

## 2013 Hunting Season Prospects

District 5 (Grant and Adams Counties);

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## DISTRICT DESCRIPTION

District 5 is the heart of Eastern Washington, and is often the destination site for hunters across the state. Five Game Management Units (GMU) comprise what is often called the Ephrata District: 272 (Beezley), 278 (Wahluke), 284 (Ritzville), 290 (Desert), and 330 (West Bar).

District 5 offers a variety of hunting opportunities but is most renowned for waterfowl hunting throughout Grant and western Adams counties, and mule deer hunting within the Desert Unit (GMU 290). Grant County is ranked #1, among 39 Washington counties, for total harvest of dove, duck, goose, pheasant, and snipe; it is second to Yakima County for quail harvest (Table 1).

Waterfowl and upland bird harvest has been somewhat steady over the last decade (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). Pheasant, quail, and mourning dove hunting is popular within the Desert, Potholes, Goose Lakes, Lower Crab Creek, Banks Lake and Quincy Lake Units of the [Columbia Basin Wildlife Area](#) (CBWA; Fig. 3). Other opportunities within the district include chukar, gray partridge, cottontail rabbit, coyote, and both general season and permit opportunities for mule deer.

Mule deer and upland game bird habitat in District 5 is characterized by shrub-steppe, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and agricultural fields (primarily wheat, alfalfa, and orchards). Dominant native plant species include big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*), and spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*). Waterfowl habitat predominately includes wetlands, wasteways, and reservoirs that were created as part of the [Columbia Basin Irrigation Project](#) (CBIP).

*Table 1. Numerical ranking of District 5 harvest by county (out of 39 total counties) and percent contribution to statewide harvest (in parentheses) based on 5-year average (2007-2011).*

County	Dove	Goose	Pheasant	Duck	Quail	Gray Partridge	Chukar	Snipe
Grant	1 (31%)	1 (24%)	1 (19%)	1 (16%)	2 (13%)	1 (13%)	6 (8%)	1 (13%)
Adams	8 (3%)	9 (3%)	9(4%)	13 (2%)	12 (3%)	12 (3%)	11 (2%)	28 (<1%)

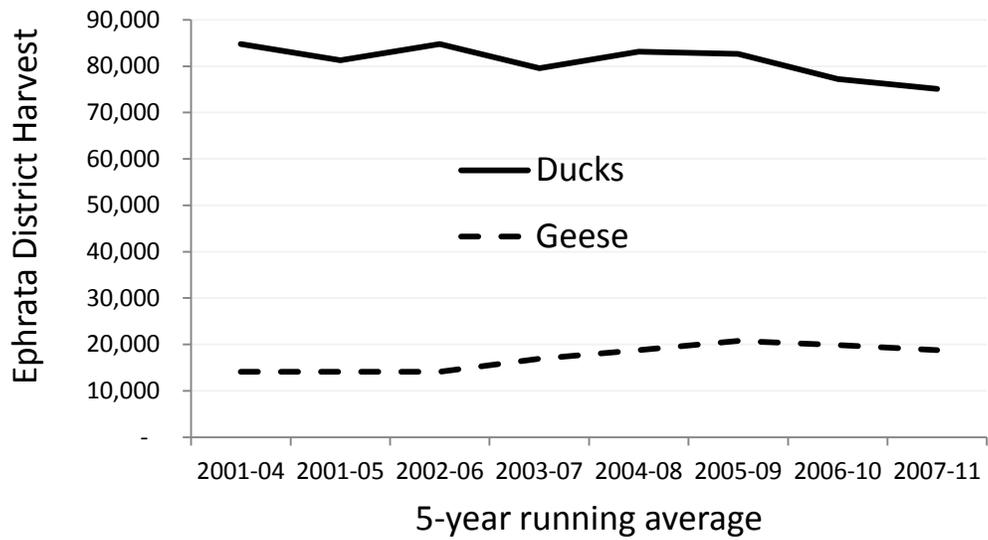


Figure 1. Waterfowl harvest trends for District 5 based on 5-year running averages.

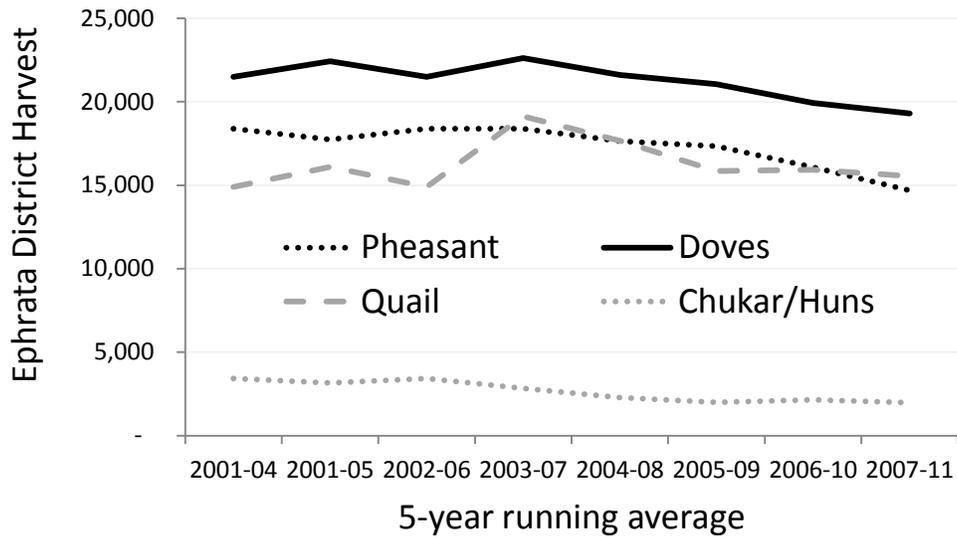


Figure 2. Upland bird harvest trends for District 5 based on 5-year running averages.

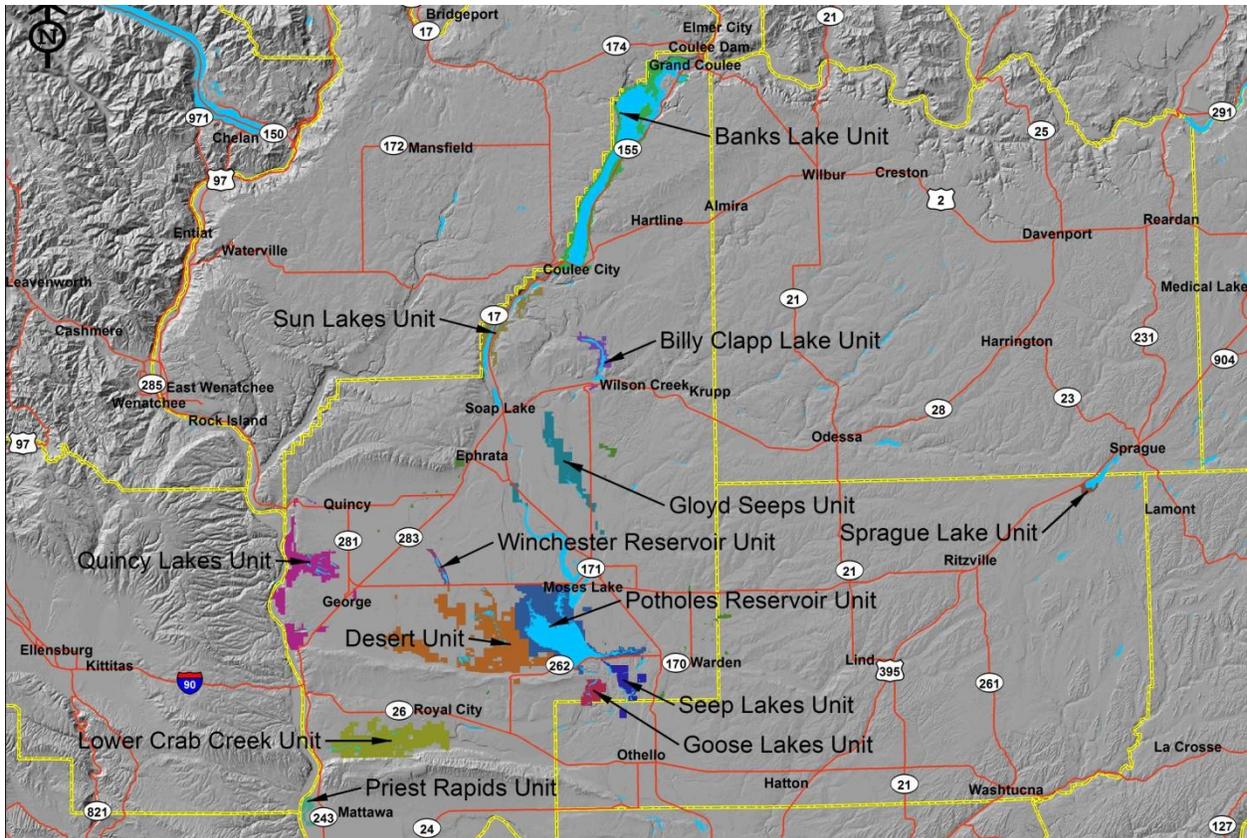


Figure 3. Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Units.

**Habitat Management**

District 5 biologists have traditionally been very focused on wetland project development in the CBWA and have successfully created many wetland projects. Efforts are shifting away from creation of new projects, to managing and maintaining existing projects. Biologists continue working with wildlife area staff to target grant opportunities to gain funding to manage wetland succession, recover wetland projects, and plant a limited acreage of food plots.

**Wildlife Area Management Activities (Fig. 4):**

- 1) Gloyd Road 20 sharecropping: grain crops are sharecropped at this site to provide food for pheasants and quail.
- 2) Ephrata Lake acquisitions: to date WDFW has purchased 40 acres of land around Ephrata Lake and is working to acquire another 80 acres. This lake is an important staging area for waterfowl during migration and is also important during the breeding season.
- 3) Middle Crab Creek habitat enhancement: emphasis is being placed on opportunities to improve waterfowl nesting habitat in the Gloyd Seeps Unit to supplement an increase in wetland acreage due to irrigation operations. Approximately 180 acres are currently in fallow condition to control weeds in preparation for seeding to perennial grassland during 2013. Wetland enhancements will also begin in this area once feed water begins.
- 4) Mansfield Pond recovery and maintenance: efforts underway to reduce tall emergent vegetation by mowing, burning, and spraying, particularly along wetland edges, to allow for hunting opportunity and to increase habitat value. This will be a slow process but will ultimately result in improved hunting opportunities in this area. We've observed a

considerable favorable response by smartweed (*Polygonum* spp.) in the area when tall emergents such as common reed (*Phragmites australis*) are removed.

- 5) Road 10 Gloyd Farm Unit wetland enhancement: small pond being enhanced to improve forage productivity for waterfowl and hunting opportunity. Smartweed production in this wetland complex has increased tremendously as a result of these management actions.
- 6) Westlake vegetation control: vegetation management, primarily aimed at improving northern leopard frog habitat, has added benefit of improving waterfowl habitat by opening up wetlands from dominance by tall emergent vegetation.
- 7) Winchester Restricted Access Area management: emphasis on mowing vegetation for hunting access and experimentation with food plots. Success of food plots has been variable depending on water conditions and trespass cattle. Experimentation with spring wheat will occur on 10 acres and about 15 acres of moist soil planting are planned.
- 8) Common Reed control: hundreds of acres of common reed are regularly sprayed along Winchester Wasteway (Dodson to Potholes Reservoir) and throughout North Potholes. WDFW has received considerable positive feedback with regards to the “opening” of previously “closed-in” wetlands.
- 9) 239 Drain project recovery: herbicide treatment of common reed to recover shallow excavated wetland basins.
- 10) Harris Ponds maintenance: regular maintenance to maintain open water within shallow excavated wetlands.
- 11) Frenchmen Restricted Access Area management: small food plot planting and control of invasive vegetation. Due to late season rainfall, smartweed and other small seed-producing plants in this area, has been more productive than years past. These plants are an important component of waterfowl diet. We plan to experiment with 4 acres of winter wheat planting during August 2013.
- 12) Buckshot Goose Field: this alfalfa field has an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) access pit blind. Contact Region 2 Office in Ephrata for a key.

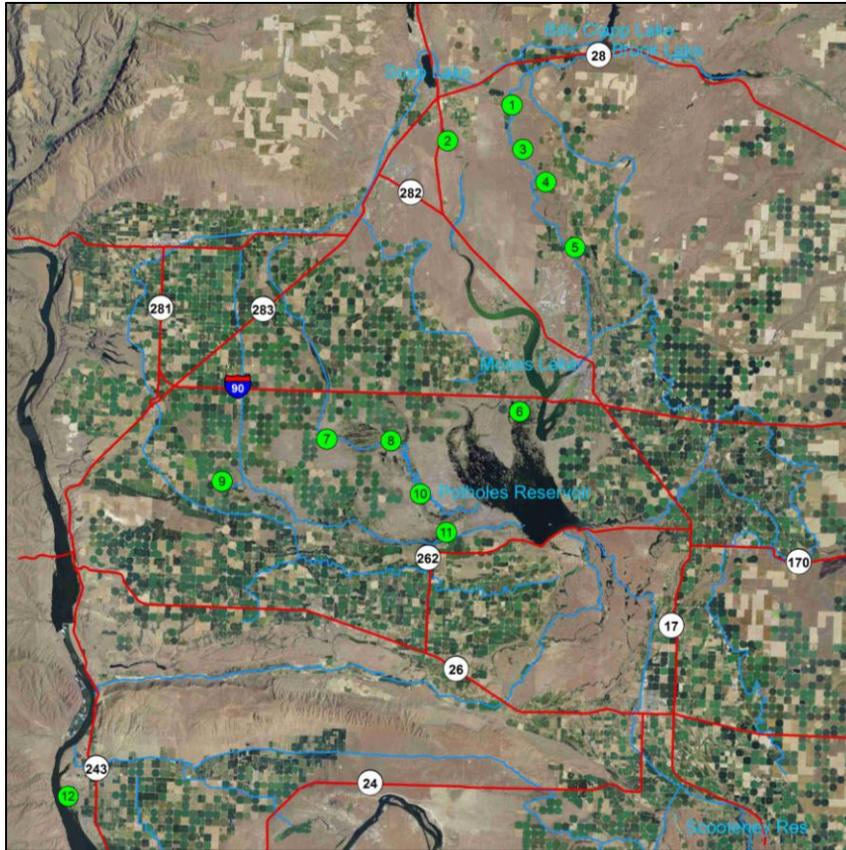


Figure 4. Distribution of waterfowl related work in District 5. Green circles represent project areas.

## BIG GAME

### Deer

#### *Management and Population Status*

Mule deer are the most abundant big game species within District 5. Although white-tailed deer are a small portion (<5%) of deer harvest each year, they occur at very low densities primarily in eastern Adams County. Mule deer numbers in District 5 are relatively low throughout summer months, but increase in October as deer begin to migrate from areas outside the District (see Migration Patterns below). Mule deer habitat in District 5 can most commonly be characterized as small patches of shrub-steppe and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands bordered by cultivated crops (usually winter wheat and orchards).

The abundance of agriculture in District 5 creates the potential for crop depredation complaints if mule deer populations are allowed to exceed social tolerances. Therefore, the primary management goal in all GMUs is to increase deer herds to levels that balance hunting opportunity with agricultural conflicts. Management objectives include maintaining a post-hunt buck:doe ratio of 15:100. WDFW achieves these management objectives by providing general season opportunities for bucks with  $\geq 3$  antler points, providing antlerless harvest during the

general archery and muzzleloader season, and by permit only in areas where crop depredation is a management concern (see Deer Areas below).

The exception is GMU 290 where the primary management objective is to produce a quality mule deer hunting experience. Although quality can mean different things to different hunters, it almost always includes the opportunity to harvest a mature buck. For that reason, primary management objectives in GMU 290 are to maintain a mule deer herd with a post-hunt buck:doe ratio of  $\geq 50:100$  and a post-hunt buck population where adult bucks ( $\geq 2.5$  years old) constitute no less than 50% of the bucks. WDFW achieves these management objectives by providing permit only opportunities and harvesting no more than 25% of the mature bucks on an annual basis.

In addition, WDFW minimizes depredation complaints on agricultural lands by controlling population growth with antlerless harvest, which is also limited to permit only opportunities. The level of antlerless harvest that WDFW allows depends on whether or not the population is increasing, decreasing, or stable. See Appendix A for photos of bucks that were harvested or observed during post-hunt surveys in GMU 290 as well as FAQs for this unit.

Trend data in all District 5 GMUs indicate relatively stable mule deer populations with post-hunt buck:doe ratios that satisfy the management objectives. See the most recent [Game Status and Trend Report](#) for a more detailed analysis of mule deer population trends in District 5. Damage complaints associated with these herds have also been relatively low in recent years, indicating they have not exceeded the social carrying capacity that exists in agricultural settings. Therefore, current harvest restrictions and season lengths appear to be appropriate for these herds and will likely change little in the near future.

### ***Migration Patterns***

With the exception of the Desert (GMU 290) and Wahluke (GMU 278) units, mule deer in District 5 are largely migratory. Previous radio telemetry studies on mule deer herds detected movements of deer from neighboring GMUs into District 5 (Fig. 5). These movements are largely weather dependent with snowfall likely having the largest effect on fall and winter movements.

Mule deer will reverse this migration and return to fawning grounds during spring. South and east movements of mule deer into GMU 272 from neighboring GMUs such as Big Bend, Saint Andrews, and Moses Coulee are also believed to occur but these movements are not as well understood.

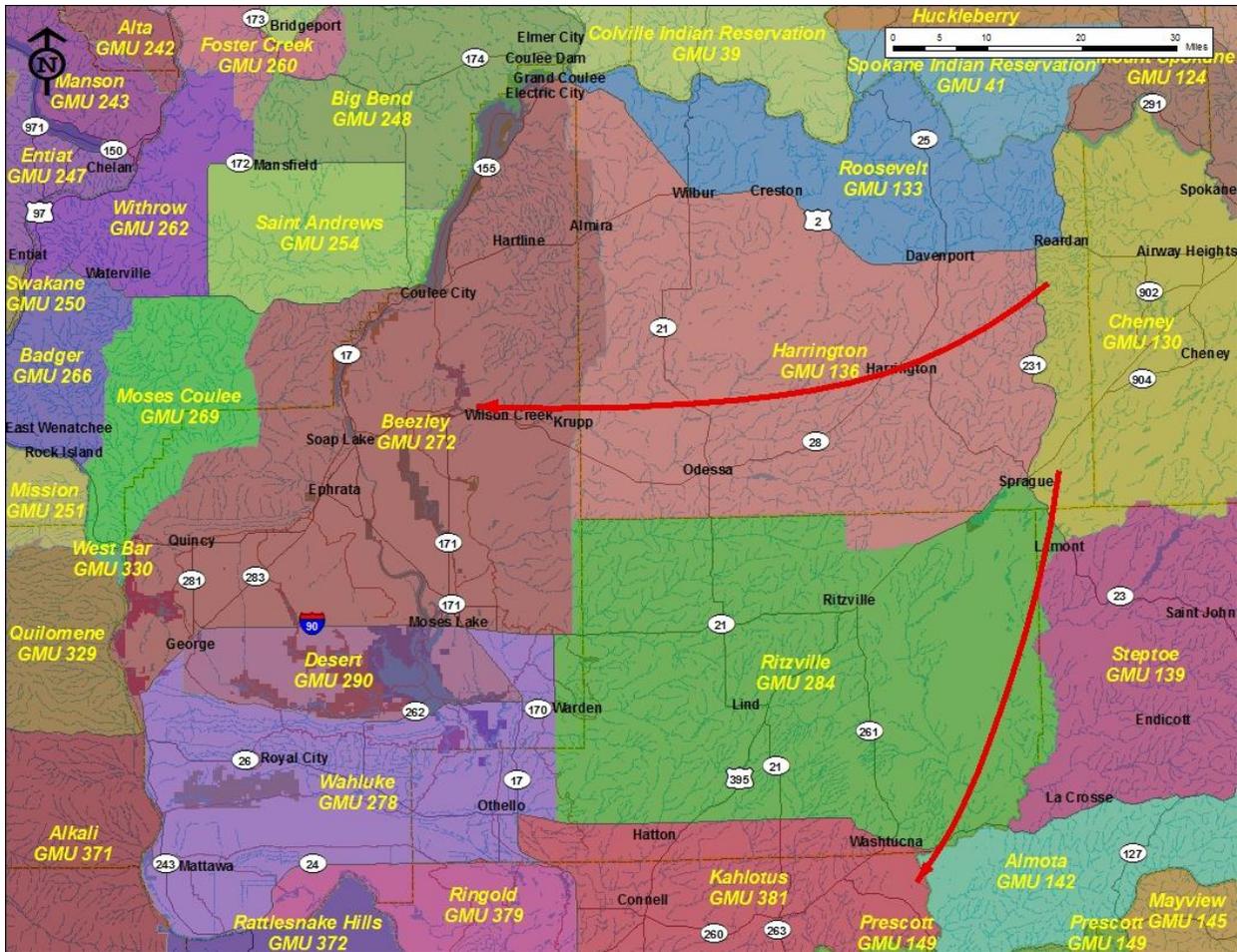


Figure 5. Generalized patterns of fall and winter mule deer migration into District 5.

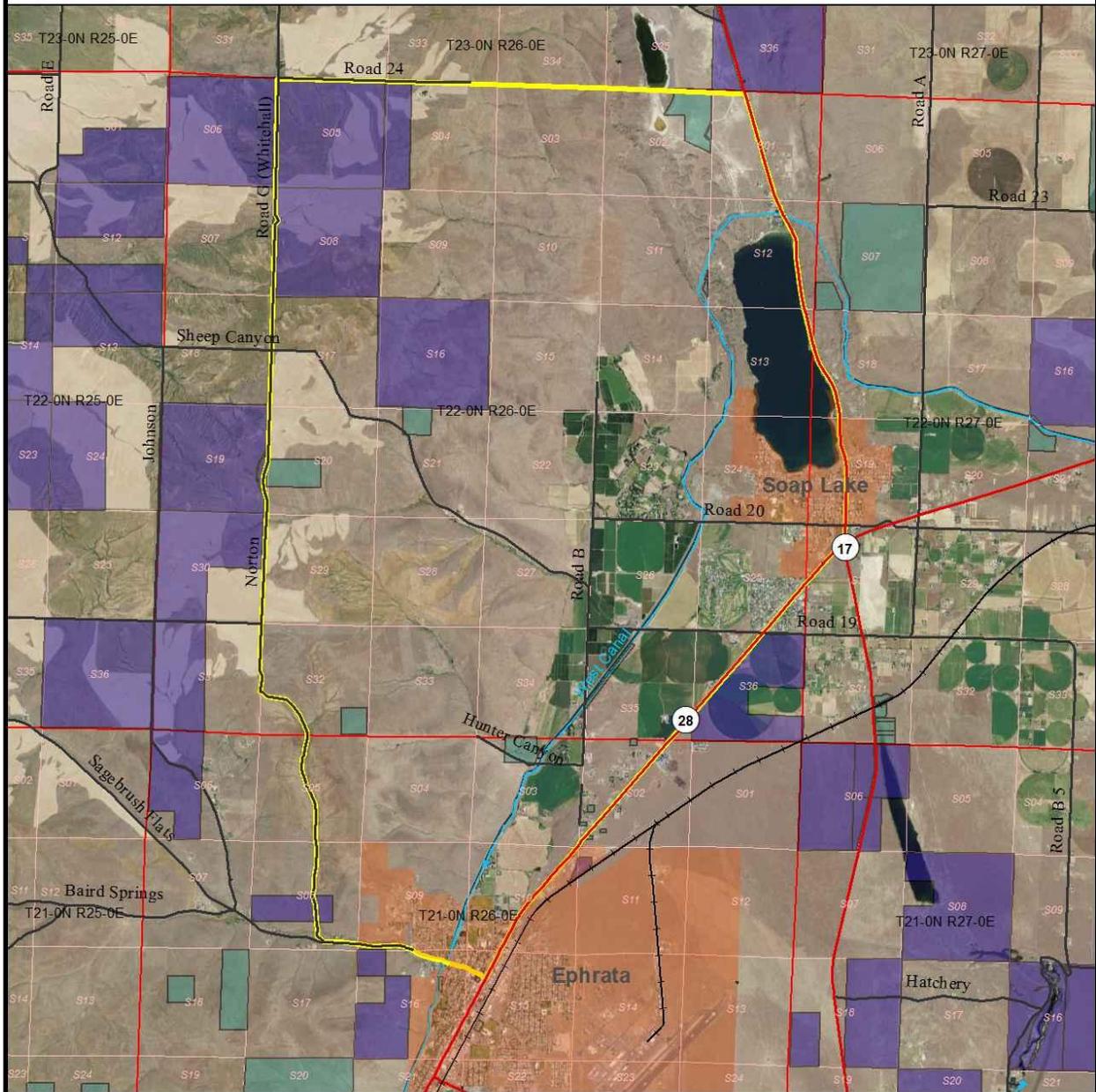
### Deer Areas

There are localized areas in District 5 where deer congregate during harsh or prolonged winters and have the potential to cause severe crop damage. To address this issue, WDFW provides limited permit only opportunities to harvest antlerless deer that occur in close proximity to these areas. WDFW defines such areas as “Deer Areas”.

By providing these opportunities, WDFW hopes to minimize crop depredation by deterring mule deer from congregating in Deer Areas. Deer Areas that occur in District 5 include Deer Area 2010 (Lakeview; Fig. 6) located in GMU 272 and Deer Area 2011 (Benge; Fig. 7) located in GMU 284. See the most recent [Big Game Hunting Seasons & Regulations Pamphlet](#) for current permit opportunities and legal boundary descriptions.

# Lakeview; Deer Area 2011

# Ephrata District



### DISCLAIMER

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- Highway
  - County
  - Seasonal closure
  - Closed road
  - WA\_Railroads
  - Waterway
- Ownership**
  - Federal
  - State
  - City limits
  - Deer area



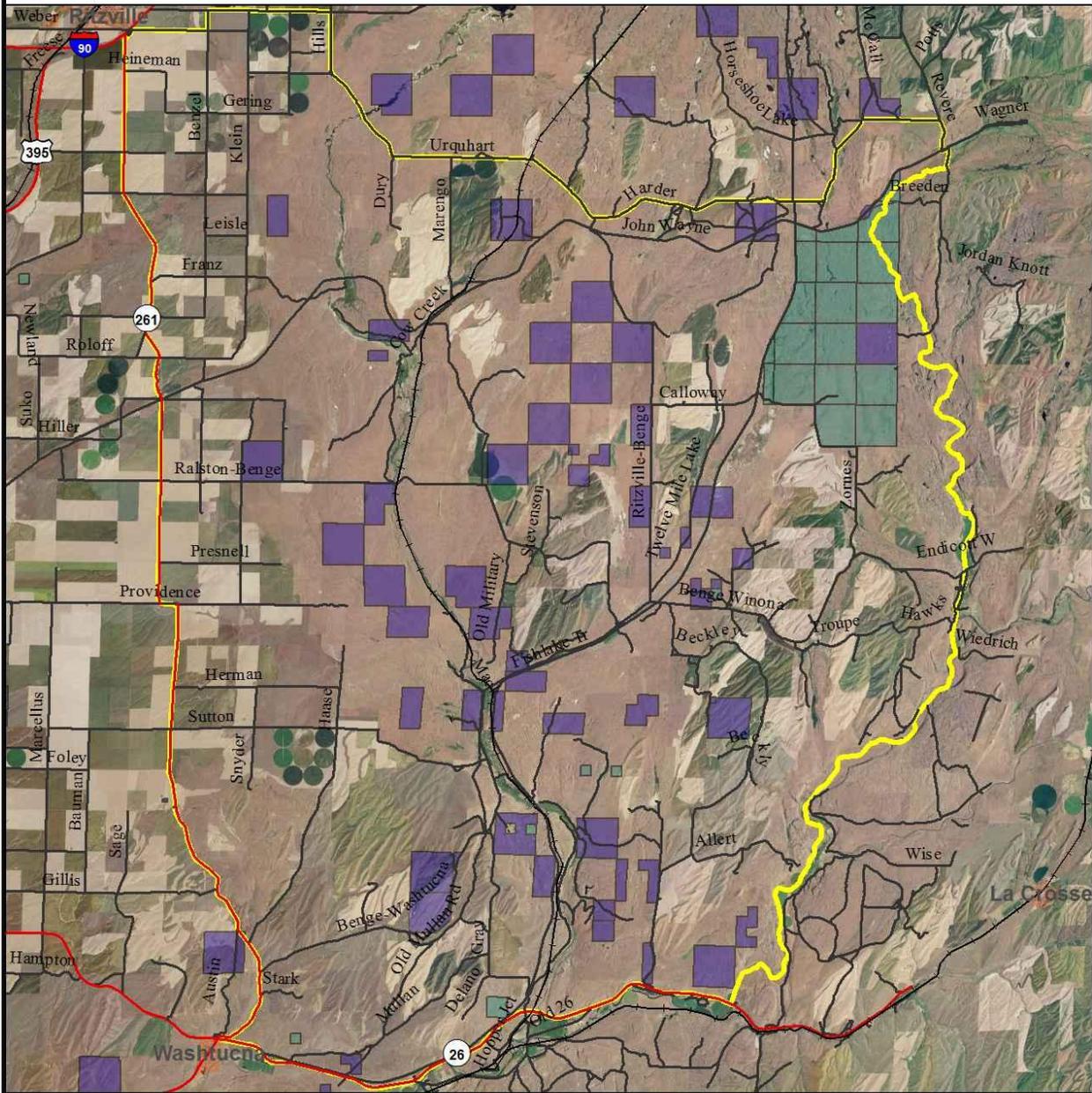
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Figure 6. Lakeview Deer Area map.

# Benge; Deer Area 2010

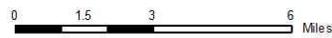
# Ephrata District



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- WA\_Railroads
  - Highway
  - County
  - Seasonal closure
  - Closed road
  - City limits
  - Deer area
- Ownership**
- Federal
  - State



1:200,000



Figure 7. Benge Deer Area map.

### ***Hunting Prospects***

Most deer harvest occurs in GMUs 272 (Beezley) and 284 (Ritzville) where post-hunt buck:doe ratios average 21–26:100. Post-hunt fawn:doe ratios indicate herd productivity was moderate in all surveyed GMUs, and buck:doe ratios remained stable or increased following the 2012 season. With the mild winter conditions in 2012, post-hunt populations are believed to have experienced minimal levels of winter mortality so deer hunters should expect average success rates during the 2013 season.

The number of deer hunters in GMU 272 during 2012 (1,405) was similar to previous years (1,337 hunters in 2010 and 1,410 hunters in 2011), and biologists expect comparable participation rates in 2013. Success rates in GMU 272 were equivalent to the long-term average of 25%. Harvest rates during 2013 are expected to be close to 25% and differ little by user-group (Modern Firearm 24%; Muzzleloader 23%; Archery 20%; 69% Permit).

The number of deer hunters in GMU 284 during the 2012 season (832 hunters) was slightly above the long-term average (775 hunters). Hunter success in 2012 (45%; all weapons combined) was also slightly higher than the long-term average of 35%. Biologists anticipate similar participation with success rates that are closer to the long-term average for this upcoming season. GMU 284 is dominated by private property. Hunters should plan to seek out permission to access private lands and/or plan on hunting lands enrolled in the WDFW Access Program as little Wildlife Area land (~1,600 acres) occurs in this unit.

All hunting opportunities in GMU 290 (Desert Unit) are issued through the permit draw. With average post-hunt ratios of 45 bucks:100 does, and 60% of bucks being classified as >2.5 years old, high success rates are expected to continue in 2013. Forty-one percent of land in GMU 290 occurs as the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, thus public opportunity is widely available. The area consists of riparian areas that are associated with the Winchester and Frenchmen Wasteways, and is surrounded by rolling, sandy dunes with varying densities of shrub cover. The majority of the private agricultural land in this unit occurs throughout the western half.

Harvest in GMU 278 (Wahluke) is again expected to be low in 2013 compared to other general season units in District 5. During the 2012 season, hunters harvested 67 deer, a record for this unit. Since 2001, hunters have averaged 38 deer per year in GMU 278. Hunter success in 2012 (25%) was higher than the long-term average of 18%. GMU 278 offers approximately 36,000 acres of public lands as part of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex, most of which is open to hunting.

### **Elk**

#### ***Management and Population Status***

Elk are extremely rare and have not historically been a management priority in District 5. Resident elk herds do not exist in GMU 272 (Beezley), GMU 278 (Wahluke), and GMU 290 (Desert). These trends are not expected to change in the near future. Because of the significant potential for crop depredation issues, WDFW does not encourage the establishment of elk herds in District 5. WDFW keeps elk herd numbers low by providing any-elk opportunities during the general archery and modern firearm seasons.

In District 5, hunters killed 21 elk last season, all of which were taken by modern firearm hunters. Hunters in GMU 284 (Ritzville) harvested the most elk (16) in this district. Because harvest levels have been extremely low until recently, biologists do not conduct annual surveys for elk in GMU 284.

Elk that are harvested in GMU 284 are most likely part of a herd that is known to occur at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Consequently, harvest in GMU 284 is probably dependent on whether or not that herd migrates to GMU 284 during the hunting season rather than a function of population size and growth. The number of elk harvested in GMU 284 gradually increased from 4 elk in 2005 to 22 elk in 2011 and then declined to 16 elk in 2012. This fluctuation in harvest is further evidence of the dynamic nature of elk migration from Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge.

### ***Hunting Prospects***

Hunters are not encouraged to hunt elk in District 5, due to low elk numbers and success rates. The most likely chance to be successful is in GMU 284. However, the majority of this GMU consists of agricultural and other private lands, so access may be difficult.

## **Cougar**

### ***Management and Population Status***

Modeling efforts suggest a small population of adult cougar in District 5 and annual harvest is very low. In 2012, hunters harvested three cougars in District 5, all of which came from GMU 272 (Beezley Hills).

### ***Hunting Prospects***

District 5 is not an optimal area to target cougar. The most likely places to encounter these cats are the Beezley Hills, Moses Coulee, and adjacent to the Crab Creek drainage upstream from the town of Stratford.

## **Black Bear**

### ***Management and Population Status***

District 5 does not have a resident population of black bears. In 2012, one bear was harvested in the entire district and was taken in GMU 272 (Beezley Hills). The establishment of black bear populations in this district is not expected in the foreseeable future.

### ***Hunting Prospects***

District 5 is not an optimal area to target black bears. An occasional bear may disperse through this district and the most likely places to encounter these dispersers are the Beezley Hills and Moses Coulee.

## UPLAND BIRDS

District 5 is an excellent place to encounter upland birds. Common species in this District include pheasant, quail, chukar/gray partridge, and dove.

**Pheasant** – Grant County was Washington’s top pheasant producing county in 2012. Despite this, harvest in Grant County was down 18% compared to the 2011 harvest. Hunters bagged 8,745 roosters in Grant County and 2,126 Adams County for a total harvest of 10,871 pheasants in District 5.

The largest wild populations of pheasants on WDFW lands in District 5 are likely to be found within the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George (Fig. 8). Mixed bags of wild and released birds are also likely to be had in lower Crab Creek, Gloyd Seeps, Quincy, and Dry Falls units.

For wild birds, dense thickets of Russian olive and cattail associated with Frenchmen and Winchester Wasteways and ponds are likely to hold pheasants. Hunters will increase their odds greatly with a well-trained dog to both flush and retrieve the birds in dense cover. Pheasants are strong runners so moving quickly and quietly can improve the odds of getting a close shot.

Many hunters feel that pheasant release sites are the only areas where they can successfully harvest pheasants. However, in 2012, 2,900 pheasants were released in Grant County while hunters harvested 10,871 pheasants. Thus, released birds would have made up, at most, 26% of the total harvest.

Hunters should not ignore the opportunities to harvest “wild” pheasants, particularly since pheasant releases are being reduced in response to recommendations from the [Performance Audit Report of 2009](#). This report essentially determined that pheasant releases were an inefficient means to increase hunter harvest. The report recommended reducing pheasant releases by at least 10% annually and redirecting those savings towards habitat enhancement. WDFW agreed with the assessment and has been responding accordingly.

Expect similar numbers of wild pheasants as observed during the 2012 season. Most hunters who invest considerable effort and cover a lot of ground will cross paths with wild birds and can increase their chances for a productive hunt by selecting non-toxic shot and diversifying the bag with waterfowl. Hunters may also choose to seek out pheasant release sites, see the [Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program](#) for details. Non-toxic shot is required at all pheasant release sites.

**Quail** – Quail harvest in 2012 was down slightly in District 5 from the 10 year running average. Hunters bagged 12,998 quail in District 5 in 2012 (10,387 in Grant County and 2,611 in Adams County). The 10 year running average in Grant and Adams Counties are 13,569 and 2,956 quail respectively.

Traditional quail hunting areas on WDFW lands in District 5 include the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex between Potholes Reservoir and the town of George, Lower Crab Creek between Corfu and the Columbia River, Gloyd Seeps between Stratford and

Moses Lake, the Quincy unit near the town of Quincy, and Dry Falls unit at the south end of Banks Lake (Fig. 8). Hunters will increase their odds greatly with a well-trained dog to either flush or point, and retrieve the birds.

Large coveys are difficult to find by mid-season on public lands and successful hunters will attempt to identify multiple coveys to pursue throughout the season. Riparian areas will offer the best hunting and hunters can increase their chances by securing access to private lands where pressure can be considerably lower.

If pressure is high, some coveys can be found settling into shrub cover a considerable distance from heavily hunted areas. Hunters with wide ranging pointing breeds can be most successful at targeting these coveys. Quail hunting is expected to be good this year. Winter temperatures were not far from the norm and the area lacked long periods of snow crust that can result in low overwinter survival. .

**Chukar/Partridge** – During the 2012 season, hunters harvested 809 chukar and 611 gray partridge in District 5. The majority of the chukar harvest was from Grant County. Last year's harvest rates are similar to those from 2011.

Most chukar hunting in District 5 occurs in the Coulee Corridor areas around Banks and Lenore Lakes and along the Columbia River breaks north of Vantage. (Fig. 8) Chukar is a challenging but rewarding game bird to pursue.

Gray partridge occur in low densities in the basin but are rarely targeted by hunters; instead they are taken incidentally while hunting chukar, quail, or pheasant. Most gray partridge will occur on private farm fields, particularly in the dryland wheat portions of Adams and, to a lesser degree, Grant counties. Chukar and Gray partridge are resilient birds and thus likely fared well through the winter. Winter of 2012 was relatively mild and snow depth and crusting was minimal.

**Dove** – Dove hunters were very successful in 2012 harvesting over 19,295 doves. Grant County recorded the highest dove harvest with hunters bagging 17,465. Hunters harvested 1,830 doves in Adams County during the 2012 season.

Dove hunting is expected to be good in 2013 but it is highly dependent upon weather conditions. If conditions are stable, the birds found during scouting should be around during the hunt, but unstable conditions often redistribute birds significantly. Hunters may improve their success by securing access to wheat fields for the morning hunt. Evening hunts can be productive in wheat fields or in traditional roosting areas.

Look for large stands of trees (preferably with dead limbs) adjacent to water and surrounded by agriculture for best roost hunt results. Roost site hunting can be found along the north and west sides of Potholes Reservoir, the east side of Winchester Lake, and throughout the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area Complex. The Gloyd Seeps Unit offers a mix of roost and crop hunting (wheat) on the sharecropped site at the north end of the unit by Road 20 NE (Fig. 8).

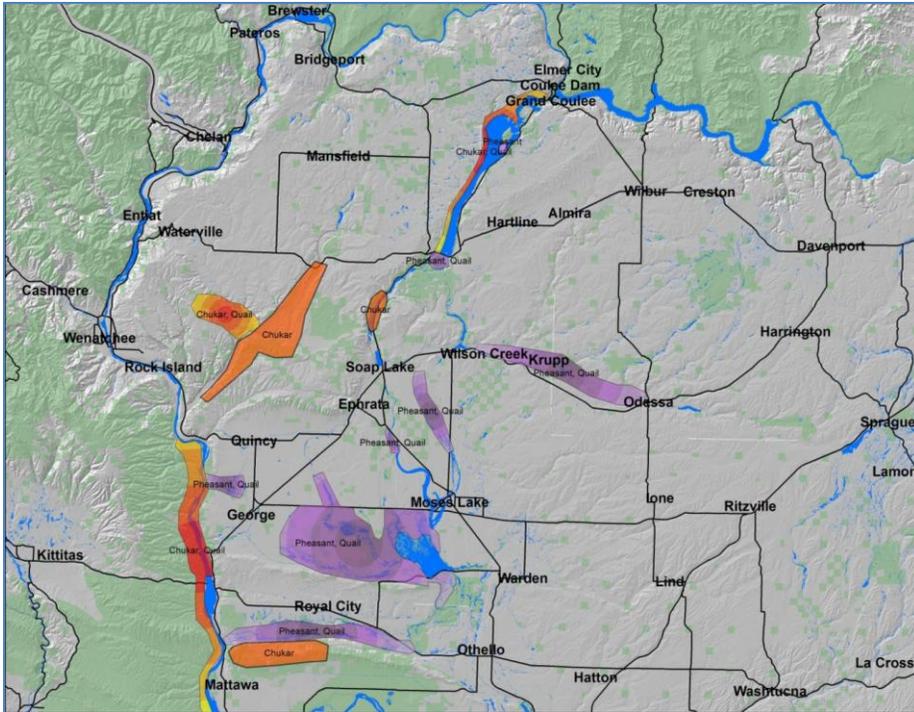


Figure 8. Generalized upland bird concentrations (pheasant, quail, and chukar) throughout District 5.

### **Upland Bird Management**

Upland bird management in District 5 consists primarily of sharecropping and strategic use of bird feeders to increase over-winter survival. However, efforts are underway to enhance nesting cover throughout the Gloyd Seeps Unit of the CBWA. The area has been selected due to the Bureau of Reclamation’s Supplemental Feed Project<sup>1</sup> which will increase wetland acreage throughout the area dramatically.

WDFW intends to support this increase in wetland acreage with an increase in native perennial nesting and winter cover for wildlife. Wildlife Area staff are currently working to establish 180 acres of nesting cover. These fields will require a fallow period to reduce the seedbed of noxious weeds and invasive vegetation. Seeding of native perennial grasses is planned for fall of 2013. The effort is also intended to stem the advance of invasive species and to reduce erosion to the existing ephemeral streambank. Fifteen linear miles of creekbed has been targeted for riparian plantings of willow, dogwood, and waterbirch, with other native shrubs (serviceberry, hawthorn, currant, rose, etc.) being planted on the adjacent drier sites.

### **WATERFOWL**

Ducks – Grant County has been one of Washington’s top duck producers since harvest reporting began in 2001. Last year hunters harvested 76,457 ducks in Grant County surpassing harvest in the second highest county by over 24,000 ducks. Adams County hunters added another 13,771 ducks for a district total of 90,228, a 21% increase over the 2011 district duck harvest.

<sup>1</sup> BOR 2007; <http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/ea/wash/potholes/index.html>

Geese – The District 5 Canada goose harvest was also up from the 2011 harvest totals. Hunters took 20,617 geese in 2012 with 17,939 harvested in Grant County and 2,678 harvested in Adams County. The ten year annual harvest average for this district is 17,116 geese.

**Waterfowl Population Status**

Local waterfowl production has some influence on early season hunting success, but this influence is often minor because by the start of the hunting season migration is in full swing. During the hunting season, most of the waterfowl in the basin come from breeding areas in Canada and Alaska.

Breeding population surveys indicate that waterfowl populations are declining in the Columbia Basin (Fig. 9 and 10). Despite the downward trend in local productivity, hunter success in the basin has remained high and stable which suggests an influx of birds from elsewhere prior to opening weekend.

Areas covered during the waterfowl breeding (Fig. 11) and winter (Fig. 12) surveys . Winter survey data can be located at the following link:

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region2/waterfowl\\_surveys.html](http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/regions/region2/waterfowl_surveys.html)

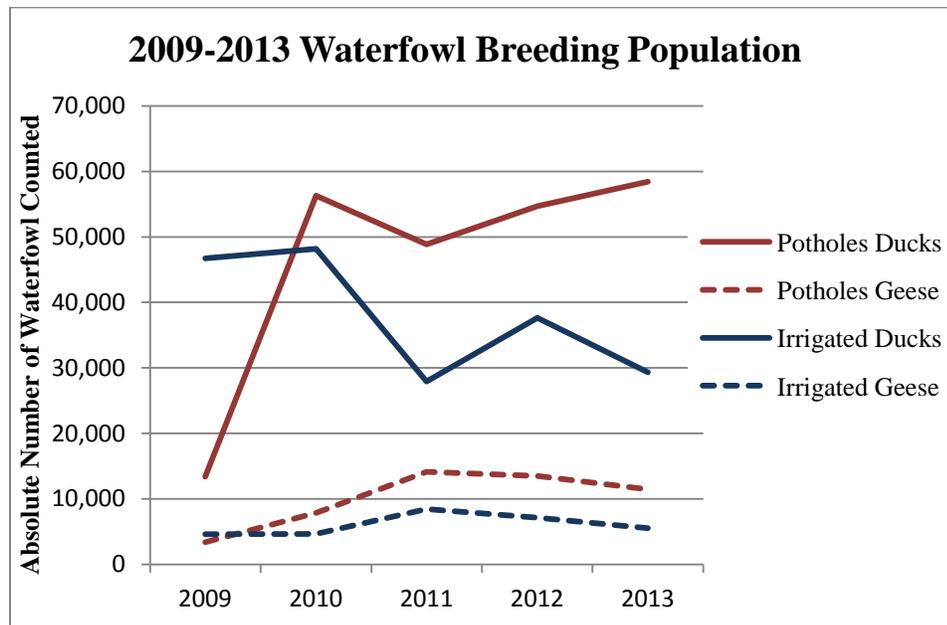


Figure 9. Trends in ducks and geese counted in the Washington’s Potholes and Irrigated waterfowl areas during the annual breeding population surveys.

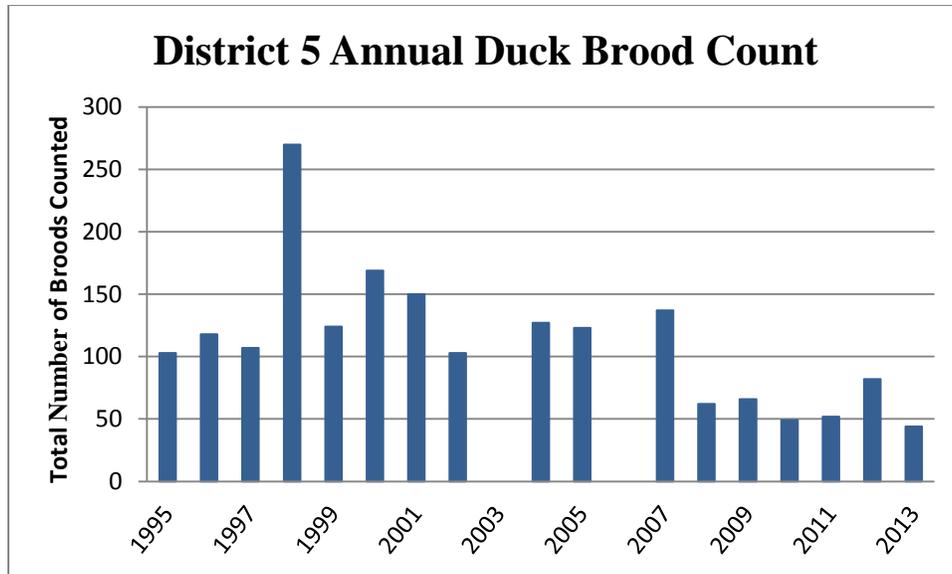


Figure 10. Number of duck broods counted in District 5 during the spring/summer brood survey routes. Data is not available for the 2003 and 2006 surveys.

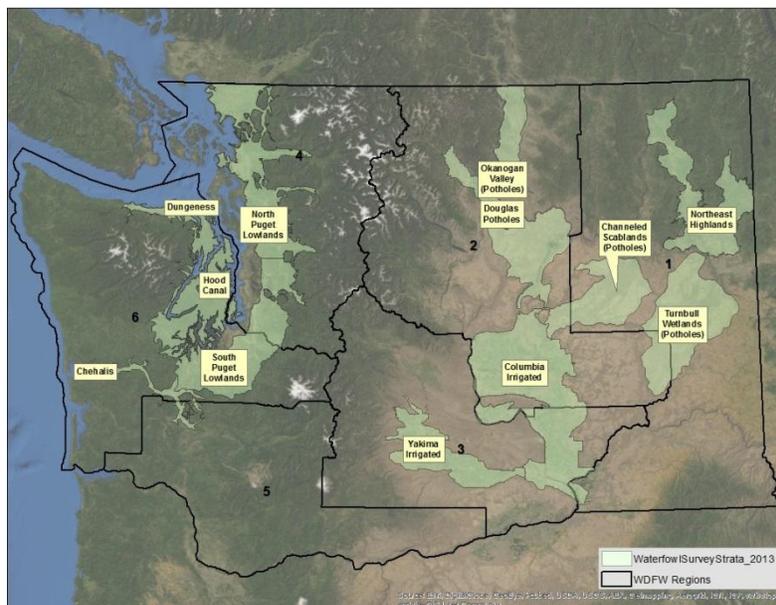


Figure 11. Areas of Washington that are covered during the annual waterfowl breeding population surveys.

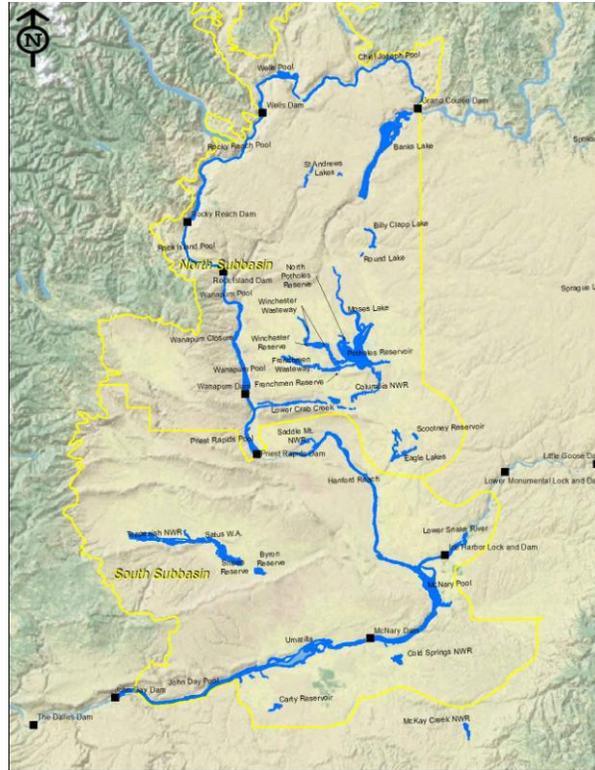


Figure 12. Survey strata used during winter waterfowl surveys. These areas represent locations of potential waterfowl concentrations.

### Waterfowl Migration Chronology and Concentration Areas

Peak migration will bring the best waterfowl hunting in the basin (Fig. 13). November will bring large numbers of mallards, wigeon, gadwalls, teal, scaup, redheads, and canvasbacks. Until this time hunters must rely on early migrants and locally produced birds.

December typically provides the peak of mallards, ringnecks, and canvasbacks, while other dabbling and diving species continue their journey south.

Goose hunting will typically improve in November when early season migrant Canada geese (Lesser and Taverner's) begin to scatter from their initial staging area at Stratford Lake to alfalfa or grain fields within feeding distance from Moses Lake and the Columbia River.

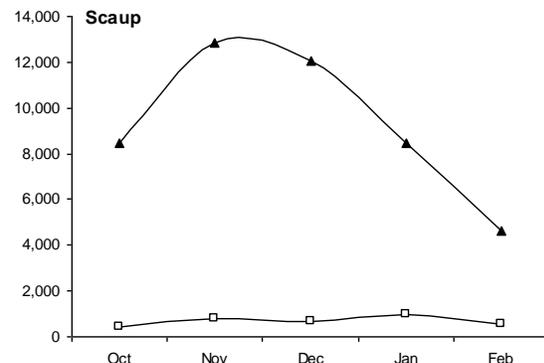
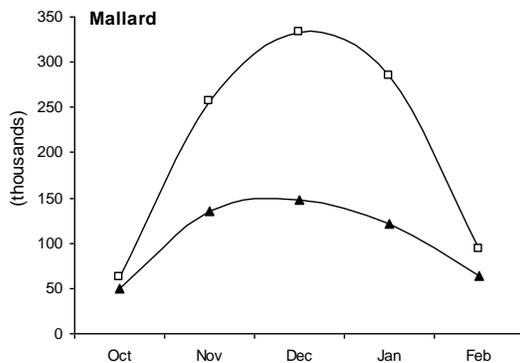


Figure 13. Migration curves for several species which winter in large numbers on the Columbia Plateau. Refer to Figure 12 above for map of subbasin boundaries.

### Understanding Waterfowl Migration

The waterfowl hunting season in District 5 is largely dependent upon bird production in northern breeding grounds (Fig. 14). The first step in understanding the relationship between breeding conditions and the expected harvest is to understand the source of incoming birds. Northern Pacific breeding area (includes: Alaska, British Columbia, and Yukon) provides the bulk of the mallards harvested in Washington State. The second most important breeding area contributing to Washington State harvest is Northern Alberta, followed by Southwest Alberta, and lastly by locally produced birds in Washington and Oregon (Fig. 15).

Perhaps the important consideration is that poor breeding conditions on the prairies parklands has been shown to displace birds to the north-northwest to northern Alberta, Alaska, and the Northwest Territories. Birds that are displaced to these areas have a higher likelihood of migrating through the Basin during fall and winter. Alaska will provide large numbers of waterfowl, perhaps mostly to west-side hunters, while British Columbia and Northern Alberta will provide fair numbers of birds to eastern Washington.

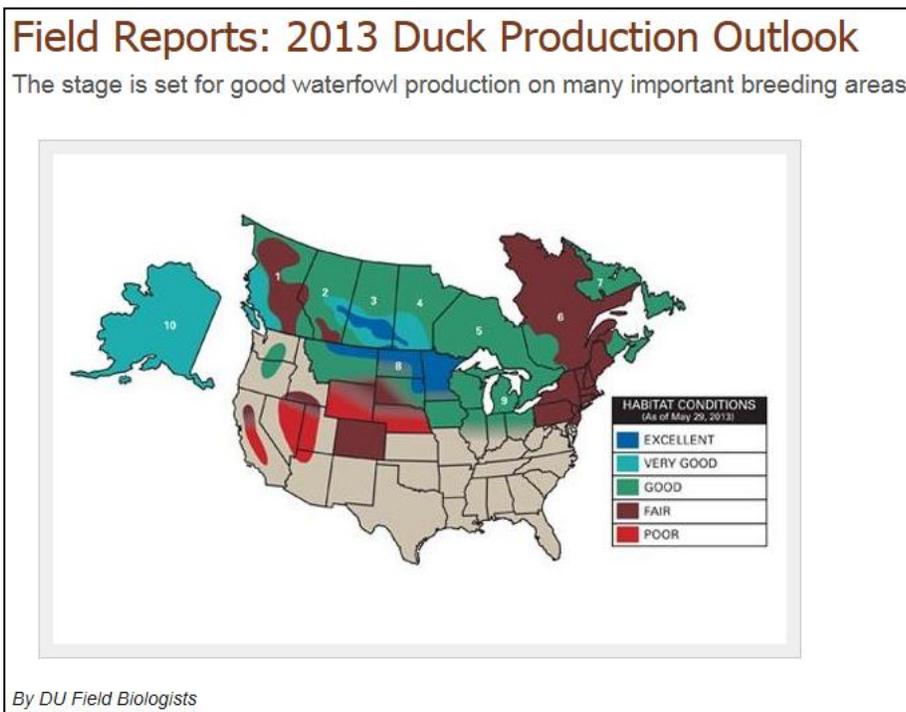


Figure 14. 2013 spring habitat conditions. Source: Ducks Unlimited.

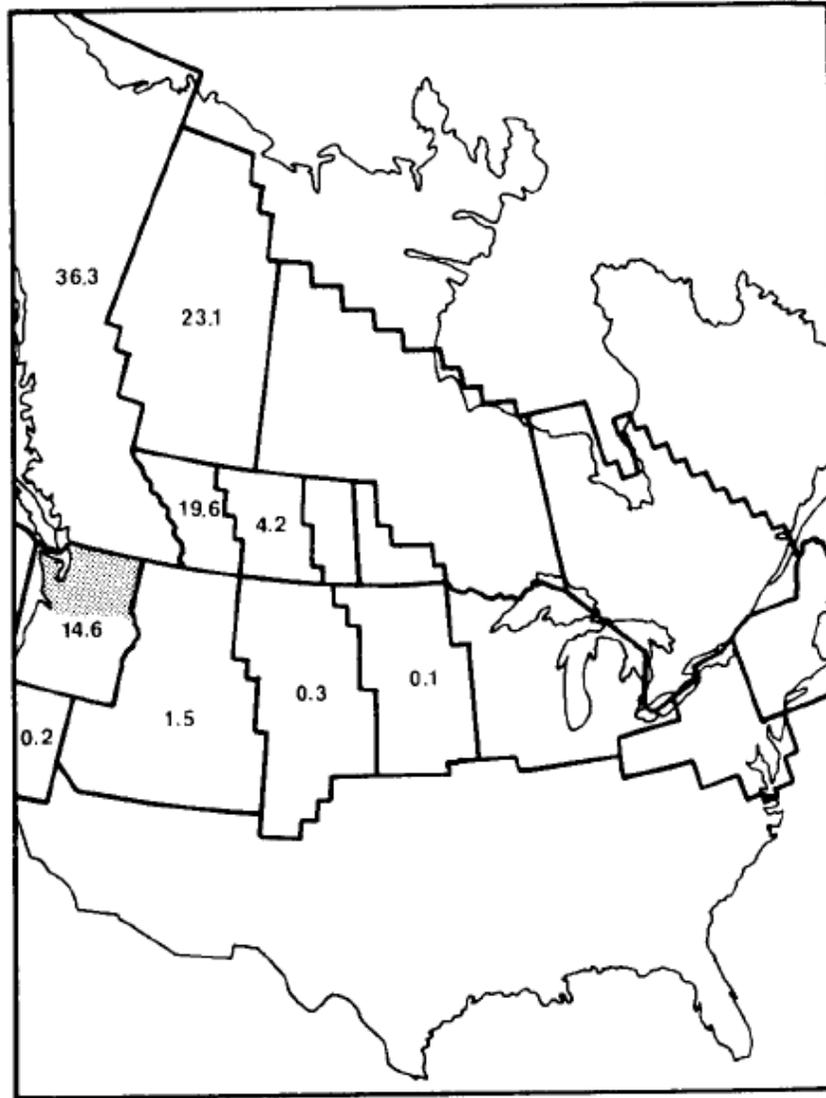


Fig. D-11. Percent derivation of the mallard harvest in Washington (shaded) from major breeding reference areas.

Figure 15. From Munro and Kimball 1982 - *Population Ecology of the Mallard*. VII. *Distribution and Derivation of the harvest*. These data describe where the ducks harvested in Washington State are coming from. Note the importance of northern and southwestern Alberta, and British Columbia.

### **Hunting**

Scouting is often the key to successful waterfowl hunting. Ample opportunity exists for public waterfowl hunts but hunters should first identify where birds are feeding and roosting. Feeding flights for ducks typically occur very early in the morning and late in the evening and last for an hour or so. There is always good opportunity to harvest waterfowl during opening weekend in the Columbia Basin.

A harvest rate of slightly above three ducks per person is common from year to year for the first weekend of the general waterfowl season. Mallard, teal, American wigeon, and gadwall are among the species most commonly encountered. Also, wood ducks can be found in fair numbers concentrating in stands of flooded Russian olive trees (typically associated with the Winchester and Frenchmen wasteways) in the early season.

Late in the season, when snow is on the ground and conditions are harsh, ducks are likely to feed more during the day while the snow is soft, or will seek out fields that are grazed by cattle, so they can access the snow-buried corn kernels. Knowing when and where ducks are feeding and which direction they depart will help hunters determine the best locations to intercept the duck traffic with a spread of decoys.

Select areas to hunt based on the species you want to target. Diving ducks are typically hunted along the Columbia River, particularly at Wells Pool, Wanapum Pool, and Priest Rapids Pool. They forage over beds of submerged aquatic vegetation such as pondweeds and milfoil. American wigeon will associate with diving ducks because they are *kleptoparasites*, meaning they wait for the diving ducks or coots to bring up a bill-full of vegetation, and then quickly rush in to steal their meal.

Dabbling ducks are more commonly targeted on the plateau where grain corn and wheat fields attract mallards and pintail and shallow wetlands attract teal, American wigeon, and gadwall. Canada geese feed primarily in wheat and alfalfa fields, so requesting permission from private landowners is often necessary to secure good goose hunting.

Setting up a decoy spread on a pond between the feeding and roosting sites will generally result in some good shooting, particularly when conditions are favorable (e.g. wind, snow, fog). Typically the larger roosting sites will be the Wanapum Closure (Columbia River), Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, and Columbia National Wildlife Refuge Marsh Units (Fig. 16).

Hunters should be mindful that water (and muck) depths are highly variable and it takes a lot of trial and error to learn where you can and cannot set out decoys. For some areas, boat access is a must. Winchester and Frenchmen Wasteways (the two major drainages entering the west side of Potholes Reservoir) are crossable in some areas with chest waders but use caution as deep holes do exist and patches of muck can be difficult to exit, particularly when packing decoys.

One of the more popular waterfowl hunting areas is Potholes Reservoir. The abundance of small sand dune islands (Fig. 17), where hunters find cover, makes this an attractive area to many hunters. Most hunters use the northern portion of the reservoir where they find shallower water and numerous islands. Hunting pressure and competition for the best locations on Potholes Reservoir is high. Hunters that are new to the reservoir should be aware that potholes reservoir water levels do increase dramatically through the hunting season (Fig. 18).

Winchester Lake is another location where hunters can expect to see good numbers of waterfowl but hunting pressure is relatively high here. Winchester Lake sits in a prime location to get traffic from mallards that feed on grain corn in the surrounding area. Ducks typically come from Winchester Reserve, Potholes Reserve, Moses Lake, and/or the Wanapum Closure to feed in

fields and they occasionally attempt to shorten their commute to the roost by stopping at Winchester Lake instead. This area can be very good at times.

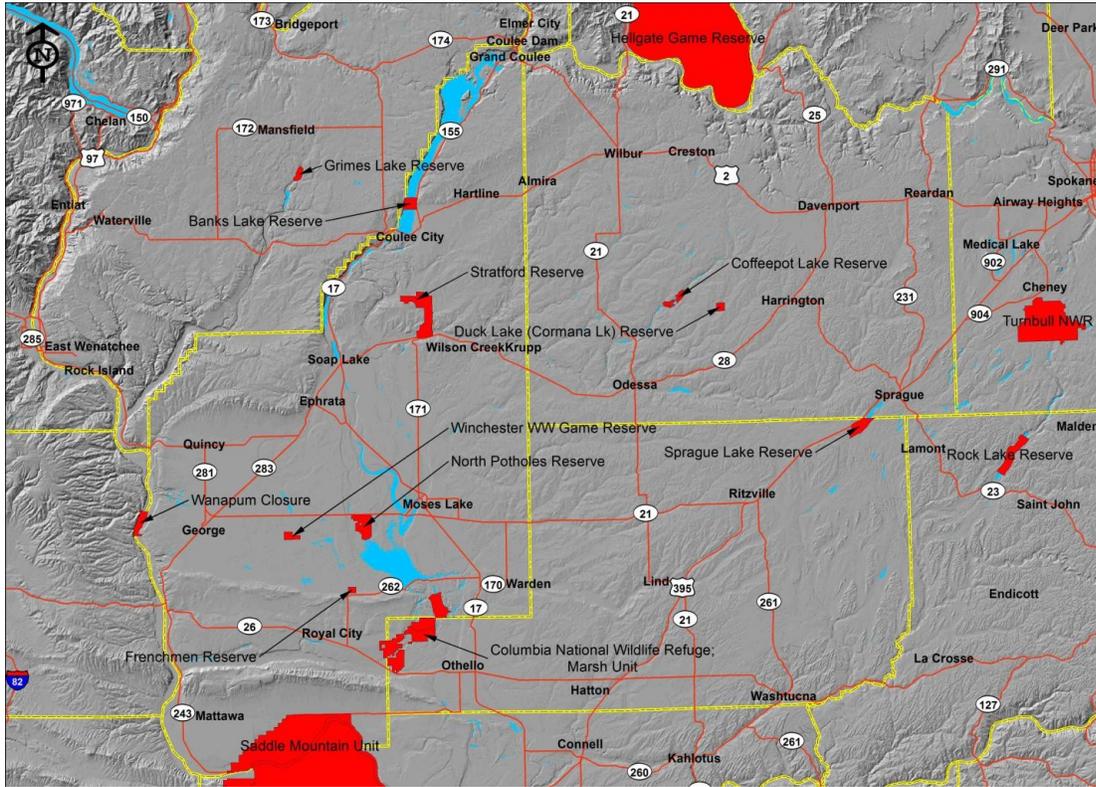
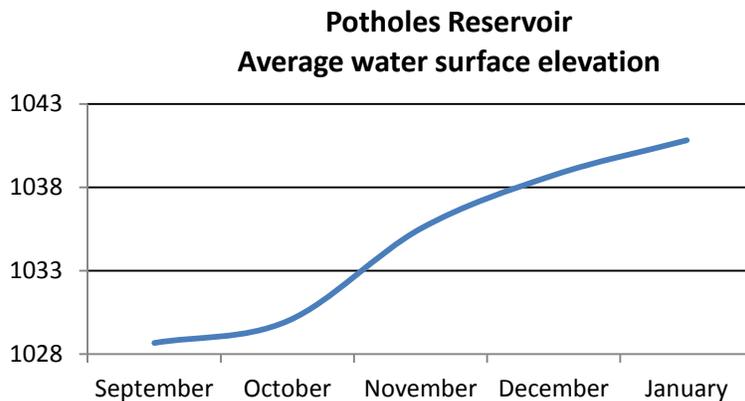


Figure 16. Location of wildlife reserves and closed federal refuge units (in red) throughout and adjacent to District 5.



Figure 17. Aerial imagery showing difference between high water (June) and low water (September) levels on Potholes Reservoir.



*Figure 18. Potholes Reservoir water surface elevation (in feet) during waterfowl season. Note that water surface elevation is measured at O’Sullivan dam and some lag in flooding will occur in the upper portions of the reservoir.*

Regulated Access Areas (RAA) occur in District 5 to provide quality hunting opportunity (Fig. 19) Hunters frequenting the Winchester RAA should use caution on pintails, which can be abundant and thus easy to exceed bag limits. Time restrictions and number of vehicles allowed for the RAA can be found in the hunting pamphlet. These sites are now ‘Register to Hunt’ so be sure to register at the box provided in the parking area. See Figure 19 below for a map of RAAs.

Waterfowl hunters should also be aware of private land grain fields enrolled in the Hunter Access Program. This program is intended to provide public field hunting opportunity for ducks and geese but also may provide opportunity to harvest pheasants and occasionally gray partridge. Fields are typically identified and enrolled during November, after the fields are harvested; timing of enrollment and field locations will vary annually. Call or visit the Region 2 office in Ephrata at (509) 754-4624 for details about this program and the Regulated Access Areas.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, [see “Let’s Go Waterfowling.”](#)

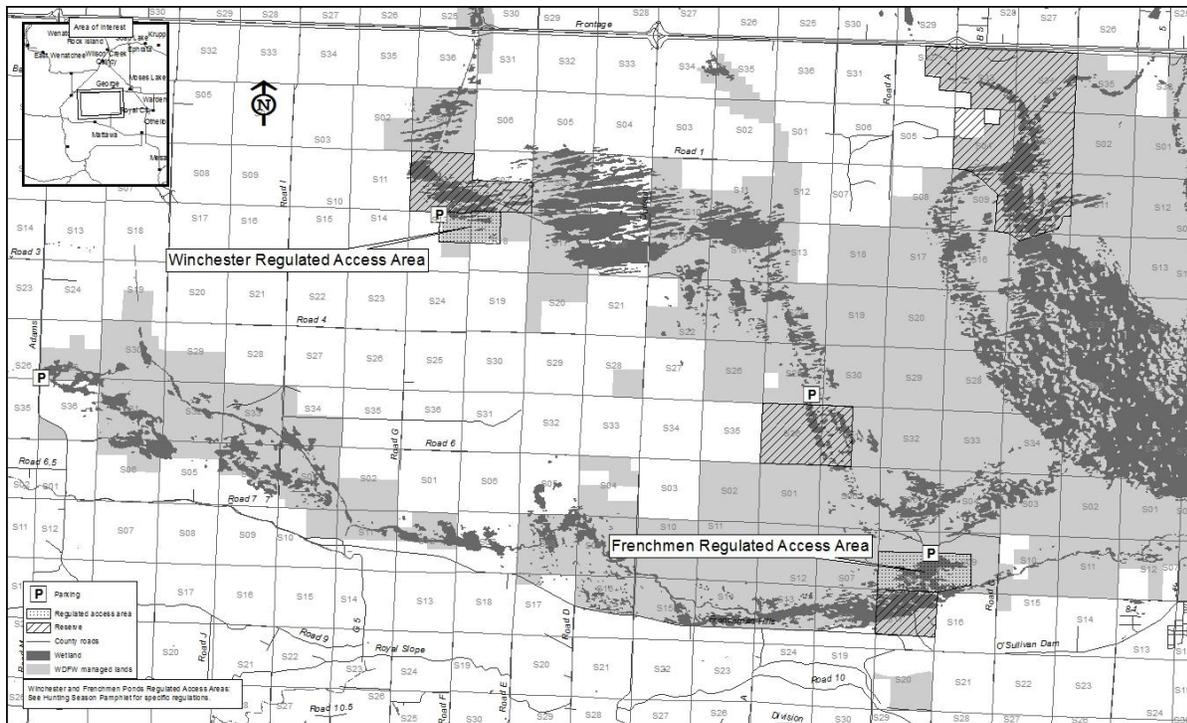


Figure 19. Locations of the Frenchmen and Winchester Regulated Access Areas west of Potholes Reservoir.

## SMALL GAME

### *Distribution and Population Status*

Small game in District 5 consists primarily of bobcat, raccoon, fox, crows, cottontail rabbits, and coyotes. There are no sizeable populations of forest grouse or wild turkey in this district. Bobcats occur in District 5 but harvest is relatively low. Raccoons occur in fair numbers in association with wetlands and residential developments when adequate native habitat exists.

Fox farms occurred adjacent to the Columbia Plateau during the early 1900s but declines in fur prices during the 1950s resulted in fox being released into the wild. A few descendants of these individuals occur within District 5 today, however these introduced fox are still considered uncommon.

Crows are typically hunted in areas where damage occurs, such as orchards (typically nuts), thus hunting opportunities for crows within District 5 are limited. Cottontails are widespread and abundant in areas of optimal habitat. In native landscapes, hunters should look to rock outcrops, greasewood patches, or other thickets where suitable escape cover occurs. Cottontails can be found on farm ground as well, particularly within and around equipment storage areas or rock piles.

There is much opportunity for coyote hunting throughout most of District 5. Yellow-bellied marmots can be hunted but most hunting opportunity occurs on private lands where rock piles

and agriculture are in close proximity. Hunters should also be aware that Washington ground squirrels are protected and they can occur in large numbers in District 5.

## **HUNTER ACCESS**

### ***Land Ownership***

Whether hunting, hiking, or wildlife viewing it is important that we all respect private property rights and ALWAYS ask permission before entering private lands. Fortunately, technology has made this process considerably easier and land ownership can now be ascertained from the internet using the following resources. Simply log on and use the interactive map program to zoom into your area of interest. Clicking on the parcels will reveal land owner information.

<http://adamswa.mapsifter.com/>

<http://grantwa.mapsifter.com/>

The disadvantage of these resources is lack of portability and difficulty scanning a large area for availability of public land. However, these are by far the best available resource for identifying ownership of specific locations. The best resource available for identifying where public land occurs is the Department of Natural Resources public lands quadrangles (1:100k). See the link below to order a copy for a fee.

[http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Topics/Maps/Pages/public\\_land\\_quadrangle\\_maps.aspx](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/BusinessPermits/Topics/Maps/Pages/public_land_quadrangle_maps.aspx)

### ***Private Lands Program***

Since 1948, WDFW has worked with private landowners across the state to provide public access through a negotiated agreement. Landowners participating in a WDFW cooperative agreement retain liability protection provided under RCW 4.24.210. Landowners receive technical services, materials for posting (signs and posts), and in some cases monetary compensation. In addition, lands under agreement are well known by WDFW enforcement staff.

Currently, the private lands access program includes four basic access agreement types: Feel Free to Hunt, Register to Hunt, Hunting Only by Written Permission, and Permit Only Area. More information on where these enrolled lands occur can be found at WDFW's GoHunt site, <http://wdfw.wa.gov/mapping/gohunt/index.html>. Over 250,000 acres of private property in District 5 are accessible to hunters through these agreements. When accessing these lands, hunters should obey all the rules posted for that specific piece of property. Hunters should also be aware that, unless property is enrolled in these agreements, they may not access private property and they may be prosecuted if they trespass.

### ***Public Land***

#### **WDFW Managed Land:**

Wildlife Areas – The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area contains about 192,000 acres and provides habitat for a multitude of species. For more information on this wildlife area, please visit the wildlife [website](#). Visitors to the wildlife area need to be aware that a Discover Pass is required to access all WDFW lands.

Release Sites – The Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program was designed to help supplement harvest and maintain hunter opportunity in Washington. Several pheasant release sites are found in District 5. For more information on this program and release sites in this district, please visit the Enhancement Program’s [website](#).

**DNR:** The Washington Department of Natural Resources maintains land that is open to the public for recreational purposes. Visitors to DNR land should be aware that a [Discover Pass](#) is required for access. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on DNR land can be found [here](#).

**BLM:** Some BLM land is found in District 5 and is open to public hunting. For more information on BLM property or to order maps, please visit the [blm.gov](http://blm.gov) website.

**The Bureau of Reclamation** maintains property that is open to public use for recreational purposes. Further information regarding recreational opportunities on BOR land can be found [here](#).

### ***Map Book***

Click the image below to access Ephrata District Hunting Maps.



### ***ADA Access***

District 5 maintains some access for Americans with disabilities. These sites occur at Rocky Ford Creek (Drumheller Pond) and Buckshot Ranch. Hunters must have a Disabled Hunter Permit (and in most cases permits from the land managers) in order to access hunting areas behind locked gates by driving on the roads that are normally open only to walk-ins. For additional information, please call or write to Dolores Noyes, WDFW, 360-902-2349, FAX: 360-902-2392 or Email: [Dolores.Noyes@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Dolores.Noyes@dfw.wa.gov).

**Rocky Ford Creek** – Travel south from Ephrata on SR 282 for 7.2 miles. Turn right onto Neppel Rd (Old Moses Lake Hwy). Go 0.1 mile and turn right at the public fishing sign. Continue 0.5 mile to the access site. The access duck blind is on a small pond off the creek. A vehicle can be used to drop off a disabled hunter next to the blind. The ground around the blind is rough and access into the water is best with a small hand launch boat or raft. An accessible vault toilet is in parking lot located nearby for the walk-in fishers. Use of blind is by reservation only. Obtain key from Regional Office, 509-754-4624.

Buckshot Ranch – Drive south on SR 243 along the Columbia River from Vantage toward Mattawa. Turn right (west) onto Road 26 SW and go about 1 mile to the Priest Rapids/Buckshot Wildlife Area. Follow the gravel road into a parking area and turn right between two fence posts. Follow dirt road north 0.25 miles to fence on left side to a locked gate on left. Drive through the gate into the crop field towards the old pump house. Ground level roll-in goose pit blind is available with seasonal success dependent on weather. Call to reserve, 509-754-4624. Obtain gate key from Ephrata Office.

***Bird Dog Training***

District 5 does not currently have any areas designated for bird dog training. Thus all training on WDFW land must occur within the established bird dog training season, August 1 – March 31.

***Target Shooting***

Per WAC 332-52-145, target shooting is allowed in developed recreational facilities (Table 2) or areas with an unobstructed, earthen backstop capable of stopping all projectiles and debris in a safe manner. Targets are defined as ‘items that are commercially manufactured for the specific purpose of target shooting’. Because of extensive misuse of WDFW managed lands (primarily litter related), some areas have been closed to target shooting, particularly in the Lind Coulee, Potholes, and Seep Lakes Units of the CBWA. Information for shooting range facilities is provided below.

*Table 2. List of target shooting facilities in District 5.*

County	Name	Contact
Adams	Lind Golf & Gun Club	509-671-3314
Adams	Othello Gun Club	509-488-3768
Adams	Ritzville Gun Club	Gun Club Road, Ritzville
Adams	Washtucna Gun Club	509-646-3263
Grant	Boyd Mordhorst Memorial Range	509-345-2550
Grant	Coulee City Sportsmen	509-632-5137
Grant	Marlin Trap Club	509-982-2445
Grant	Moses Lake Gun Club	509-765-1382
Grant	Quincy Gun Club	509-787-5506

**APPENDIX A.**

**Desert Unit (GMU 290) Photos**



## **Desert Unit (GMU 290) Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q: Where should I start looking for a mature buck?**

A: The highest density of mule deer typically occurs between Dodson Road and Potholes Reservoir, bounded on the north by Interstate 90 and on the south by Frenchmen Hills Road. We recommend exploring all access points around this area when getting to know the unit, then branch out from there.

### **Q: What is the area like?**

A: The unit sits within the heart of the Bureau of Reclamation, Columbia Basin Irrigation Project, which delivers water to over 600,000 acres of farmland in the area. As a result many small ponds and streams have been incidentally created in this area. Hunters should be familiar with the orientation of Frenchmen and Winchester Wasteways as they pose a significant barrier and can only be crossed by boat or with chest waders in places. There are many small ponds associated with these wasteways that are used by waterfowl hunters.

The Desert Unit provides a rich source of natural vegetation so, though mule deer utilize agricultural fields such as alfalfa, the crops may not be the best place to seek out your deer. Bitterbrush, which is common within the Desert Unit, is an important mule deer food item during winter. Be familiar with the distribution of bitterbrush patches, particularly during the later seasons if snowfall has occurred.

The Desert Unit sits on deep sandy soils. These soils have been wind-blown, resulting in long east-west running dunes which characterize the landscape (and provide great vantage points to scan for deer). These dunes and sandy soils can make walking difficult at times and will certainly make packing out an animal a lot of work.

### **Q: What size bucks am I likely to encounter?**

A: The typical buck harvested from the Desert Unit is a 4x4 with a 24" spread. Many hunters report having seen larger bucks than the one they harvested.

### **Q: Are there any areas that I cannot hunt?**

A: Hunters need to be aware of the locations and boundaries of Winchester Reserve, Frenchmen Reserve, and North Potholes Reserve (Fig. 19). Private lands within the Desert Unit are only open to hunting if the hunter first obtains landowner permission.

### **Q: Where should I stay?**

A: The town of Moses Lake is the nearest location with many amenities (motels, restaurants, etc.). Camping is allowed on WDFW lands; most folks camp within the parking areas. Expect crowds during the opening weekend of duck and pheasant hunting.

### **Q: Is there any other hunting going on in the area?**

A: The entire unit is open to hunting. Expect to see waterfowl hunters and upland bird hunters throughout the area. However, these hunters are typically associated with the wasteways and associated ponds; once you get far enough into the shrub dominated uplands, you will find far fewer people.