

District 15

Kitsap, Mason and east Jefferson Counties

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Summary

District 15 is located along the east side of the Olympic Peninsula. The district covers Mason, Kitsap and the portion of Jefferson County that lies east of Discovery Bay. The Game Management units are quite diverse, with GMU 621 (Olympic) and GMU 636 (Skokomish) bordering the Olympic National Park and offering quite a bit of hunting opportunity on National Forest lands. Game Management Units 651 (Satsop) and 633 (Mason) are comprised of mostly commercial timber lands, private property and some Department of Natural Resources parcels.

The remaining units, GMU 624 (Coyle) and GMU 627 (Kitsap) have some public parcels and commercial timberlands but are comprised mostly of private property, much of which is heavily developed, especially near Puget Sound. Hunting and vehicular access is constantly changing on private property, including the timberlands, so be sure to contact the owners before hunting. The easiest way to determine ownership is to access the County Assessor's webpage on the internet and check the parcel maps for the area where you plan to hunt.

[Kitsap County](#), [Mason County](#), [Jefferson County](#)

The habitat across District 15 is mostly Douglas fir/western hemlock second or third growth with clearcuts scattered throughout. Farmlands are rapidly disappearing due to residential sprawl. Unfortunately, virtually all shorelines in the district are privately owned so access for waterfowl hunting is very limited. However, district staff is currently working on maintaining access through the [Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program](#). Information on this new program including hunting locations and rules is available on the WDFW website.

Hunting Forecasts

Pheasant: Pheasant numbers should be similar to last year's at this district's three release sites. Nontoxic shot is required on all pheasant release sites. More information is available at the WDFW [GoHunt](#) site and the [Western Washington Pheasant Release](#) brochure.

2012 Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: [Pheasant - Statewide and by County](#)

Quail: District 15 contains the largest population of mountain quail in the state. Although frustratingly unpredictable, they are most likely to be found in two- to six-year-old clearcuts and tall stands of Scot's Broom throughout Mason and Kitsap Counties. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird. Locations to try include the DNR property on the Tahuya Peninsula northwest of Belfair and the industrial timberlands between Shelton, Matlock and McCleary.

2012 Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: [Quail - Statewide and by County](#)

Forest Grouse: Hunting on the Olympic National Forest can prove highly successful for a combination of blue (sooty) and ruffed grouse. The Skokomish Valley is another popular grouse location. Populations are expected to be similar to last year. With the high cost of gasoline and limited vehicle access to forest roads, road hunting for grouse has dropped dramatically. However, hunters willing to walk beyond the gates can find some excellent hunting especially when using a setter or pointer.

2012 Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics: [Forest Grouse - Statewide and by County](#)

Band-tailed Pigeon: Hunter success should be slightly improved due to higher pigeon numbers observed during July surveys in along Hood Canal. Band-tails are most prevalent in the district along marine shorelines near mineral locations or in the higher elevation berry fields.

Waterfowl: Waterfowl hunting should be similar to 2012. Public hunting access exists in the Skokomish and Chimacum Valleys and at the mouth of the Duckabush, Quilcene and Union rivers. Many of the undeveloped lakes and marshes on the Tahuya Peninsula offer an untapped and remote walk-in hunting opportunity for mallards, ringnecks and scaup. Be sure to check the 2013 Migratory Waterfowl Regulation Pamphlet for additional requirements before hunting sea ducks (long-tailed ducks, scoter, harlequin and goldeneye) in Western Washington. District 15 wildlife biologists plan to continue waterfowl hunting opportunities with the [Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program](#). Check the WDFW website for locations and restrictions.

For an excellent introduction to waterfowl hunting, [see "Let's Go Waterfowling."](#)

[2012 Statewide Small Game Harvest Statistics](#)

Deer and Elk: Deer hunting opportunities continue to be promising across the district. While many of the commercial timberlands may be gated off to vehicles, walk-in opportunities abound. These clearcuts as well as those on state property produce some of our biggest bucks.

Meanwhile, elk hunting opportunities in District 15 have steadily declined over the past several decades. In recent years, the majority of elk in the district have moved from clearcuts to private pastures and hay fields during the hunting season. Hunters are always encouraged to arrange access before applying for special permits in the district. However, for those who like to get away from the crowds, the rugged terrain of Olympic and Skokomish Units can provide a quality hunting experience for both elk and deer.

Hunting on Private Lands Is A Privilege, Treat Private Lands With Respect

- ✓ **Ask Permission**
- ✓ **Obey Posted Signs**
- ✓ **Leave Gates As You Found Them**
- ✓ **Pack Out Your Trash**
- ✓ **Be Courteous**

Archers and Muzzle loaders

Private timber companies have traditionally opened their lands to modern firearm hunters during established seasons. Archers and Muzzleloaders may not have full access, and that level of access varies-by year and by land owner. Most often access is influenced by industrial fire classification issued by DNR. Hunters are urged to respect the landowners by following that rules.

Landownership

Every GMU is a checkerboard of ownerships. It is the hunter's responsibility to understand ownership before accessing properties, and then to scout for access points. Some of the major landowner(s) in each GMU are mentioned; however, hunters should be aware that there are many additional landowners.

Major public land for WDFW, DNR, and USFS can be located using the ["Go Hunt"](#) mapping feature on the WDFW web site. Additionally, both the DNR and USFS sell maps.

Access Ratings

One of the more common questions is about the level of access. While hunters generally enjoy a high level of access to all GMU's, the level of access varies by motorized and non-motorized. Additionally some GMU's are quite rugged.

In this guide, each GMU is given a rating from 1 – 3.

- A "1" rating means that it has a high level of motorized access. In this case most if not all of the main logging roads are open, as well as most of the spur roads.
- A "2" rating means that there is a mix of open roads and closed roads. Anyone hunting these areas should be aware that they can end up in a situation where it will be necessary to pack their animal several miles.
- A "3" rating means that most of the GMU is accessible by non-motorized means.
- A rating with a "+" indicates that at least a portion of the GMU is very steep and rugged. A hunter could end up packing a harvested animal several miles in very rough country. So while the roads are good for distributing hunters there are some portions that can be a little on wild side!

GMU 621 – Olympic Access rating = 2+

Elk in this unit are generally found on lower elevation private lands along the major river valleys. This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, DNR, and USFS. Access to USFS land is generally allowed year-round. DNR land is accessible to motorized vehicles or walk-in only in most areas. Green Diamond Resources generally opens some of their gates to motorized access from September to the end of December; however, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. For areas behind closed gates on Green Diamond Resources land, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

GMU 624 – Coyle Access rating = 3

Other than the resident elk herd in the Sequim area, the Coyle Unit is usually considered a deer area. Although there are scattered timberlands that are publicly owned by DNR, most forest lands are privately owned. The largest property manager is Olympic Resource Management which is a division of Pope Resources Company. Maps of their properties can be found at

www.orminc.com. Although some DNR and private mainlines may be open to motor vehicles, most hunting access is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicle.

GMU 627 – Kitsap Access rating = 3

The Kitsap Unit is a highly human developed deer area, with private property throughout. However there is still ample hunting opportunity on forest lands. DNR owns a considerable amount of land in the western part of the unit. Olympic Resource Management (Pope) and Green Diamond Resource Company also have major holdings here. Whether state or private, virtually all access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles. Be sure to obtain permission to trespass if hunting on private property not owned by one of these major timber companies.

GMU 633 – Mason Access rating = 3

Although elk are occasionally harvested here, the Mason Unit is best known as an area for deer. DNR has forestland throughout with extensive holdings on the Tahuya Peninsula. But in the Mason Unit, most of the deer hunting occurs on private property controlled by the Green Diamond Resource Company and the Manke Lumber Company. These lands are currently open to public hunting but, other than a few mainlines, are restricted to walk-in or non-motorized vehicle access.

GMU 636 – Skokomish Access rating = 2+

This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands and USFS. Elk in this unit are generally found on the lower elevation private timberlands primarily owned by Green Diamond Resources and along the upper Wynoochee River Valley. Green Diamond Resources generally opens some of their gates to motorized access from September to the end of December; however, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings.

For areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year. Upper elevations and those portions of this GMU in the upper Wynoochee River and Skokomish River Valleys are primarily USFS with most areas open year-round for vehicle access. Some USFS land is gated and closed to motorized access to minimize disturbance to elk.

GMU 651 – Satsop Access Rating = 2

The primary area accessed by elk hunters is owned by Green Diamond Resources. They generally open some gates to motorized access from September to the end of December; however, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. For areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

District 15 - 2012 Game Harvest Statistics:

- [Deer General Harvest](#)
- [Deer Special Permits Harvest](#)
- [Elk General Harvest](#)
- [Elk Special Permits Harvest](#)

Cougar: The big cats can occur anywhere across the district but are most likely to be encountered in areas with high deer and elk densities in GMUs 621 (Olympic), 636 (Skokomish)

and 651 (Satsop). WDFW changed cougar hunting season design for 2012 with a liberalized season coupled with harvest guidelines (see wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/cougar). This management plan will continue for 2013. Cougar seasons will run from September to December for any weapon, and may close after January 1 if harvest meets or exceeds the harvest guideline in the pamphlet.

[2012 Statewide Cougar Harvest Statistics](#)

Miscellaneous comments

Tribal Hunting: District 15 is within the ceded area of numerous treaty tribes on the Olympic Peninsula. The WDFW and tribes are co-managers for wildlife populations. Tribes set their own seasons and bag limits and hunting often occurs before, during and after WDFW hunting seasons. Tribal enforcement personnel are responsible for ensuring that tribal hunting regulations, which may differ from state regulations, are followed. You can find more information about tribal hunting on the [WDFW website](#).

Hunting Results for District 15

Upland Bird

Quail

Mason County hunters accounted for 70 of the district's 80 quail that were harvested during the 2012 season. Most, if not all, were mountain quail.

Forest Grouse

Mason and Jefferson County hunters took the majority of the grouse in District 15 last year. Only 27 were harvested in Kitsap County.

Big Game

Deer

District 15 hunters harvested 1,714 deer during last year's season. Of the 1,502 bucks taken, 36 were 5 points or better. Half of those big bucks were taken in the heavily developed GMU 627 (Kitsap) and were evenly divided between modern firearm and archery hunters.

Two units in the district, GMU 621 (Olympic), and GMU 651 (Satsop), produced over 300 bucks each. Modern firearms hunters in the Olympic Unit harvested 346 bucks with a 26.1 percent success rate. Modern firearms hunters took 340 bucks from The Satsop unit and had a 25.7 percent success rate.

Elk

Elk hunters harvested 30 elk in District 15 during last year's season, 19 of which came from GMU 651 (Satsop). Twenty-seven were bulls and 3 were antlerless.

Bear

District 15 hunters harvested 89 black bear in 2012, with the harvest widely spread across the entire district.

Cougar

District 15 hunters took eight cougar during the 2012 season, six from GMU 651 (Satsop) one each from GMU 624 (Coyle) and GMU 636 (Skokomish).

Waterfowl**Ducks**

Determining waterfowl harvest totals for the district is problematic since Jefferson County is split between two districts and hunters only provide the county where the birds were taken. While most waterfowling occurs in Jefferson County's eastern half, exact numbers cannot be determined. Total duck harvest in 2012 was 2,608 for Jefferson County, 4,423 in Mason County and 430 in Kitsap County. The harvest in Kitsap County is expected to continue to be low due to county-imposed shoreline shooting restrictions and a rapidly increasing human population.

Geese

The goose harvest was up from 2011 in Mason County with 179 geese taken. Kitsap and Jefferson saw a drop in their goose harvest with a total of 134 taken in those counties.