

# Wildlife Program

Week of April 2-8, 2012

## **WILDLIFE OUTREACH DIVISION**

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

**WildWatchcams – Eaglecam:** Chuck Gibilisco, Watchable Wildlife Section lead, spoke with King 5, Seattle TV about arranging a direct link to the Lake Washington eaglecam and perhaps a link to the Kiwanis heroncam on the King 5 website. In 2011, the eaglecam was featured on the King 5 website.

**Falconcam:** Chuck Gibilisco and Chris Anderson are responding to a Washington Mutual inquiry about broadcasting nesting Peregrine falcons on their Seattle building to the Internet for 2012. Currently, images of the nesting birds are broadcast only within the building and to several businesses that have flat screen monitors in their offices. Another planned falconcam at Snoqualmie Falls is temporarily on hold as new technologies are being explored to capture images across and through the heavy mist created by the cascading falls. The possibility exists for WDFW in the near future to feature and compare urban falcon nesting behaviors to those of a more natural setting at Snoqualmie Falls. Either or both of the existing falcon cams are searching for support and visibility offered by the popular WDFW WildWatchcam project.

**Hunting Pamphlet Photo Contest – Youth Hunting:** For the 2012 Hunting Pamphlet cover photo, Assistant Director Nate Pamplin decided to host a contest to select a quality photo of a youth with a big game animal. An eblast was sent to all deer and elk license buyers from 2010, 2011 and 2012, totaling more than 68,000 hunters. For a picture to be eligible for the pamphlet, the image must be a picture of a youth (under age 18 at time of picture) wearing appropriate blaze orange and following all hunter safety practices; and with a harvested big game (deer, elk or bear). The image must be tastefully composed, high resolution, print-quality.

After the eblast was sent, the photos came pouring in! Most of the photos were added to the Youth Hunting section of the WDFW Photo Gallery which climbed from one page to 50 pages in the week! Special thanks to Wendy Ware, Walt Cooper, Marjorie Creekpau, Jodi Hoye (Habitat Program), Chuck Gibilisco and James Chandler for jumping in to help manage this rewarding response. Also shouldering this huge influx of submissions was John Burrows of the Web Team.

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

**Wildlife Outreach Volunteers:** Volunteer Management Coordinator, James Chandler, worked on Performance and Development Plan Evaluation and Performance Expectations. James Chandler is currently drafting simplified guidelines for WDFW staff to work with volunteers, which will be available through the intranet, and under the CERVIS (Community Event Registration volunteer Information System) administration login. The first draft will be presented to Wildlife Outreach supervisor and staff for review April 6, 2012. Chandler also reviewed images submitted by the public for the Big Game Pamphlet cover contest. James is currently

preparing to evaluate Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grants as a member of the ALEA review panel.

**Citizen Science:** Citizen Science Coordinator Margaret Tudor provided “Field Investigation” for Citizen Science training on a webinar for educators nationwide, offered jointly by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and National Environmental Education Foundation for Environmental Education Week. This webinar will be used on a future self-help WDFW website for educators. Tudor also completed a draft document for review that integrates across the Wildlife Science and Lands Divisions and Outreach Section to implement the Ecological Integrity Assessment Citizen Science Project.

## **WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION**

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

**Natural Heritage Advisory Council:** The Natural Heritage Program has received some funding commitments for FY13: DNR proprietary funds \$200k, \$50k FWS-WA, \$75k Sec. 6 rare plant work, \$150k from legislature (pending). Other funds may be available for contract work: EPA eastside wetlands assessment, smart phone application for rare plant field guide and data logging.

## **REGION 1**

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

#### **Wildlife Areas**

**Z-lake Fishing/Collaboration:** Wildlife Area Assistant Manager (WAAM) Mike Finch and the Spokane Fly Fishers' (SFF's) Curt Erickson posted two signs near Z-lake commemorating the cooperative aeration project. Later, WAAM Finch and Wildlife Area Manager (WAM) Juli Anderson planted a third sign where the driveway to the old Welch place meets Telford Road and ordered a fourth to be used as a spare. Aeration ensures that planted rainbow trout survive the winter.



Left: SFF's Erickson at Z-lake, 4/3/12

Right: WAAM Mike Finch, 4/4/12



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

**McDonald Road Access Project:** Private Lands Biologist Dawn Davis received Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) to begin work on the McDonald access project. Initiated by Biologist Scott Rasley, this project is the result of collaborative efforts between Lyon's Ferry Fish Hatchery, the Wildlife Program, and the Habitat Program (including Biologists Schirm, Karl, and Grandstaff). Premier Excavation will be donating all of their time and equipment at no cost to WDFW. The Walla Walla River supports popular salmon and steelhead fisheries; however, nearly all access to the Walla Walla River is on private lands. The ramp modifications will allow hatchery staff to release fish in a manner that is safer for fish and staff and will provide access to fishing opportunities in an area that is sometimes inaccessible for angling and/or difficult for the general public to get permission to access.

## **REGION 2**

### **Region 2 – Okanogan, Douglas, Chelan, Grant and Adams Counties**

**Regional Wildlife Program Manager: Matt Monda**

#### **DISTRICT BIOLOGISTS**

**District 5: Grant / Adams District - Rich Finger / Vacant**

**Weather Conditions:** Generally cool and mild conditions with highs in mid-50s and lows in mid-30s. Cranes and curlews have arrived to the Columbia Plateau. One report from a Warden area agronomist suggests some burrowing owls arrived to the plateau just this week. A snow bunting was observed in the northwestern portion of the Gloyd Seeps unit. It was just north of road 16 on the west boundary of the unit frequenting the recently burned annual grassland on private land. Sandpipers are using Mansfield pond mudflats that are slowly flooding back up. Sandhill cranes were also observed on Mansfield Pond in the Gloyd Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, likely for the first time in many years.

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



**Washington Ground Squirrels:** Biologist Finger trapped on Sage Hills Golf Course to capture a handful of males to supplement reintroduction sites. Trapping conditions were poor and despite having removed ~60 females from the area trapped, Finger caught several females for every male removed (photo of nursing female). Finger also coordinated and provided some assistance to two crews trapping reintroduction sites to evaluate which individuals remain on site and their reproductive status. Poor weather conditions limited our ability to get trapping done and additional trapping will be needed next week.

#### **District 6: Okanogan District - Scott Fitkin / Jeff Heinlen**

**Weather Conditions:** Spring is finally here in earnest with consecutive days in the 50s in the Methow for the first time since last fall. Green grass is plentiful on many deer spring ranges with flowers beginning to emerge. Spring has progressed a bit further in the Okanogan valley.

**Weekender Opportunities:** The general spring turkey season opens next Sunday. Snow will limit access somewhat, particularly at middle elevations and above in the Methow Watershed.

Dusky grouse courtship display behavior is at its peak right now and males are readily heard and seen, particularly early and late in the day. Birds are often fairly approachable and offer great watchable wildlife opportunities. Most units of the Methow wildlife area are good bets for observations. Look and listen for grouse in areas that are a mix of shrub-steppe and ponderosa pine forest. Deer are also quite numerous and visible in these same areas.



*Male dusky grouse*



*Female dusky grouse*

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



**North Cascades Lynx Research Project:** Great wrap-up to the season and capture phase of this project. Wildlife Biologists Fitkin and Heinlen along with USFS staff placed a replacement GPS collar on Houdini (see picture), an adult male captured in each of the last two seasons. His existing collar was an older unit with limited battery life. The replacement should function for a full 12 months, giving us unbiased winter habitat use information that is not affected by baited trap

placement. Such data does not currently exist for this animal. All told we had a very successful season with two adult male and two adult female captures in the Methow study area. On the last day of trapping we almost had what was likely a third female, but she had somehow squeezed out of an opening in the trap before the crew arrived. We will continue to get data downloads from these animals over the coming year. In the interim, the project is transitioning into the data analysis phase.

**Deer Management:** Biologists Fitkin and Heinlen began spring deer surveys in the Okanogan District. Deer are classified as fawn or adult, and results help us estimate over-winter fawn mortality, which in turn helps us shape hunting season recommendations. We are early in the process, but no big surprises thus far in the fawn:adult ratio; however, Biologist Heinlen did spot and photograph what appears to be a fawn showing fairly severe hair loss. This could be a case of the same hair-slip syndrome caused by an exotic louse seen in other Districts to the south and west. So far, just the one animal has exhibited the obvious hair-loss pattern, but we will be looking closely for other cases over the next week or so.



*Mule deer fawn with possible hair-slip syndrome*

## **District 7: Chelan / Douglas District – David Volsen / Jon Gallie**

**Weekly for March 22-31, 2012**

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

**Sage Grouse:** Biologist Gallie met with the new Sage Grouse Initiative Biologist working with NRCS in Ephrata. The priorities of this position will be to work with landowners to implement habitat improvements on their land outlined in the SGI through NRCS grant programs. Gallie took them out to ride along on some lek counts and to get a feel for the Douglas County landscape including examples of remaining shrubsteppe habitat, CRP, and SAFE fields, areas of cattle grazing, and levels of habitat/wheat fragmentation. They also agreed to pass along grouse observations and contact information from landowners in areas where we do not have any documented leks.

**Mule Deer:** Biologist Volsen worked with the USFS to evaluate proposed prescribed burning projects on the Entiat Ranger District. The USFS has burning projects on mule deer winter range scheduled for this spring. A final evaluation of the distribution of deer relative available spring ranges will be made prior to giving the OK to burn. While lower elevations on the Ranger

District are snow free, upper elevation remain snow packed, limiting movements of deer onto habitat in the upper county.

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

**Mountain Goats:** Biologist Gallie conducted a late winter/early spring mountain goat counts in Chelan County in the Icicle Creek, Tumwater Canyon, Nason Ridge, and White River drainages. Goats are readily visible this time of year as they come to lower elevations to access snow free areas and green up of plants in the rocky terrain. A total of 43 (35 adults and 8 kids) goats were counted in Icicle Creek in two main groups, one on the Snow Creek and other on Cashmere Mtn. Counts in the valley have been between 40-50 goats over the last three years. Tumwater Canyon had 25 (19 adults and 6 kids) in two groups. Effective counts on Nason Ridge and White River have not been completed due to poor weather conditions. Up to 13 goats (10 adults and 3 kids) were detected on Nason Ridge (20-25 is normal), and only 7 goats were detected thus far on White River.



**Mountain Goats on Snow Creek wall. There are 8 of them if you can find them all!**



Lek site in Douglas County.



Tundra Swans in Douglas County.

## SPECIES RECOVERY

### Pygmy Rabbit Recovery - Penny Becker

**Weather Conditions:** Sagebrush Flat Wildlife Area has greened significantly after good rainfall and sunny days.

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

**Reports to Collaborating Agencies:** Research Scientist Becker worked on preparing reports on translocations of wild rabbits for the Nevada Department of Wildlife and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. The report outlines trapping locations, documents new areas in which we scouted for pygmy rabbit habitat and shows our success at capturing 47 rabbits in their states March 4-21.



*Chad Eidson and David Volsen, WDFW, remove a pygmy rabbit from the trap (left) and a pygmy rabbit sits in a transport bin with sagebrush and lettuce (right).*



*A pygmy rabbit kit (left) and wild-born adult (right) are caught on trail cameras next to burrows in the large enclosures.*

**Pygmy Rabbit Husbandry:** Biologist Eidson spent time on Sagebrush Flat wildlife area providing supplemental feed to the pygmy rabbits in large enclosures. Eidson and Becker

continued monitoring of the rabbits in the enclosures via visual observations and trail cameras. One translocated wild rabbit mortality occurred this week. Also this week the first of the 2012 breeding season's kits emerged from natal burrows in the large enclosures, with 4-5 kits observed this week and caught on camera. They weigh approximately 80 grams now.

## **WILDLIFE AREAS**

### **Methow Wildlife Area Complex - Tom McCoy / Rob Wottlin / John Haegan**

**Weekender Opportunities:** There are mule deer all over the lower elevations of the Methow Valley. Anyone interested in seeing them in large numbers, and up close, this is a great time to visit the Methow. Bluebirds are starting to make their appearance. Spring must be coming!

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

**Eagle:** You never quite know what you are going to see on any given day! Last week Methow Manager Tom McCoy and Watershed Steward, Ken Bevis, were discussing local issues just outside the front door of the HQ when Ken went silent and pointed down into the stairwell in front of the office. Down at the bottom of the stairs was a mature, and fully alert, female bald eagle? After a number of calls District Biologist Scott Fitkin was able to get a rehabilitation specialist from Oroville to come pick up the bird. While there are a few wild and unsubstantiated theories about how it got there, the truth is that we still really have no idea.





### **Wells Wildlife Area Complex –Dan Peterson / Ann Winters / Fidel Rios**

**Weather Conditions:** Lows in the 30's, mid to upper 50's for highs. Sky conditions varied from mostly sunny to overcast.

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

**Deer Survey – Pateros Unit:** Friday, Dan, Wildlife Biologist Jeff Heinlen and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Bob Fischer conducted the annual deer survey of the Pateros Unit. At the end of the three hour hike they had seen and classified a total of 103 deer. See Jeff's report for more information and also details of his presentation on bighorn sheep Friday night to the Okanogan Highlands Alliance.

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

**Field Trip with WSU & U of I Sagebrush Habitat Ecology Class:** Saturday, Area biologists Dan Peterson and Ann Winters joined Research Scientist Mike Schroeder to lead a day-long field trip for 18 graduate students from WSU and U of I. Organized by instructors Lisa Shipley (WSU) and Janet Rachow (U of I) the group had a tour of northern Douglas County that included stops at a sage lek, Moses Coulee, the Chester Butte, Dormaier and West Foster Creek wildlife area units. Discussion topics included natural history and ecology of sage and sharp-tailed grouse, the challenges and rewards of shrub-steppe restoration, Federal farm conversation programs and their benefit to shrub-steppe dependent wildlife, geologic history of the area and that yes, we don't always have snow on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March. Participants had decent views of displaying sage grouse, good questions for the WDFW staff and in spite of the weather a very enjoyable time.

**Truck Acquisition from Fort Lewis:** Thanks to the work of Colleen Chandler and Ross Fuller our wildlife areas are now the proud owners of three surplus Army trucks. Staff spent two days this week to drive them from Fort Lewis back to Brewster. Mike Finch, Assistant Wildlife Area Manager from Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area graciously agreed to travel with us to assist. His help was invaluable particularly when trouble shooting one of the trucks that refused start following a pit stop at the Covington Fred Meyer.



Surplus Army trucks.

## **Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex – Greg Fitzgerald / Brian Cole / Roger Nelson**

**Weekender Opportunities:** Spring migrating waterfowl and shorebirds are flocking to the managed wetlands in the Gloyd Seeps and Desert Units. Canada geese, Tundra swans, Mallard and Pintail ducks are the most common, but many other species of waterfowl and shorebirds are also using the managed wetlands as the water slowly draws down for the spring. Now that the waterfowl hunting season has ended, access restrictions have been lifted at the Frenchman Ponds and Winchester Regulated Access Areas and may be visited for wildlife viewing at any time.



Birdwatcher's Section, corner of Dodson and Frenchman Hills Roads.

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

**Managed Wetlands:** Assistant Manager Brian Cole started the spring drawdown of the Frenchman Ponds. Water levels in the ponds are controlled with drop board riser water control structures, water is held in the wetland cells through the fall and winter to provide waterfowl hunting opportunities. Water is released in the spring in a controlled manner to quickly dry out some wetland cells for equipment access and others more slowly to stimulate growth of the desired early-successional stage wetland vegetation.



Millet in Frenchman Ponds wetland cell 7, July 2010

## **Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Complex - Jim Olson / Brian DuPont / Mike Nelson**

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

**Sharp-tailed Grouse Lek Surveys:** Wildlife Area Manager Olson started lek surveys on Scotch Creek this week. After finding zero the first day on the SC lek (obviously flushed before I arrived) a second attempt the next day had 18 total birds on the lek. This is the highest count on this particular lek since I have been keeping records. A count on the Happy Hill lek the next day had only 1 bird, which arrived after I had passed by the lek. Looks like another occasion when the birds were flushed before my arrival. There are lots of Northern Harrier hawks cruising the ridge tops every morning. Counts will continue now on most favorable days, and progress northward toward Chesaw.

**Life on the Edge: Impacts of Habitat Fragmentation on Grassland Songbirds.** Manager Olson met with Elly Knight, a graduate student from British Columbia who is working on this topic. We located study sites on the Eder unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area where she will be setting up plots for the second year of her study.



### **Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Complex - Dale Swedberg / Justin Haug**

**Weekender Opportunities:** Bird watching – most common wintertime birds, e.g., Bird watching opportunities include species previously listed in weekly reports - Red-tailed hawks, pileated woodpeckers, ring-necked pheasant, American goldfinches, pine grosbeak, American robin, northern shrike, northern harriers, redpolls, trumpeter swans, Bohemian waxwings, Clark's nutcrackers, black-capped chickadees, northern flicker - red-shafted variety, sharp-shinned hawk, and hooded mergansers, rough-legged hawk, prairie falcon and red-winged blackbirds. Immature bald eagles are in the area. Assistant manager Haug spotted a newly constructed Bald Eagle nest with nesting birds near Conner's Lake.

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

**Volunteer Trail Maintenance:** Assistant Manager Haug met with representatives of the Okanogan County Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen to discuss the clearing of the Sinlahekin trail this weekend. A total of 11 people assisted in the trail maintenance with a significant amount of work done south of Blue Lake near Hunter's Camp. This is an annual event that helps a great deal to keep this trail clear. Their work on the wildlife area is very valued.

**PRIVATE LANDS - John Cotton / Eric Braaten / JoAnn Wisniewski**

**Weather Conditions:** Temperatures for the week were consistently below the historical average with highs in the fifties and lows below freezing five of the seven days.

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

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):** Biologist Cotton with the assistance of Natural Resource Workers Osborne and Steele finished a shrub planting project in Adams County that was started last fall but a portion required additional ground preparation. Natural Resource Workers Osborne and Steele applied glyphosate to the area between irrigated shrub rows that was seeded to warm season grass to take out cheatgrass. Biologist Cotton visited six sites scheduled to be planted to shrubs and warm season grass. We flagged locations for shrub rows and determined additional ground prep activities that must be completed prior to planting.

**Weekender Opportunities:** Douglas County waterfowl



Early Morning surprise –White-tailed Jack Rabbit – Douglas County, WA



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

**Douglas County Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse Lek Counts:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten spent one morning counting grouse on three separate leks in north central Douglas County with 2 inches of snow on the ground. This made for some challenging counts. 38 Sage Grouse and 9 Sharp-tailed grouse were counted. Fresh snow showed evidence by grouse made for some interesting pictures.

**Douglas County Sharp-tailed grouse dancing in the snow.**



**Sage Grouse in the strutting snow.**



**Douglas County Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse Lek Counts:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten spent most of the week counting grouse in the early AM. Private Lands Biologist Braaten discovered new sage grouse lek this week.



**Mule Deer Habitat Project:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten received \$1000.00 from Mule Deer Foundation Washington State Chapter to plant 500 Antelope Bitterbrush in Douglas County. Plants were planted in area of the Smith Lake Fire, which destroyed over 1000 acres of bitterbrush stands critical for Mule Deer.



**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - Signup 43:** Private Lands Biologist Braaten met with two landowners who had questions about CRP signup 43. Their concerns were noted. They were wanting information about CRP field visits and who (what agency) was going to survey their CRP. Their CRP fields were enhanced for wildlife with a CP4D mix and they wanted to know if they were going to have to tear it out. Private Lands Biologist Braaten answered a few questions about pollinator habitat also.

**State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE):** Biologist Cotton met with Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), and Foster Creek Conservation District staff to coordinate upcoming spring field work and clarify duties and time lines.

## **REGION 3**

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

**Wenas Backcountry Horsemen Work Party:** On Saturday, the Wenas Wildlife Area hosted a work party with Wenas Backcountry Horsemen (BCH) to develop a horse parking area along Sheep Company Road. We had 13 members of the Wenas BCH group participate in building fence around parking area and installing three hitching rails that the group provided the materials for and made. They were happy to see this new parking area developed and would like to do more projects. The group will be working on signage for the site and there was also discussion about constructing a ramp to help elderly and handicapped people get onto their horses. Additional pictures are on Wenas BCH face book site.



*Wenas Wildlife Area staff and Wenas Backcountry Horsemen volunteers work to improve a parking area for horse trailers.*

**Target Shooting and Range Fires:** Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Confer Morris attended a meeting with Selah Fire District and Regional DNR staff, PM Clausing and Captain Mann to discuss target shooting and range fire issues on the Wenas Wildlife Area and develop a plan to move forward with public meetings on the subject. DNR will review the plan with regional management staff and get back with us.

**Sunnyside/Snake River Wildlife Area:** Wildlife Area staff and volunteer firefighters from Franklin County Fire District 1 conducted a controlled burn on a portion of the Mesa Lake wetlands. This was the last of 4 burns on this property and was very successful. It will allow

development of a topographical map of the site for water management, planning and grant proposal purposes, yet left enough random cover for wildlife escapement.



*Fire Chief Chris Schulte lights off a line of fire on a Mesa Lake wetland*

## **REGION 4**

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

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Oregon Spotted Frog Survey:** Biologist Bohannon and the Forest Service crew resurveyed a property on the Samish River that had large numbers of egg masses. The total number of egg masses counted was over 370, up from 211 the previous week.

Additional sites in Skagit and Whatcom Counties were surveyed, but no Oregon Spotted Frog egg masses were detected. The exception was that 53 egg masses were found at a new site along the Samish River in the vicinity of other occupied sites. The total number of Oregon Spotted Frog egg masses that have been located along the Samish River is now over 500.

Cole Roberts, a student from Western Washington University, joined Biologist Bohannon and Whatcom Land Trust AmeriCorps Intern Briana Berkowitz on a survey of the Whatcom Land Trust's Alpine Meadows and adjacent property. Oregon Spotted Frogs finally started breeding at Alpine Meadows last week and 35 egg masses were counted. The adjacent property is much farther along, and has 93 egg masses. All of the occupied sites along the Black Slough (South Fork Nooksack) were surveyed and 116 total egg masses were counted.



*Volunteers Cole Roberts and Briana Berkowitz assist with an Oregon Spotted Frog survey in Whatcom County. Pink flags mark Oregon Spotted Frog egg mass locations.*

**Brant Aerial Photography Efficacy Trial:** Biologist Danilson accompanied Biologist Evanson on the initial flight to evaluate whether aerial photography methods used for seabird sampling can be adapted for monitoring brant. Under the conditions flown, this method shows some promise. Results from the flight indicate that brant could be identified at the elevations and speeds flown and did not appear to be disturbed (i.e. flushed off the survey transect) by the plane. This is the initial phase of a longer term project to compare this methodology to traditional brant estimation techniques. A brant survey is conducted in District 14 each winter to estimate the size of this unique overwintering population. This survey is also used to determine whether sufficient numbers are present in Skagit County to allow for a limited late winter hunting season.

**Bald Eagle Secondary Poisoning Consultation:** Biologist Danilson continued to consult with WDFW Veterinarian Mansfield and Wildlife Research Scientist Watson as well as personnel from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington Dept. of Agriculture and Skagit County Health Department regarding a massive rat extermination effort associated with a local poultry farm that is being shut down in Skagit County. A consultant is now preparing a plan to address the rat issue while minimizing exposure of wildlife (raptors in particular) to secondary poisoning.

**Wolf Surveillance:** Video clips retrieved from the Wolf Surveillance project by Biologist DeBruyn on March 30<sup>th</sup> were downloaded and viewed. Cards were retrieved from five of the ten cameras currently deployed. Species captured by these cameras include red squirrel, black tail deer, snowshoe hare, bobcat, mountain lion, and gray wolf. The camera monitoring element of this project will continue through the spring months and be used to inform potential wolf capture efforts at this location.

### **Federal Peregrine Falcon Delisting Surveys**



*Male*

*peregrine approaching female perched on snag immediately prior to copulation attempt.*

Biologist DeBruyn conducted initial surveys at several peregrine falcon nesting sites in Skagit and Whatcom Counties as part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife three-year peregrine falcon delisting

monitoring effort. DeBruyn was able to confirm occupancy at four of five sites when one or both adult falcons were observed.

Biologist Cyra took advantage of calm sunny weather to make the first occupancy visits to the three Peregrine Falcon sites that are included in the federal delisting survey in District 13. As all three sites are best observed from the water, calm conditions improve observations of the sites. Two sites were confirmed as occupied with both members of the pair observed (see photo). One site required a follow-up four hour visit as no birds were located on the first scouting trip – no birds were observed during the subsequent visit either. Productivity visits will be made to these sites later in the season.

**Great Blue Heron Management:** Biologist Anderson provided site-specific heron plans at the request of Seattle per their local code. WDFW provides wildlife management consultation to local cities and counties under the Growth Management Act. More information regarding this relationship and WDFW wildlife management assistance can be found at the WDFW Priority Habitats and Species website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/>

Biologist Cyra followed up on leads and located and mapped a new Great Blue Heron colony along Highway 203 near Monroe. Ten nests are currently located in dying deciduous trees near a wetland.

**Osprey Nest and Conflict Management:** Biologist Anderson consulted with T-Mobile regarding needed work on area cell towers. Work does not involve alteration of nests or anything near the nest, but maintenance of collocation spots below nests. T-Mobile is aware osprey are now arriving back on territory and voluntarily will have a biologist monitor their work to ensure no birds, eggs, or young are in any nest while they complete work. More on local osprey at the WDFW Osprey Camera website...the male osprey returned the afternoon of April 5, 2012...Check him out: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildwatch/ospreycam/>

### Wildlife Areas

**Crescent Lake Riparian Project:** Manager Paulson and Habitat Biologist Hennick walked the Crescent Lake Unit to scope out a possible riparian planting. On the west side of the lake there are a series of beaver dams that is keeping the water level on the lake high. Removal of the dams will not improve the water quality for salmon. Blackberry removal along the south side of the lake and planting a mixture of coniferous and deciduous trees was recommended for the unit.

*Of Picture:* Crescent Lake is part of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area that now has a new Wildlife Area Manger, Kraig Paulson.



**Lake Terrell Unit:** Natural Resource Tech Deyo checked, repaired and replaced over two dozen wood duck nest boxes on the Lake Terrell and Intalco Units. Several wood ducks were seen in the area checking out the boxes. Manager Kessler and Natural Resource Tech Deyo posted No Trespassing and Closed Area signs on the lake to protect breeding waterfowl. Several Canada goose nests were seen on the islands.



**Manager Kessler and Natural Resource Tech Deyo posted No Trespassing and Closed Area signs on the Lake Terrell Unit to protect breeding waterfowl. Several Canada goose nests were seen on the islands.**

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

**Wildlife Management**

**Woodland Park Zoo-WDFW Citizen Amphibian Monitoring Project:** Biologist Anderson assisted Woodland Park Zoo and participating volunteers with egg mass identification and began work on updating educational materials for training. Sign up for next year's efforts to locate amphibian breeding sites and document use! See the zoo pre-registration site and other wildlife-related citizen activities and classes here: <http://www.zoo.org/page.aspx?pid=2004>

**Lesser Snow Goose Banding and Collaring:** Biologist Danilson coordinated with Waterfowl Section Manager Kraege to develop and implement reporting mechanisms for lesser snow goose observations during the spring months both in the Skagit and Fraser Deltas. 200 geese were captured by WDFW staff and volunteers in early March on Fir Island. These geese were banded and outfitted with brown plastic neck collars with alphanumeric identifiers. Observations of these geese are now trickling in to WDFW and US Fish and Wildlife Service. Kraege has developed and begun to distribute an informational flyer that encourages the public to report these observations through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's band reporting website at: [http://www.reportband.gov/recwobnd.cfm?aou\\_type=Unknown#top](http://www.reportband.gov/recwobnd.cfm?aou_type=Unknown#top).



**Lesser snow geese with neck collars at Reifel Bird Sanctuary in British Columbia. These geese were captured, banded and collared on Fir Island in Skagit County on March 8th (photo provided by Kathleen Fry).**

**Mountain Goat Augmentation:** District Biologist Milner began crafting the list of participants for planning and participation in mountain goat augmentation. Discussions were begun two years ago, but staffing issues and other topics have delayed progress. We are now reconvening a planning group to move the project forward.

### **Wildlife Areas**

**Skagit Agriculture program:** Manager Belinda Rotton and Natural Resource Specialist (NRS) Greg Meis have been coordinating with vendors regarding pricing of services for crop planting. Manager Rotton prepared a summary for requested ferry service for the equipment transportation to the Island Unit. Manager Rotton has been working with Ted Nelson on the development of contract services agreement for ferry service on the Island Unit.

**Fir Island Farms Snow Goose Reserve and Skagit Headquarter** – Bird watcher numbers are increasing with more sunny days and change in weather conditions. The Snow geese are still in the Fir Island area and utilizing the Reserve and Skagit Bay Estuary.

**Intalco Unit:** Manager Kessler and Natural Resource Tech Deyo coordinated with the Custer Sportsmen's Club on the Archery Course on the Intalco Unit. The club is finishing up work on raised wooden paths on the archery course. The materials for this were purchased as part of the Archery Range Improvement grant that was secured last year.

## **Private Lands/Access**

**Private Lands Access Agreements for Deer Hunting:** Biologist Roozen continued to work on private land deer hunting access on Whidbey Island. Roozen started documenting possible payment strategies and hunt logistics.

**Pheasant Release Site Scoping:** Biologist Roozen continued work on a new pheasant release site. Roozen began site evaluations of new proposed areas.

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

## **Wildlife Management**

**Nuisance Wildlife Calls:** This was the week of nuisance wildlife calls from members of the public. District Biologists Anderson and Milner offered advice to many callers. Many wildlife related questions regarding habitat, attracting, or dealing with conflict situations can be answered by perusing WDFW's website. See the WDFW Attracting Wildlife webpage and Living with Wildlife webpage:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/attracting/>

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/species/>

## **Private Lands/Access**

**Private Lands Access Programs (general):** Biologist Roozen administered contracts and payments for partner private land access with applicable staff in Olympia. Roozen also continued efforts to develop non-consumptive wildlife viewing opportunities in Region 4. Roozen continued work on proposals for private lands programs to outline funding and time needed for each program.

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

## **Wildlife Management**

**Radio Training:** Biologist Cyra provided the required state radio training and assigned call numbers to several new staff. Radio training and a call number is required for all users per our contract with the Department of Natural Resources which provides and maintains the system of repeaters throughout the state.

## **REGION 5**

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

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Elk Count:** Biologist Bergh conducted the monthly winter survey for elk on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area. Elk were well distributed across the valley floor and no unusually large groupings were observed. There were 124 elk seen on the valley floor with a calf to cow ratio of 51:100. All elk observed were in reasonably good condition with normal pelage. Weather during the survey was sunny, cold, and windy with good visibility to the valley floor. Snow level was approximately 3,500 ft.

**Elk Surveys:** Biologists Miller, Bergh, Stephens, and Holman, St. Helens Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald, Sergeant Holden, and Enforcement Officer Simpson, along with Deer and Elk Specialist McCorquodale conducted the second week of elk surveys for the Mt. St. Helens elk herd. 490 groups of elk were located and classified from the air during 4 days of surveying. Exact numbers of elk classified will be summarized in future reports. This is part of the sightability effort to establish a more accurate protocol for determination of population status for the herd. One GPS collar and one VHF collar were also recovered from elk mortalities. Thank you to Jess Hagerman, pilot at Northwest Helicopters, for his safe and efficient flying during the week.



Shed bull.



Rainbow over the mudflow during survey.

**Peregrine Falcon Survey:** Biologist Stephens conducted a peregrine falcon survey at a known peregrine nest territory near Lyle. The purpose of the survey is to document nesting activity and productivity to satisfy the monitoring requirement mandated by the Endangered Species Act following the delisting of peregrine falcons. These data are collected from a randomly selected subset of peregrine territories every three years. The Lyle territory was found to have two adult peregrines exhibiting courtship behaviors of flight displays and copulation, however; the birds were not incubating eggs at this time. This site will be surveyed again in a few weeks to determine if the pair is nesting.

**Rock Creek WWRP :** Wildlife Program Manager Jonker, along with Biologists Anderson and Holman met with Regional Director Norman regarding the Rock Creek Acquisition proposal. Biologists Anderson and Holman subsequently began work on preparing the application materials for a Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program grant. The nearly 14,000 acres

property in eastern Klickitat County represents a real possibility to secure important habitat for western gray squirrels, mid-Columbia steelhead, mule/black-tailed deer, golden eagles, Oregon white oaks, etc. Development of a successful effort will include additional funding from the Department of Ecology and Wind Power mitigation funds.

## **Wildlife Areas**

### **Klickitat Wildlife Area:**

**Fisher Hill Unit:** Manager Van Leuven went to the grazing permit area to assess the range plant composition and see how much new plant growth has occurred. It is still early in the season, and the grass is very short. Early spring wildflowers were blooming, including desert shooting stars. Other early bloomers on show were biscuitroot, Columbia desert parsley, pungent desert parsley, Indian celery, grass widows, prairie stars, western buttercups, yellow bells, small flowered blue-eyed Marys, and northwestern saxifrage. Manager Van Leuven also located a canyon wren by its song.



Desert Shooting Stars

## **REGION 6**

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

#### **Wildlife Management**

**Western Pond Turtles:** Bios Tirhi and Schmidt began turtle captures at SPS this week. We have caught 78 individuals and deployed 23 transmitters on adult females as of Sunday afternoon. Two adult females were transferred to the Pierce College Veterinary Technology Program for long-term treatment due to shell rot.



Bio Schmidt picked up several basking logs that were graciously donated by Weyerhaeuser to be installed at the turtle ponds once trapping has concluded. A big thank you to Duane at the Vail Tree Farm for cutting and splitting the logs to specifications and to Julie Keough for filling the request.

Biologist Tirhi along with staff from headquarters, Region 5, and cooperators from the Woodland Park Zoo captive rearing and reintroduction program are participating in a Population and Habitat Viability Assessment for the state endangered Western Pond Turtle. Jennifer Pramuk (Woodland Park Zoo) submitted a grant to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on behalf of the Western Pond Turtle Working Group in order to conduct this very thorough analysis. IUCN is a world leader in population viability analysis of rare and endangered species. The working group is excited to have the IUCN assistance in assessing the future of the Western Pond Turtle recovery program in Washington State. The team begins the process with assessing each of the three recovery populations in Washington (Pierce, Mason, Klickitat counties) and the ecology of the species thru a series of detailed questions provided by IUCN. First draft of the questionnaire is due by mid July 2012.

**Snowy Plovers:** Biologists Michaelis and Sundstrom spent a day marking the boundary of core snowy plover (a federally threatened species) nesting areas with signs that direct people to stay out of the area to avoid disturbing nesting efforts. Disturbance has been identified as a key factor that reduces snowy plover nest success and WDFW biologists hope to reduce those effects by

restricting access during the peak nesting season. Please obey posted signs if you encounter them!

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

**Wildlife Management**

**Watchable Wildlife:** The Strait has a variety of watchable wildlife opportunities, including the chance to see many bald eagles and other wildlife around Morse Creek



*Eagles at Morse Creek. Photo – Anita McMillan*

**Wildlife Areas**

**North Willapa Bay:** Manager Guzlas met with John Hansen and WADOT staff at the sites that will be included in the State Land Development WWRP proposal, North Willapa Bay Recreational Access. This proposal will include the creation of two parking areas, one at Cedar River and one at Hawks Point. Two access trails will also be improved at the Hawks Point site providing access to the bay and an overlook location. Interpretive kiosks will be developed at both locations.



*Hawks Point Bluff Overlook – photo Kyle Guzlas*