation method for western pond turtles. The model in development relies on the capture history of individual animals as well as their length and weight at the time of capture. The utility of a centralized pond turtle database for the State was again apparent during this effort.

**Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Elk Survey:** The first monthly winter elk survey was conducted by Biologist Miller on December 5<sup>th</sup> to assess herd composition and wintering elk concentration on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area. A total of 116 elk were observed. The herd composition of a group of 67 elk was 31:100 calf: cow ratio (not all elk were classified). There was a group of 14 bulls (raghorns and spikes) on one of the river islands. Two radio collared elk were observed. Elk appeared in good condition and no mortalities were observed from the viewpoint.

## Wildlife Areas

### Cowlitz Wildlife Area

**Peterman Hill Unit:** Cowlitz Wildlife Area assistant manager Vanderlip submitted a SEPA checklist containing plans to abandon 23 miles of logging roads and spurs on the Peterman Hill unit. The checklist was given a “Determination of Non-Significance (DNS)” after a public comment period and an agency review. These abandonments are not for Road Maintenance and Abandonment Plans (RMAP), but instead for shared roads under agreement from a timber reservation held with Green Diamond Resources.

Wildlife Area manager Grabski and assistant manager Vanderlip met on the Peterman Hill Unit with Green Diamond Resources (GDR) to discuss which roads to start abandoning this winter with their road contractors. Those roads identified for abandonment in sections 19 and 24 will be completed this winter while contractors are maintaining others roads in the area. The Department of Natural Resources will be called in at a later date to approve the work.



### Shillapoo Wildlife Area

**English Ivy Control at Shillapoo Wildlife Area:** Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald controlled English ivy at three sites in the South and Vancouver Lake Units of the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. He used a new method of spraying the foliage with a glyphosate and pelargonic acid mixture, which was recommended to Wildlife Area staff by Clark County Weed Management. In order to use this mixture under our BPA funding, Hauswald had previously coordinated a consultation with NOAA fisheries. Two of the three sites were found within the last week, and a survey of other possible infested areas will be made this winter to keep this invasive plant from getting a foothold on the wildlife area (English Ivy Picture).

### **Mt St Helens Wildlife Area**

**Storm Damage:** Wildlife Area Manager Calkins revisited photo points along the North Fork Toutle that are used to document changes in vegetation, erosion, river movements, and the performance of structures installed over the past several years to discourage erosion of elk winter range habitat. Calkins found that the river had gone around the back of the uppermost large “lateral wall” type structure where it met the bank line and a small amount of erosion had occurred. Previously everything looked fine from a distance and the damage was not evident without getting out to the site. There now is a gap of about 40-50 feet between the structure and the bank, which increases the chance of erosion. It was apparent that the structure had stood up to the forces of the river for some time before the breach occurred as there were 3-4 feet of sediment and debris collected on the upstream side. Some of the other logjam structures are also known to be impacted while others performed quite well. Staff will continue to monitor the situation and will be consulting with WDFW engineers on whether to attempt some sort of repair to the upper structure.

**Monitoring:** Wildlife Area Manager Calkins retook photo points at two forage enhancement sites that had not been monitored since 2009. The photos illustrate progress in the form of increased growth of grasses and forbs intended to increase forage availability for elk wintering here.

### **Klickitat Wildlife Area**

**Grazing Monitoring:** Klickitat Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven revisited the grazing permit area in the lower Klickitat River Canyon to inspect the property. Most of the site is covered with oak woodlands, with a few groves of conifers and some open grassland. The area most used by the cattle seems to be a shady oak grove adjacent to more open pastures nearby. Van Leuven verified details about the site that were provided by the permittee, and prepared for the initial resource assessment with input from the District Team. Habitat Biologist Fornes provided a list of priority species and habitats thought to occur on the property.

## ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

### **Wildlife Areas**

#### **Shillapoo Wildlife Area**

**New Duck Blind at Shillapoo:** Habitat Technician Boylan and Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald built a new duck blind to replace an old blind that had rotted and was beyond repair. The blind was placed in the old Shillapoo lakebed in one of the fallow agricultural fields approximately 20 yards from the old blind along a drainage ditch, facing a strip of spring grain that has started to flood. The blind was placed in an area that is one of the most used fields by waterfowl, and waterfowl hunters.

#### **Mt St Helens Wildlife Area:**

**Winter Range Closure:** Wildlife Area Manager Calkins checked signs posted previously and placed additional ones along portions of the Northern boundary of the closure area. The closure not only protects elk from disturbance but also makes it more likely that they will be in open areas where they can be seen from viewpoints above the Wildlife Area.

### **Private Lands/Access**

**Hunting Access:** Technician White contacted 5 hunters during patrols in GMU 388 and 578. Technician White accompanied Law Enforcement Officer Bolton during a patrol, which included private timberlands enrolled in Feel Free to Hunt.

***GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.***

**Wildlife Management**

**Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study –Body Condition:** Regional Wildlife Program and Customer Service Staff spoke with many individuals who have drawn antlerless elk tags and have been requested to participate in collecting samples for the St. Helens Elk Study. Collection volume has increased recently with high-success rate hunts occurring in GMUs 550 Coweeman, 524 Margaret, 556 Toutle, and 554 Yale. Organ collections continue through December 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Wildlife Areas**

**Cowlitz Wildlife Area**

**Davis Lake Unit:** The Allen Barn on the Davis Lake Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area has been burglarized twice within the past year. In response to this event, the Wildlife Area staff have taken measures to prevent and deter future break-ins. Among the measures taken: electricity has been brought into the building to provide security lighting, a steel entry door was installed, and the large sliding doors have had their locking mechanisms improved. The Wildlife Area staff and Enforcement have made it a point of monitoring the building on a regular basis, which is located approximately 4 miles from the office.

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**Winter Conditions:**

**D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:**

**Past Weather:** November temperatures were below normal and precipitation was slightly above average. Snow accumulated in mid and low elevations early in the month, but was later melted off by a major warm rainstorm. The early part of December was dry, but temperatures were below normal.

**Short-Term Forecast:** Conditions are expected to remain cold with valley temperatures ranging from the low 30's to low 40's. Moderate precipitation is expected with snow levels potentially falling below 2500 feet.

**Long-Term Forecast:** The longer term outlook maps suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter and into early spring.

**Habitat:** Growing conditions were good over the spring and summer which should have produced above average forage growth. Use of grasses and forbs on the Wildlife Area has been light to date and only minimal use of shrubs has been noted. *Staff discovered that one of the largest bank protection structures was damaged during the November rainstorm, potentially increasing the risk of loss of forage habitat to erosion. Only a very minor loss occurred during the storm as a result of the breach.*

**Snow Depths:** Areas below 3000 feet remain mostly snow free. Snowpack is slightly below average. See attached spreadsheet for detailed information.

**Animal Concentrations:** No unusual concentrations noted to date. The first monthly winter elk survey of the Mudflow Unit monitoring area was conducted this week. A total of 116 elk were present. One group was classified, which had a composition of 31 calves/100 cows.

**Animal Condition:** No reports to date of animals in poor condition that can be attributed to winter conditions. Animals observed to date appear to be in good condition.

**Mortality:** None to report.

**Public Contacts:** None to report related to winter conditions.

*The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area lying East of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle, and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30 to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.*

### **District 9: Winter Conditions**

**Past Weather:** Weather in the South Cascades has been very dry over the past week. There has been no new precipitation/snow recently and December conditions for deer and elk are favorable.

**Winter Severity:** The Klickitat Wildlife Area is snow-free and forage habitat is still available. There is little concern for the current severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. The eastern portions of Klickitat County have had no snow accumulation and deer range is in good condition.

**Habitat:** Habitat is open and available below 3000 ft.

**Animal Concentrations:** No unusual concentrations seen due to inclement conditions.

**Animal Condition:** Animals appear to be in good condition and no winter stress has been reported.

**Mortality:** None documented this week.

**Public Contacts:** No concerns raised by the public this week.

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## **REGION 6**

### ***GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE***

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Swans in Dungeness Basin:** Biologist Ament gathered the carcasses of one immature tundra swan (collected by Biologist McMillan Nov 20th) and one immature trumpeter swan (captured by Scott Gordon and transported to Rehab center where it died after some treatment). These two carcasses were shipped to Madison Lab as instructed by State Wildlife Veterinarian Kristin

Mansfield/Assistant Ella Rowland. Follow-up discussions between Biologist McMillan and Kristin Veterinarian Mansfield spelled out further direction that the necropsies will not be conducted on any swans that have had rehabilitation efforts (treatments). There has also been an ill swan observed along the Three Crabs Road. Martha Jordan (Swan Society and WDFW volunteer) had been coordinating with local residents and some volunteers she has established to collect the ill swan. Martha was going to make a decision on whether the swan would be a good candidate for rehabilitation and coordinate with WDFW.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Chinook Estuary:** Guzlas worked with R5 Estuary MOA team to conduct experimental tidegate openings while recording data throughout the estuary. Staff met with Pacific Northwest National Laboratories staff on December 5 to discuss and analyze the recently completed draft powerpoint presentation - *Chinook River Hydrodynamic and Hydrologic Models: Application to Scenarios with New Tide Gate*. This modeling effort will largely determine the long term management plan for the tidegates associated with the Chinook estuary.

**Prairie Habitat:** Gibbons and VanBlaricom worked alongside prairie habitat specialists on a variety of restoration projects at Scatter Creek and West Rocky Prairie. Primary activities included fescue plug plantings within all of the 2011 prescribed burn units. All of the Scot's broom mowing was completed at the West Rocky unit for 2011 by VanBlaricom.

### ***GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.***

### **Private Lands/Access**

**Waterfowl Quality Hunts:** Biologist Skriletz and a volunteer had to move and rebuild a WQHP duck blind that was damaged when cows were unexpectedly returned to the field. Three truckloads of gravel were delivered to improve the parking location for two of the blinds.

Biologist Skriletz worked with volunteers to improve the new WQHP blinds in District 15. Despite one brief flood event in November, most of the blinds are still high and dry due to unseasonably low water levels.