

Directors Report

2/3/2020

Skagit Valley Elk-Crop Mitigation

The Washington Legislature appropriated funds for WDFW to use in state fiscal years 2020 and 2021 for cooperative elk management in the Skagit Valley to address impacts of elk on agricultural crop production. Many commercial crop producers (Producer) and WDFW recognize the need to work cooperatively to prevent, correct, or minimize damage caused by wildlife, including elk in the Skagit Valley.

Mitigation: The purpose of the mitigation available under this agreement is to recognize the valuable contribution private landholders make to big game (specifically elk) in areas where they frequently inhabit fields producing crops. WDFW will reimburse a Producer for commercially purchased fertilizer or grass type seed to offset wildlife forage loss of orchard type grasses that shall not exceed \$2,500 per year.

WDFW Conflict Staff have met with eligible farmers and signed ten agreements, worth \$5,000 each, this month. Additional agreements have been completed and are pending signatures from landowners that are currently out of the area.

To receive reimbursement under the Crop-Mitigation program the Producer must meet the following criteria:

- 1. Have elk related damage to an eligible farm (RCW 82.08.855) and work with local WDFW staff to complete a signed Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement / Skagit Valley Elk-Crop Mitigation.**
- 2. Register in the statewide vendor database (Required to receive State Payment).**
- 3. Purchase fertilizer, grass-type seed, and/or noxious weed treatment and obtain all receipts from the seller.**
- 4. Complete the WDFW invoice and sign as the “Vendor Authorized Signature”**

Damage update:

WDFW staff responded to three elk-related complaints for the month January. Two complaints were to non-agricultural producers. One complaint was to landscaping plants, and the other complaint was located off the South Skagit Highway where elk had rubbed several small fir trees. WDFW staff is currently working nights and weekends to respond to landowner complaints. Current landowner complaints this year (July to February 1) total 68 complaints, with 41 on agricultural lands in Skagit and Acme Valley. Landowner harvest since July 1, 2019 is 33 (25 cows and 8 bulls). This does not include the recreational harvest in Elk Area 4941. WDFW staff continue to pursue a bull elk group utilizing agricultural property during nighttime hours off Burmaster Road in Skagit County. Motion alarms and cameras have been set on elk trails east of Burmaster Road to monitor the deterrence effect. Cellular transmitting cameras have been helpful in

providing real time data for nighttime response. The landowner has also conducted night hazing by use of an ATV.



Tree Rubs Caused by Bull Elk



Bulls captured on film using Swinomish trail cameras

WDFW Elk Study:

WDFW will deploy up to 20 GPS collars on cow elk in Skagit Valley beginning February 2020. The purpose of this study is to provide WDFW and Co-managers from the Point Elliott Treaty Tribes (PETT) with information on the North Cascades elk herd (NCEH) and elk movements relative to Elk Area 4941 (Skagit Valley), an area with the potential for human-elk conflict. Results of the study will assist WDFW and Co-managers with understanding how and when elk use the elk area and surrounding habitats and thus aid in addressing and mitigating human-elk conflict in Skagit Valley.

The specific objectives for this study are:

- Deploy 20 satellite GPS collars on cow elk in the Skagit Valley within the boundaries of Elk Area 4941 to aid in mark-resight helicopter surveys for estimation of population size and herd demographics.
- Estimate core and home range size of collared elk.
- Evaluate seasonal movement rates for collared individuals and the extent of any movements outside Elk Area 4941.
- Investigate and document causes of mortalities in collared individuals and augment existing mortality data to estimate a survival rate for cow elk in the NCEH.