

## District 3

### Asotin, Garfield, Columbia and Walla Walla Counties

#### Paul Wik, District Wildlife Biologist

District 3 is located in southeastern Washington, bounded by the Snake River, Oregon, and Idaho and is comprised of 13 GMUs with a range of 145 (Mayview), 149 (Prescott), 154 (Blue Creek), 157 (Mill Creek Watershed), 162 (Dayton), 163 (Marengo), 166 (Tucannon), 169 (Wenaha), 172 (Mountain View), 175 Lick Creek), 178 (Peola), 181 (Couse), and 186 (Grande Ronde).

Hydrologically, the district is comprised of the Wenaha River, Grande Ronde River, Tucannon River, Touchet River, and Asotin Creek, which are all tributaries of the Snake River.

The Blue Mountains are the major topographical feature, located south-centrally in the district along the Oregon border. The lands surrounding the Blue Mountains are comprised of private agricultural land, rangelands, and canyon lands. Elevations range from 300' on the Columbia River at the Oregon State Line to 6,400' in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness.

Public land within the district is managed by the US Forest Service (Umatilla National Forest), WDFW, Washington DNR, BLM, and US Army Corps of Engineers. Most public lands are located within GMUs 157, 162, 166, 169, 172, 175, 181, and 186, although the USACE manages a large number of acres along the shorelines of the Snake River.

The public lands tend to be at higher elevations with a shorter growing season, less agriculture, and in general have lower densities of game animals, except elk. Elk are predominantly located on public lands except in GMU 154, which is 99%+ private lands, GMU 172 (30% private), and GMU 162 (40% private).

Very little to no public lands are located within GMUs 145, 149, 154, 163, and 178. Hunting within these GMUs requires access to private lands either through the Departments Access Program ([Feel Free to Hunt, Hunting by Written Permission](#), etc) or direct landowner contact.

Big game in District 3 include elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, black bear, cougar, and to a small extent, moose and mountain goats. Elk occur predominantly in or near the forested areas on public lands, although small herds are located throughout the entire district. In recent years, the Blue Mountains elk herd has remained stable at 5,000 elk. In addition, recent studies have shown that yearling bull survival is relatively high for a general season, and calf recruitment has increased from the lows of the 1980's and 1990's. This herd is managed under a spike-only general season with branched-bulls by draw permit only. This can be rugged country with some difficulty getting to the elk.

Mule deer are the more common deer species and are located throughout the district. Higher densities of mule deer occur on private lands where rangelands and agricultural areas come together. White-tailed deer occur predominantly in the foothills of the Blue Mountains and along the riparian areas of the lower elevation rivers (Touchet, Mill Creek, and Tucannon). Highest white-tailed harvest occurs in GMUs 154 and 162, with significant numbers in 145, 149, 178 and 181. Post-hunt buck ratios have remained relatively stable in the high teens to low 20's

with fawn recruitment remaining stable with 45-50 fawns per 100 does. Mule deer densities can be quite low on the National Forest lands, but some large mature bucks are taken each year.

Bears and cougars occur predominantly in the forested or shrub type habitats. Bears tend to be much more visible during the spring permit hunting season compared to the fall general season. Cougars tend to be harvested incidentally while deer and elk hunters are in the field, but it is becoming more common for hunters to target cougars during the winter using snow tracking and callback devices. Bighorn sheep hunting is severely limited due to diseases that cause pneumonia in 4 out of 5 herds, which is suppressing these populations.

Small game in District 3 includes Dusky (blue) and ruffed-grouse, ring-necked pheasant, California and mountain quail (mountain quail is closed to hunting), gray and chukar partridge, wild turkey (Rio Grande subspecies), a number of migratory game birds including numerous species of ducks and geese, American coots, Wilson's (common) snipe, mourning doves, and snowshoe hares. Furbearers including coyotes, bobcats, beaver, and river otters are also open to small game hunting or trapping (non-body gripping traps). In recent years, the exotic Eurasian collared dove has become more common, offering year-round hunting opportunities with no bag limits for those interested. The collared dove has been more common near residential areas, limiting access for recreational hunting opportunity.

**Pheasant:** The spring of 2013 has been relatively dry, with some poorly timed rains in June. Since June, temperatures have been extremely high with little to no precipitation. It is unknown what the 2013 upland game bird hatch will be like at this time.

**Chukar:** The 2011 and 2012 chukar seasons were very good compared to the past decade. Although it is unknown what the 2013 hatch will be like, good numbers of adult birds should be carried over from the previous year, providing good hunting opportunity this fall. The best chukar hunting will likely be in the breaks of Asotin County, which has been the case for the past 40 years.

**Waterfowl:** Little waterfowl production occurs within District 3. Waterfowl harvest is dependent upon production in other parts of the state and Canadian provinces. Most waterfowl hunting occurs along the Snake River, with a majority of waterfowl being harvested in Walla Walla County. The USACE manages most of the shorelines along the Snake River, providing excellent access for waterfowl hunters. Goose hunting is popular in Walla Walla County, but requires access on private lands for ground decoys.

**Big Game:** Most big game seasons have remained consistent in the Blue Mountains, with the exception the cougar season. In the fall of 2013, cougar season opens on Sept 1 and continued through Dec 31 for all hunters and weapon types. In January, harvest levels will be assessed by biological staff to determine whether harvest guidelines have been met. Starting on January 1, hunt areas (see [Hunting Regulations pamphlet](#)) that meet or exceed the harvest guideline may be closed until the next fall season which begins on September 1.

For big game hunters in Washington State, drawing a special permit within the quality buck and bull categories is the ultimate opportunity. That maxim certainly applies to District 3 in the southeast corner of the state. My advice to most hunters who come here is to hunt the general deer, elk and/or turkey seasons opportunistically, but keep putting in for special permit hunts and

accruing bonus points, so that someday you will draw on a quality elk or deer permit and already know the country for lining out your hunt.

**Wildlife Area Access:** WDFW has acquired large parcels of land in southeastern Washington over the past 30 years, providing excellent access for upland and big game hunting. Access to most of these lands require only a Discovery pass or WDFW Access permit (received with the purchase of a hunting license).

All hunting and fishing activities can occur on these lands as described in the pamphlet. The exception to this is the 4-0 Wildlife Area in Asotin County. Deer and Elk hunting on the 4-0 Wildlife Area is managed by special permit, as part of the sale agreement with the original landowner.

For 2013, the special permit holders who drew a permit to hunt on the 4-0 Landowner Hunting Permit program will also be allowed to hunt on the wildlife area. Starting in 2014, permits will be issued specifically for the 4-0 Wildlife Area, as the acquisition has reached a size that will allow for quality hunting opportunity.