Wildlife Program

Week of January 11 – January 17, 2016

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Tucannon Bighorn Sheep: Biologists Wik, Vekasy, and Garrison travelled to Oregon this week to assist with a bighorn sheep capture at the Lookout Mountain herd and transport seven ewes back to the Tucannon. Weather conditions were unfavorable and travel times were extended beyond normal, but we were successful in getting the animals released. We are grateful for Terry Reynolds of the Umatilla National Forest for driving a truck and horsetrailer with us during the long drives.

Processing the ewes prior to transport

Loading up the ewes for movement to the Tucannon

Private Lands/Wildlife Conflict

Preparation and Facilitation of an Eastside Wildlife Control Operator (WCO) Certification Course: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett coordinated with Olympia staff members on a WCO Certification Course held in Spokane. Review of three amended WACs and two new WACs were incorporated into a PowerPoint and handouts for participants. A total of 23 participants attended the course, with 21 applying for a WCO application at a later event. Wildlife Biologist Rowan presented information on zoonotic diseases and euthanasia to prospective WCOs.

Mule Deer Foundation: Biologist Lewis attended a monthly Mule Deer Foundation committee meeting to discuss a spring habitat project that is being funded by the Mule Deer Foundation. The project is to establish winter/thermal cover on a 170 acre property in the Lamont area. The objective is to establish tree and shrub cover on north facing slopes to add tree cover on the

property that is in CRP grass and forb cover. The property is also in a WDFW public access program. The Mule Deer Foundation is interested in providing labor to help plant the trees and shrubs and a time frame was provided to see how many volunteers would be available.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Management

Moose on the Loose: Biologist Lowe assisted Veterinarian Mansfield and District 2 Enforcement with the capture of two moose for relocation this week. The orphaned calf and an adult bull were of concern in neighborhoods in the Dishman Hills area of Spokane Valley. Region 1 Fish and Access staff members also assisted.

A sled came in handy for transporting the immobilized bull to the trailer for relocation

Wildlife Areas/Water Access Sites

Asotin Creek WA – Thornton Fence Construction: Dave Meisner and Ken Christion spent the week working on the boundary fence between Thiessen land and Thornton acquisition land. Biologist Woodall assisted Wildlife Area Technicians with gathering up fence material and bundling it up with proper weights for aerial transport into the canyon. He coordinated with Leading Edge Aviation about our needs and provided a map and what they need from us to make this operation safe and successful. We had five bundles of fencing material ranging from 299 to 356 pounds.

Technician Christian bundling up fencing material

Robinson 400 helicopter and bundled fence material

Lift off!

<u>Private Lands/Wildlife Conflict</u>

Pomeroy Damage hunts: Natural Resource Technician Wade and Biologist Earl conducted two damage hunts this week in Pomeroy. Both hunts ended with a successfully harvested deer.

DPCA-L Agreements: Biologist Shepherd developed a draft process for selecting Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements for Livestock in order to distribute limited funds to the potential cooperators that are at higher risk for wolf-livestock problems.

<u>REGION 2</u>

No report submitted this week.

REGION 3

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Wildlife Areas

LT Murray Wildlife Area: Manager Winegeart was contacted by Jeff Kozma of the Yakama Nation to participate in a multi-agency Snag Conservation Working Group. The group's goal is to establish standard wood cutting and snag retention policies across Washington's State and Federal land managing agencies, and create a public education flyer explaining the importance of snags.

Elk Fence: Natural Resource Technicians Leuck and Hill continued to bait return gates along the southern portion of the L.T. Murray elk fence. Elk were all around the area and looking for ways to get through the fence now that a large hole had been fixed. They also fixed a small hole near a return gate.

Gate Replacement: Technicians Hill and Leuck replaced an old one-way gate that was proving ineffective. The gate was designed with four hanging bars that elk could push up and pass through in one direction, but the elk had instead bent the bars sideways and were passing through in either direction. The old gate was replaced with a standard one-way gate that has spring-tensioned horizontal bars.

Elk Location/Movement: Technician Leuck pushed roughly 250 elk back to the correct side of the elk fence. They were in a CRP field above the Bradshaw property. Technician Leuck was able to use his snowmobile to corral the herd into a corner near a return gate. It took some time and maneuvering, but eventually they went through the gate. Conflict Specialist Wetzel hired a helicopter the next day to push the elk north toward the Robinson feed site, where they will hopefully settle in.

Old ineffective return gate baited with hay

Technician Leuck at a hole in the elk fence

Wenas Wildlife Area: Manager Confer Morris and Assistant Manager Taylor field reviewed the Buffalo River fence and cattle guard to determine how elk were crossing to private land. They verified the adjacent landowner's determination that elk were crossing the cattle guard, which was partially filled with snow. One of the wing gates had also been unpinned, allowing animals to skirt around the cattle guard.

No holes or other access points were found. The wing gate was locked back into place and warmer temperatures melted the snow on the cattle guard. The landowner is cooperative and has agreed to keep an eye out. If the problem reoccurs, staff members may need to put panels across the cattle guard. There is a herding gate about 10 feet south that can be used for vehicular access if needed.

Buffalo river access where elk have been crossing cattle guard

Sign Posting: Assistant Manager Taylor picked up snowmobiles from the Oak Creek Wildlife Area. Manager Confer Morris and a volunteer snowmobiled up to Cleman Ridge, posted the winter closure signs, and locked the Woodcamp Ridge road gate.

Cleman Mountain – Mellotte winter closure

<u>Winter Feeding</u>

Mellotte Feed Site elk numbers: About 1,100 animals

Elk Feeling: Elk feeding continues with six inches of new snow this week. Warmer temperatures and rain has resulted in the snow depth staying about the same, but the frozen condition is making it harder for elk to move and forage.

Mellotte feed site

Elk Count at Feed Site: Biologist Bernatowicz came out to the Mellotte feed site and did an unofficial elk count at the request of Wildlife Area staff members. The total count was 1,082 animals (733 cows, 264 calves, 61 branch bulls, and 24 spike bulls). A lot of the elk were in

large groups, making an accurate count difficult, but within +/-100 animals. The official count will be done later in the month.

Wildlife Management

Ferruginous Hawk Monitoring: Biologist Fidorra worked with Olympia Diversity staff members Hayes and Connally to iron out details of the volunteer project to monitor ferruginous hawks. Fidorra also spent considerable time reviewing hawk territory access and landownership.

Barn Owl Boxes: Biologist Fidorra checked in with the Grandview FFA school group, which is building barn owl boxes for hay farmers and the Blue Mountain Rehabilitation Center. They are ordering supplies and will hope to have boxes built and installed in February.

Ferruginous Hawk Surveys: Biologist Stutzman began going through a list of landowners that need to be contacted for the coming ferruginous hawk surveys. Stutzman will provide contact information and any other relevant information to District Biologist Fidorra.

Elk Damage Issues: Biologist Bernatowicz participated in a conference call with the Department of Transportation (DOT), Conflict Specialist Wetzel, and Regional Program Manager McCorquodale regarding elk collisions on I-90. Approximately 50 elk have been hit between Rye Grass Summit and Vantage, mostly at night. Two helicopter hazing efforts had results that were relatively short-lived. Plans were made to put up hotwire along the DOT fence in hopes of deterring movement onto the highway.

Elk Damage: Bernatowicz continued to communicate with Conflict Specialist Wetzel regarding responses to the numerous elk damage issues. Elk continue to push through fences and end up in problem areas.

Bighorn Sheep: Sampling of Cleman sheep last month yielded one positive for the bacterium *Mycoplasma ovipneumonia* (MOVI) via PCR. MOVI typically causes a multi-bacteria pneumonia in bighorn sheep and spreads through a population fast. Biologist Bernatowicz watched bighorn at the feed site this week and did not see any symptoms typical of pneumonia. It is also unusual to only have one positive from 10 sheep sampled. The circumstances left the possibility of a false positive and Dr. Besser (WSU) initiated IGS sequencing. Dr. Besser reported this week that the IGS sequence confirmed MOVI and the strain matched that from domestic sheep. Domestic sheep strains of MOVI are typically the most lethal. There are still unanswered questions and additional test results pending, but the sheep translocation has been postponed. A decision was made to euthanize the positive animal so additional samples (lungs, head) could be collected. Supplies were gathered, but the sheep left the feed site before a collection attempt could be made.

Elk Capture: Biologist Moore worked with WDFW's Elk Specialist Brock Hoenes, Veterinarian Kristin Mansfield, and Northwest Helicopters Pilot Jess Hagerman to capture 14 bulls in the Colockum. This will bring the final year of the study's sample size up to 21. The capture process went extremely well, and at three days post-capture all the bulls appear to be doing fine and moving around the winter range as expected.

Elk Specialist Hoenes preparing to dart a nice bull

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECRECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCES

<u>Wildlife Areas</u>

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area: Assistant Manager Hunt worked with Lands Program Manager Hendrix on starting a permit for our first large recreation event in 2016. It is yet another LDS Pioneer Youth Trek reenactment scheduled for August 2-6.

Wenas Wildlife Area: Manager Garcia made arrangements to have two loads of pit run delivered to the Granger boat launch to repair damage from early December flooding. Assistant Manager Sak and Natural Resource Technician Medina supplied equipment and assistance to complete the project. This launch gets steady use during the waterfowl season.

Granger boat launch repairs

Granger boat launch – repairs completed

Sunnyside Wildlife Area: Assistant Manager Buser continued to collect user registration cards from access parking lots on the wildlife area. Hunting activity continues as waterfowl hunters make use of Agricultural fields.

Ice Conditions: Assistant Manager Buser continued to monitor ice conditions across the wildlife area. Warmer weather and rain have reduced ice at impoundments and hunting activity has increased as a result.

Granger Boat Launch: Assistant Manager Sak and Natural Resource Technician 2 Medina met with the truck driver delivering rock to the Granger boat launch so the load would be dropped in the desired spot. Assistant Manager Sak, Natural Resource Technician 2 Medina, and Access Manager Garcia repaired the boat launch at Granger Pond.

Wildlife Management

Access Sites: Natural Resource Technician 2 Kaelber spent most of this past week observing access sites for Hunt by Reservation. These sites in Benton and Franklin counties have provided quality waterfowl hunting opportunities. Franklin County sites have had good numbers of mallards and geese. Weather has been a major factor in hunting success. This past week has been warmer and now water is opening back up at Mesa and Windmill wildlife areas, which should provide excellent hunting opportunities for the last week of the season.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Management

Elk Monitoring: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand traveled to Yakima to conduct elk activity monitoring, hazing, and landowner contacts. Several tree fruit operations continue to have substantial elk use and damage in their orchards. Coordination with landowners and master hunters was initiated to pressure animals away.

Deer Removal: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand completed one hazing patrol in Franklin County to remove deer from vineyards and wheat crops. Strong deer numbers continue to be observed in the Kahlotus area, with some fields having as many as 150 or more deer in them.

Silver Dollar Association LHP: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continues to work with the Silver Dollar Association LHP landowners on selecting a program representative to fulfill the term for the remainder of the existing contract.

Skunks: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand assisted two different homeowners this week on skunk removal or deterrent strategies. Also discussed was the use of Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators and the Living with Wildlife resource tool on the WDFW website.

Elk and Deer Damage: Snow conditions have created elk and deer damage situations in District 8 for the past three weeks. Elk continue to breech fences and enter into agricultural areas. Elk in orchards are a priority at this time, as well as elk/vehicle collisions on I-90.

Elk Conflict: Conflict Specialist Wetzel assisted Washington State Patrol and DOT to move elk away from I-90 again this week. Injured elk were euthanized and removed if possible. A master hunter project was started on the weekend, but snowy conditions and heavy traffic hampered efforts. The fence project will be ongoing until completed.

Wildlife Damage: Residents of Vantage continue to call and complain about elk, deer, and bighorn sheep in town causing ornamental and lawn damage. Advice and devices have been given to Vantage property owners. Elk and deer appear to reside mainly on the state park and come into town at night.

Barn Sealing: Hay growers continue to report deer and elk feeding in any accessible barn area. In each case, sealing the barn in any way that prevents access for elk or deer helps move the animals to the next available barn. By limiting food access, the elk and deer are forced to move away. Combined with some permit lethal harvest, this has reduced use of those areas over time.

Elk Herding: Great help and assistance was offered by the Wenas Wildlife Area and L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members this week. Several days of elk herding were accomplished by each Wildlife Area staff member with great success. Several hundred elk were herded back through the elk fences in each area, which has greatly reduced the damage effects in Ellensburg and in the Wenas. Thanks to Wenas and L.T. Murray staff members for your timely help!

Elk moved through the elk fence off private lands and toward the Robinson Canyon feed site

GOAL 4: BUILD AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATION BY SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

Wildlife Areas

LT Murray Wildlife Area: Manager Winegeart worked with Wildlife Regional Program Manager McCorquodale to revise current Green Dot maps to reflect recent road and land management changes. Revised maps were taken to Jill Johnson, Department of Natural Resources GIS staff member, to update mapping data layers. Winegeart also worked with a local vendor to start production of Whiskey Dick winter closure signs.

Colockum Wildlife Area: Assistant Hagan continued his coordination with Engineering (CAMP) concerning the rebuild of the southern boundary fence. We recently were informed that there were funds to reconstruct an additional mile of fence, which required Hagan to provide more information on fence conditions and locations.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

East/West Bear Project: Biologist Smith assisted Bear and Cougar Specialist Beausoleil and Biologist Maletzke with ongoing bear den work. This portion of the project entails locating dens, placing cameras to document emergence and cub numbers, recollar/adjust collars on sub-adult males, recollar/adjust collars on adult females, and potentially collar yearling cubs. Work where newborn cubs are known to be present will be limited (camera placement only) to avoid den abandonment.

Biologist Smith preparing to re-collar adult female bear inside large stump den

The aftermath

Biologist Maletzke setting a camera to document den emergence

Pelt Sealing: Biologist Smith met with hunters to seal the pelts of several bobcats. Pelts are sealed in accordance with CITES requirements.

Marine Waterfowl Surveys: Biologist Cyra, along with District 15 staff members and the Marine Waterfowl Specialist, continued flying the 2015-2016 marine waterfowl surveys. These multi-species marine aerial surveys cover the entire shoreline and majority of open water in Puget Sound and are the longest continuous datasets of their kind. Information is used to inform marine sea duck harvest guidelines and provide trend data for game species and diversity species, such as western grebe and harbor porpoise. Four days of surveys were performed this week.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need Pika Surveys: District 13 staff members retrieved images from trail cameras placed at a lowland pika location in the Stillaguamish Valley. Cameras were placed to record activity throughout the winter. This alpine adapted species usually caches food for winter life under snowpack, but it appears that this population may forage above ground throughout the winter. Preliminary review of the images appears to show that above ground activity is limited to daylight hours during periods of dry weather. Cameras will be removed in the spring.

Pika on a perch during a break in the weather between snowfall events

North Cascades Elk Herd: Biologist Yarborough attended the North Cascades Elk Technical Group meeting. The technical group is made up of WDFW and Tribal biologists. The group discussed hoof disease, damage issues, and the ongoing trapping effort.

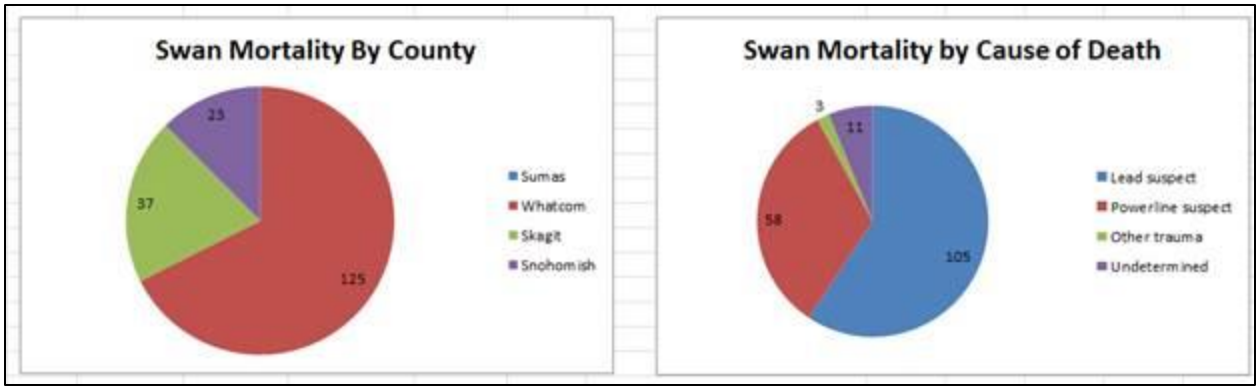
Mid-Winter Waterfowl Surveys: Biologist DeBruyn and Yarborough began wrapping up the mid-winter waterfowl surveys in District 14. These surveys include driven routes and aerial surveys. Duck, goose, and swan numbers appear to be above average in the district. District 13 staff members conducted mid-winter waterfowl surveys in Island and Snohomish counties as part of the annual inland lakes survey. These data are contributed to the Pacific flyway data base. Duck numbers varied among sites, but were generally lower than previous years, most likely because many were out in the bays versus foraging at inland sites. Biologists Anderson finished up his portion of the King County area ground waterfowl surveys, which included Lake Washington. Numbers and species diversity, anecdotally, seemed a bit low, but overall they were likely similar to historical numbers. There is much construction throughout urban King County, including along the large lakes and within them (e.g. SR 520), so there is good reason for animals to seek out temporary alternatives if this may be a factor in observations. Highlights were large rafts of canvasback and a few red-breasted mergansers on the fresh rather than the salt. Anderson had ample opportunity to interact with the public and explain this annual index effort, as well as what birds were being seen, ID pointers, biology, etc.

High Path Avian Influenza Sampling: Biologist DeBruyn and Technician Trejo collected samples from hunter harvested birds to be tested by USDA for the presence of the avian influenza virus. So far, 85 out of a target of 100 samples have been collected for January.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study: Forty-one more swans were collected this week. This brings the total to 185 recorded swan mortalities. Thirty-four of the 41 mortalities this week were swans with suspected lead poisoning. The number of swans that strike powerlines has been decreasing, with only two known power line strikes over the last week.

TRUS Weekly Mortality Report

	Lead suspect	Powerline suspect	Other trauma	Undetermined	Feather Pile	Total
Sumas						
Whatcom	86	26	1	6	6	125
Skagit	15	14	2	4	2	37
Snohomish	4	18	0	1		23
	105	58	3	11	8	185
Percents	56.76%	31%	2%	6%	4%	100.00%



Island Marble Butterfly Annual Meeting: District 13 staff members attended the annual meeting for Island Marble Butterfly Conservation hosted by staff members from San Juan Islands National Historic Park. This all day meeting brings together all parties who are working on conservation of the butterfly. Projects and needs for the upcoming 2016 field season were discussed.

Estuary Restoration Monitoring: District 13 staff members took the new Ecostudies Institute Technician out to Fir Island Farms to show her the site and begin thinking about the bird monitoring project that will begin in February. This project is a partnership between WDFW and Ecostudies Institute to begin assessing how birds use certain sites after dikes have been removed or set back.

Protected Wildlife Management: Biologist Anderson provided state consultation for Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive and Protected species, including various Priority or Species of Concern needs – most often nest take authorization and/or habitat consideration recommendations. Anderson continues to work with Habitat, local governments, and landowners to provide for documentation and management where appropriate.

One can assist WDFW with documenting wildlife via reporting at our Wildlife Observation Website: http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/observations/

One can find department management recommendations for Priority Habitats and Species here: http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/

USFWS Urban Bird Treaty City – Seattle Nomination: Biologist Anderson collaborated with Audubon Washington, Seattle Audubon, Seattle Parks and Recreation, and Heron Habitat Helpers to provide WDFW review and comment on a draft proposal to US Fish and Wildlife Service justifying Seattle to be nominated as an Urban Bird Treaty City. Anderson fleshed out the justification regarding WDFW and collaborator's partnerships with, for example, Pacific Joint Ventures and associated partnerships and goals. He also discussed the collaboration in meeting State Wildlife Action

Plan goals for migratory bird species called for management, among other mandated management needs and/or long-standing collaborative management partnerships. Submittal will take place over the next month and the acceptance or rejection notice will come this summer. This year will be the one hundred year anniversary for Seattle Audubon and the precursor to the multi-national collaborative Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which expanded on the Migratory Bird Treaty of 1916 (with Canada).

http://www.fws.gov/birds/grants/urban-bird-treaty.php
http://www.fws.gov/birds/management/bird-conservation-partnership-and-initiatives/migratory-bird-joint-ventures.php
http://www.fws.gov/birds/MBTreaty100/

Greater Seattle Woodland Park Zoo – WDFW Annual Urban Amphibian Citizen Survey Kick-Off: Anderson met with the zoo education and herp curator to discuss training this coming weekend. The discussion included points to be made, needs for collaborating jurisdictions, data management, field efforts, and locations. This effort is to provide baseline Stillwater breeding amphibian occurrence surveys at a local broad level (greater Seattle area) for an index reference over time, as well as engage citizens in amphibian importance, conservation issues and needs, and advocacy. The season begins Saturday, January 23. Sign-up at http://www.zoo.org/citizenscience

Wildlife Areas

Corson Preserve: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm met via phone conference with other WDFW staff members to discuss a Right of Entry agreement for a construction project scheduled for this coming summer.

Hovander House Bat Colony: Manager Kessler met onsite with the Whatcom County Parks Manager to discuss placement of new bat roost boxes near the Hovander House in the Hovander County Park. Various designs were proposed. Manager Kessler wrote up a proposal for the placement of several bat roost boxes on the outside of the house, under the eaves. Kessler is waiting for approval form the county before proceeding.

Manager Kessler met the Whatcom County Parks Manager to discuss the placement of new bat roost boxes near the Hovander House in the Hovander County Park

Duck Stamp Proposals: Wildlife area managers submitted several duck stamp proposals for the wildlife areas. Proposals included funds for additional farming for wildlife, and the purchase of materials for wood duck boxes and hunting blind repairs. Private Lands Biologist Wingard continued editing

new Migratory Bird Enhancement Project Proposals for Region 4. Biologist Wingard made contact with several landowners about proposed project ideas and obtained contact information for other area landowners who may be interested. Follow-up contact with private landowners and the finalizing of the proposal will occur next week.

Cherry Valley: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm met with staff members from Wild Fish Conservancy and Sound Salmon Solutions to discuss a potential feasibility study for restoration work at Cherry Valley.

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

Wildlife Management

Whatcom Wildlife Advisory Council: Biologist Yarborough attended the Whatcom Wildlife Advisory Council to work on the ogoing Existing Conditions Document. This document will provide guidance to the Whatcom City Council on exisiting conditions related to wildlife in Whatcom County.

Brant Season Hunter Harvest Sampling: Biologist DeBruyn, Technician Deyo and Waterfowl Section Manager Kraege checked brant shot by hunters on the last of the three days the season was open in Skagit County this year. Fifty-six birds were examined, most of which were juveniles from the western high arctic population.

Brant in Northern Puget Sound

Pelt Sealing – Cougar: Biologist Anderson, while out on a waterfowl survey, met a cougar hunter to examine, take samples, and seal the cougar he took on New Year's Day in Yakima County. It was a younger adult female. Please follow instructions in the Big Game pamphlet regarding reporting within three days of take and sealing within five. Also, do not freeze the animal if at all possible, or have it thawed properly for biological specimen sampling. A completely frozen animal makes sealing difficult. It is specifically requested animals not be frozen in the pamphlet.

Wildlife Areas

Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Plan: District 13 staff members attended the kick-off meeting for the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. Staff members learned the intent and time frame for the plan and will be providing information on Species of Greatest Conservation Need and game species to the planning team, as well as attending subsequent meetings to draft the plan.

Skagit Wildlife Area Waterfowl: Cosgrove monitored waterfowl use at the Johnson/DeBay's Slough Unit and within the Nookachamps Creek area. Thousands of ducks (primarily mallard and wigeon) were observed in the corn on the Game Reserve. Swans were seen in DeBay's Slough (on the Game Reserve portion) during morning surveys. Meis toured the Island Unit with Cosgrove monitoring waterfowl utilization on our corn plots. Most of the feeding observed was on the eastern lobe on the northern section/ fields, as you move south there is still a lot of corn still left. We also monitored water levels and public use. Cosgrove monitored water levels, waterfowl use, and hunter use at the Samish Unit. Cosgrove checked corn plantings at the Samish for waterfowl use. Manager Rotton has been performing morning car counts of the site.

Nooksack Unit Honey Bee Hive Removal: Manager Kessler met onsite with the local businessman bee keeper who has beehives placed in one area of the Nooksack Unit. The business had a land use permit that expired last summer, and Kessler had been unable to contact him since then. The owner is now going out of business, and will be removing all the bee hives by the end of the month.

Disabled Waterfowl Hunters: Manager Kessler spoke with three disabled waterfowl hunters who wanted to use the handicapped hunting blind at the Lake Terrell Unit. The lake has been frozen for a few weeks, but had thawed out enough by Saturday for the hunters to use it. One disabled hunter's 4.5 month old pup retrieved its first duck!

Disabled hunter's 4.5 month old pup retrieving its first duck at Lake Terrell

<u>Private Lands/Access Management</u>

Private Lands Access Program Meeting: Supervisory Biologist Caldwell, Regional Program Manager Link, WDFW Deputy Assistant Garner, and Chair of the WDFW Wildlife Commission Dr. Brad Smith met and toured Whatcom County Private Land Access Program sites. During the meeting, current and future Private Land Access Program goals, objectives, strategies, and ideas were discussed. Particular emphasis was given to topics revolving around public access for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access, wildlife viewing opportunities, habitat enhancement projects on private property, and hunting access. Additionally, the group discussed promotional options for public education and outreach for the Private Lands Access Program, regional program constraints and noteworthy accomplishments.

Russ Link, Cole Caldwell, & WDFW Commissioner Smith in Whatcom County

Wildlife Viewing and Diversity Sites: Supervisory Biologist Caldwell and Private Lands Biologist Wingard met with regional staff from The Nature Conservancy to discuss partnership opportunities for private lands wildlife viewing and diversity sites. The Nature Conservancy was interested in new ways to monitor and regulate access to some of their properties. There is great potential for partnership with The Nature Conservancy to provide private lands access opportunities for non-consumptive wildlife recreation, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access.

Private Land Evaluations: Region 4 Wildlife Program staff members were contacted about evaluating a property near Duvall, WA. Supervisory Biologist Caldwell and Private Lands Biologist Wingard had toured the site in late summer and Biologist Wingard returned to examine the site in mid-winter conditions. Biologist Wingard was able to tour the site, take pictures, and assess the site for recreational potential. Biologist Wingard and Biologist Caldwell drafted a report with recommendations, and solicited comments from other Region 4 staff members.

Private Land Access Biologist Wingard evaluated a piece of private property for access and hunting characteristics. While surveying the land he took this picture of apparent wetland that exists on private property. This wetland (and several others that connect to it) has two existing blinds for waterfowl hunting.

Hunter Bag Checks: Natural Resource Technician Deyo assisted District 14 Wildlife Program staff members with checking hunter harvest of black brant in Padilla and Samish Bays.

Waterfowl Quality Hunt Units: Natural Resource Technicians Deyo and Otto, and Supervisory Biologist Caldwell and Private Lands Biologist Wingard conducted use surveys of Waterfowl Quality Hunt sites in Whatcom, Skagit, and Snohomish counties, taking notes and resolving any issues regarding the sites.

Public Comment and Questions: Private Lands Biologist Wingard and Supervisory Biologist Caldwell responded to public comments and questions regarding private land access and hunting for waterfowl species. Information was provided on habitat conditions, waterfowl use, hunting success, and web-based access options for reserving and viewing private land access sites across the state.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Areas

Spencer Island Unit: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm met with a boy scout to discuss an eagle scout project at Spencer Island.

Cherry Valley: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm met with the Drainage District 7 Commissioner to discuss the recent dike breach that occurred. Plans are being made to sandbag the breach until a permanent repair is conducted this summer.

Skagit Headquarters: Manager Rotton continues to monitor water levels and work with the Dike District regarding drainage during the Wiley Slough Tidegate repair project. The repair project is nearing completion. The sheet pile has been removed and the contractor is completing site clean-up tasks and demobilizing equipment. Operation of the gates thus far has occurred during late night tides with silt fencing in place. Silt fencing has been removed, so full operation should occur this week.

Wiley Slough tide gate opening during Thursday early evening low tide

Migratory Bird Stamp: Cosgrove and Natural Resource Scientist Meis prepared a Migratory Bird Stamp proposal to build duck blinds on three Wildlife Area Units in partnership with the Washington Waterfowl Association. CAMP Electrician Dave Miller and contractors from Motors and Controls were at the Wiley Slough pump station to resolve pump drive and sensor issues.

DeBay's Slough: Manager Rotton and Private Lands Biologist Rob Wingard opened bids for the Johnson DeBay Slough Swan Reserve lease. Wildlife Area staff members will be reviewing and evaluating the bid offers this week.

Skagit Access Site: Cosgrove monitored public use and picked up litter at the Headquarters, Fir Island Farms, Samish, Big Ditch, and Johnson/DeBay's Slough units. Manager Rotton met with

Environmental Planner Jenna Friebel and Lands Agent Kye Iris at the Big Ditch access to discuss the upcoming tide gate repair for Dike and Drainage District 17 north of Stanwood. In addition, we discussed the Fir Island Farms agreements and the need for replacement forage for snow geese. Manager Rotton continued to coordinate with Ted Nelson, WDFW Contracts Specialist, to complete the barge agreement. Meis provided edits on the sole source contract for the barge that is utilized for management of the Island Unit.

Private Lands/Access Management

Wildlife Conflict Monitoring & Management: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman received several complaints of elk grazing and fence damage in the area between Rockport and Marblemount in the Skagit Valley. This area is frequently used during winter months by individuals of the North Cascades Elk Herd. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman met with two landowners and discussed options to mitigate elk damage to crops. The parties were interested in forming a larger community group to address neighboring landowner concerns. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman will attempt to coordinate these meetings and recommend Tribal co-managers be involved in the meeting process. Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman and Natural Resource Technical Cogdal continued to work on the exclusionary fence projects in the Day Creek area. This week, significant progress was made due to favorable weather conditions.

District 12 Elk Damage: Biologist Smith used a trail camera to monitor intermittent nocturnal elk activity on agricultural properties. Smith also met with landowners in the Enumclaw area to discuss DPCA requirements and options. In addition, Smith coordinated with volunteers for ongoing fence repair/maintenance in the area.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman and Natural Resource Technical Cogdal continued putting the finishing touches on an elk exclusionary fence project in the Day Creek area of Skagit County

Research and Management: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman met with a retired WDFW law enforcement officer and discussed historic elk damage in the Skagit Valley and what prior damage mitigation strategies took place with landowners. The information was very valuable towards ongoing and future management. Information was shared on how elk management strategies have evolved over time and how several geographic areas have experienced a significant increase in elk presence.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman coordinated the recovery and salvage of a roadkill elk on State Route 20 near Concrete in Skagit County

<u>Hunter Education/Volunteer Coordinator</u>

Hunter Education: Hunter Education Coordinator Steven Dazey answered questions from a hunter education student in regards to his CCW and his hunter education. Dazey also answered questions from students about class availability and location.

Hunter Education Instructor Support: Hunter Education Coordinator Steven Dazey delivered supplies to a hunter education instructor. Coordinator Dazey sent out four new instructor applicant packets and emailed an instructor application to a potential new instructor. Applicants wanting to become hunter education instructors have a training process to complete so as to ensure they receive the support and tools to become good instructors. This is also a process where the field coordinator can evaluate the applicants and ensure they have the skills to become certified hunter education instructors. Dazey sent out invites to instructor applicants to attend a pre-service training PST in March to start them on becoming fully certified. Dazey assisted an instructor to secure a venue to put on a second class in February. The registration for his first class filled so quickly, along with the wait list, that the instructor wanted to offer another class to fill the demand. Dazey continues to encourage instructors to return their Policy Agreement Forms and, for those who have been certified five years, to return their five year background authorization forms. Other questions fielded covered incentive permits and eligibility and Terry Hoffer award information. Dazey evaluated the team that teaches at the Snohomish Fire station. The team is doing a good job and the evaluation was positive.

Master Hunter Support: Hunter Education Coordinator Dazey assisted a master hunter to change his mailing address in the WDFW database. The master hunter also expressed an interest in becoming a hunter education instructor, so Dazey answered his questions about the instructor certification process and sent him an application.

GOAL 4: SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE, IMPROVING BUSINESS PROCESSES, AND INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY

Wildlife Management

Computer Migration: Biologist Cyra continued with the work of obtaining software and hardware permissions and accessories to ensure the new computing resources meet field and survey needs.

North Cascades Elk Herd and Wildlife Conflict Management Meeting: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor Caldwell met with Wildlife Conflict Specialist Witman, District Biologist Yarborough, and Regional Wildlife Program Management staff members to discuss current issues surrounding herd plan language, goals, objectives, and strategies. Particular emphasis was given to the practicality of implementing particular on-ground efforts outlined within the herd plan. Given that the Wildlife Conflict Program is guided and authorized by RCW and WAC to mitigate wildlife damage to qualifying private property, a conference call will be established next week to discuss issues and ideas towards solutions.

Private Lands/Access Management

Fish & Wildlife Biologist 2 (Private Lands Biologist) Interviews: Supervisory Biologist Caldwell and selected Region 4 Wildlife Program staff members interviewed candidates for the Fish & Wildlife Biologist 2 (Private Lands Biologist) position based out of La Conner, WA. Selected candidates will be asked to return for a second interview in the upcoming weeks.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area

Bear Creek Riparian Enhancement: Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald, Assistant Manager Sample, and volunteers from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation spent a day protecting conifer trees from being browsed by elk along Bear Creek. During the day, 125 six foot tall cages were built and placed around natural regeneration conifer trees within the riparian corridor of the creek to protect them from being overly-browsed by wintering elk. Protection of these trees will help with the recovery of the riparian area, providing cover and browse for wildlife, providing shading of the creek for anadromous fish, and providing a seed source for future recruitment of conifer trees to establish on the area. Over the next couple of months, up to another 500 conifer trees will be planted and protected with cages along the creek, plus an additional 20,000 trees and shrubs will be planted to restore and enhance the riparian area along three miles of the creek.

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

Wildlife Management

Southwest Washington Management Area 2A and 2B Goose Hunt: The 2015-2016 southwest Washington goose hunting season continued this week. WDFW Biologists Butler and Stephens, along with Scientific Technician Miller, traveled throughout Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties to monitor hunting activity in the field on both public and private land. Goose hunters had mixed results this week, with many having better luck harvesting ducks. As of Sunday, January 17, approximately 295 hunters have been contacted and 165 geese have been checked. A total of nine dusky Canada geese are known to have been harvested in the area.

Hunters should note that the 2015-16 southwest Washington goose cards were issued with the wrong expiration date. The card states an expiration date of January 31, 2016, but the correct expiration date is March 9, 2016. Hunters should be receiving a postcard or an E-mail informing them of the error and the correct expiration date of March 9, 2016. As a reminder, the late season goose hunt will open February 10 and all southwest Washington goose card holders can participate in the late season goose hunt on private lands only. Public lands are closed to goose hunting during the late season. More information on the late season hunt can be found within the Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons Pamphlet, located on the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/

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

District 10 Wildlife Conflict

Elk: Conflict Specialist Conklin met with some landowners located in the Grays River damage hunt area to find out if they believed the damage hunt was working and if they wanted to continue having the hunt. They stated they would like to see the hunts continue and said the hay production was up last year and there are fewer elk. In addition, Conflict Specialist Conklin escorted a youth hunter onto a property in Randle for a damage elk hunt. So far he has been unsuccessful, but he is not out of time yet.

Bear: Conflict Specialist Conklin provided advice to a landowner in Chehalis who believes a bear was harassing her livestock.

District 10 & Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Winter Conditions

Past Weather: November temperatures and precipitation were both below normal, with several days of low temperatures in the 20s. December temperatures were slightly above normal and the month had record high precipitation, causing some flooding throughout the district. There was some low elevation snow the last week of December, with depths of perhaps a few inches on the valley floor of the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area.

Short-Term Forecast: Snow levels will fluctuate between 2,500 to 4,500 feet during the upcoming week. The 6-10 and 8-14 day forecast are for above normal temperatures and precipitation.

Long-Term Forecast: The January forecast is for above normal temperatures and an equal chance of above normal, below normal, or normal precipitation. The three month forecast is for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation.

Habitat: Forage is available at middle and lower elevations, with the Wildlife Area being heavily utilized.

Snow Depths: Lower elevations are currently snow free below about 2,700 feet, with snow depths increasing in the middle and upper elevations.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. The second winter elk survey was conducted on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area on December 31, with 353 elk being observed. This is the highest survey count since the winter of 2011-12 on the Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area.

Animal Condition: The majority of animals appear to be in good condition, but a couple observed have been in poor condition.

Mortality: One mortality was observed this past week while conducting other work on the Wildlife Area.

Public Contacts: None to report regarding winter conditions.
The Public is reminded the portion of the Mount 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, 2015, to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDIFE

Wildlife Management

Mid-winter Waterfowl Surveys: Biologist McMillan reviewed data that had been submitted, readying the records to be compiled for District 16's efforts this season.

Biologist Michaelis conducted a mid-winter waterfowl survey near the Columbia River. In an area consisting of three small ponds, he observed 42 bufflehead, 19 dabbling ducks, and one ring-necked duck. This is a new survey site for District 17 and the number of waterfowl has been above the minimum requirements for two consecutive years. In the future, the Chinook Wildlife Area may be included, since many hundreds of birds frequently use this site.

District 11 staff members completed waterfowl composition count surveys on 50 water bodies in Pierce County over the second week in January. Fog, rain, and ice made for a challenging week. Several of the lakes were frozen over because of sustained overnight lows below or at freezing level. The mid-winter waterfowl index was initiated in 1955, and in many cases provides the only estimate of waterfowl use for specific areas.

Sea Duck Surveys: As part of a long-term, multi-species monitoring effort, Biologists Murphie, Evenson, and Cyra continued their annual seaduck, marine bird, and marine mammal survey effort of Puget Sound. Areas in central, south, and northern Puget Sound and northern Hood Canal were covered this week. They have an estimated four or five days remaining, with surveys to be conducted in the San Juan Islands and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Dusky goose survey: On Friday, Biologist Michaelis surveyed for marked dusky Canada geese in Pacific County. He observed 13 marked birds from a total of 165 in the area. Consistently in one area near Naselle, a large number of collared dusky geese have been observed. Marked birds in other areas of Pacific and Grays Harbor counties appear to be lower than previous years.

Satsop/Mason Deer Project: In 2009, WDFW initiated a study of the effects of forest management practices on black-tailed deer reproduction. Two of eight study sites are represented in District 15: Mason and Satsop. An objective of this study involves determining sources of mortality among all radio-collared deer. The radio collars in the Mason cluster have remote monitoring capabilities and text messages are sent when certain events occur, although periodic field checks are recommended. The Satsop collars require field monitoring to determine status. Biologist Murphie reports that no mortalities have occurred recently. One separation event was investigated and the missing fawn was not located, so the status of that fawn is undetermined at this time. Two does and four fawns are currently being monitored in the Satsop cluster, while the Mason cluster has seven does and three fawns.

Wildlife Areas

Morgan Marsh Beaver Monitoring: Manager Belson and Master Hunter Schultz visited the Morgan Marsh Unit (Kitsap County) of the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area to inspect a culvert maintenance project that was recently completed under HPA #130343-1. The project site is located on an interior forest road that crosses a fish-bearing tributary of Stavis Creek, originating at the aptly-named Hintzville Beaver Ponds. Flow has been at least partially blocked for a number of years and has required periodic clearing to meet RMAP requirements. This project resulted in completely unimpeded flow, and, surprisingly, the beavers have not yet attempted to reclaim the area. The present condition of the site will allow a more thorough assessment of potential long-term solutions to this maintenance issue. Vehicular access to the site was facilitated through a DNR Land Use License that allowed use of a Green Mountain-Stavis NRCA gate and road. A request has been submitted to Lands for assistance with securing permanent legal access to this portion of the wildlife area through DNR land by means of an easement or other formal arrangement.

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

Wildlife Management

Aerial Surveys: Biologists Michaelis and Novack conducted two aerial survey flights from a beaver floatplane in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. Data has not yet been transcribed, but the number of dabbling ducks appeared to be normal for this time of year. The Willapa Bay flight was the third and final survey for the season. The Grays Harbor flight was in response to the USFWS and it has been several years since biologists have flown this route. Track lines from the survey were recorded and will be used in the future to survey the area in a consistent manner. The greater power and size of the Dehavilland Beaver was appreciated when winds started to gust along the coast.

Wildlife Areas

Union River Signage: Manager Belson installed a complete set of new informational signs on two kiosks at the Union River Unit (Mason County) of the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area. One kiosk is located where a popular walking trail enters the wildlife area from the adjacent Theler Community Center, and the other is found along the paved roadway to The Salmon Center, home of the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group. Postings include wildlife area rules and conditions of use, site maps, estuary restoration interpretation, an eBird link (provided in collaboration with the Black Hills Audubon Society), and RCO recognition. Because of the high degree of public use and scrutiny, overlapping inter-organizational agreements, and complex conservation and public ownership matrix, the signage received prior review by both internal and external partners to ensure that all information is accurate, consistent, and easy to understand.

GOAL 3: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ECONOMY, PROTECT COMMUNITY CHARACTER, MAINTAIN AN OVERALL HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE, AND DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Private Lands /Conflict

Distressed Deer Reports: Conflict Specialist Blankenship received multiple reports of a deer with an object around its hoof near Port Orchard. Reports of this deer have come from a large area which shows the deer is still very mobile. Blankenship has advised the homeowners to remain in contact and report on the deer's condition if they continue to see the deer.

Elk Damage: Conflict Specialist Blankenship, assisted by Biologist Harris, met with a landowner in Eatonville who has been sustaining chronic elk damage to his pasture and hay crop. At the time of Blankenship and Harris' visit, there were 30 elk in the neighboring property. Reports of up to 90 elk using the pasture have been documented. Blankenship was able to negotiate terms of a DPCA contract with the landowner to help prevent further damage to the property.

Elk Conflict: Conflict Specialist Blankenship met with landowners in Yelm, Chehalis, and Olympia regarding elk damage to pasture land. Blankenship was able to advise the landowners on preventing further elk damage to the property. Blankenship will continue to work and remain in contact with these landowners to help prevent further damage to the property.