

Wildlife Program –Bi-weekly Report

March 16 to 31, 2020

DIVERSITY DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

GAME DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

HUNTER EDUCATION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Nothing for this installment.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunter Education Deferrals: The Hunter Education Division administrative assistant is the primary person responsible for processing and approving the once in a lifetime one-year deferrals from hunter education certification ([WAC 220.420.020](#)). The deferral program allows a new hunter into the field if they are accompanied by a qualified, experienced hunter. The deferral requires that the new hunter be ten years of age or older and have not failed a hunter education course within the last twelve months. Requirements are also set for the accompanying hunter to ensure that safety remains paramount. In March, the Hunter Education Division administrative assistant processed forty-nine deferrals, forty of which were for new hunters between the ages of 10 and 15. The idea is that after a season hunting on a deferral (try it before you buy it) the new hunter will complete hunter education and join the hunting community.

Law Enforcement Officer and Military Exemptions: The Hunter Education Division administrative assistant manages the exemption program where qualifying active and retired peace officers and military personnel may be exempt from the field skills portion of any hunter education course that is completed online. Forty-five military and two peace officer exemptions were processed in March.

ADA Assistance: Hunter Education Coordinator Dazey coordinated with the parents of a young hunter education student and teaching team of the class that he was signed up to attend. The young student had requested an accommodation. After contacting the young student's parent and advising her of the class structure and format, it appears the student will do just fine. His need is more time to accommodate any writing that may be necessary for the class. The Hunter Education Division, as well as over 1,000 volunteer instructors, work hard at ensuring every student has any necessary accommodations and the same opportunity to be successful as

otherwise abled students. The student must still meet the cognitive requirements of the class but should not be excluded because of mobility, reading difficulty, or other special needs.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Master Hunters for Volunteer Projects: Region 5 Hunter Education and Volunteer Coordinator Elliott sent out emails to master hunters for two local projects seeking volunteers. There was a good response to both requests.

- Wahkiakum School District in Cathlamet needed tree trimming and vegetation clearing, as well as volunteers who have equipment for the project. The school has had recent cougar sightings and need to eliminate potential cover for predators.
- A landowner in Winlock needed assistance installing 8,000 bud cap protectors on his trees to prevent deer and elk from grazing on the tops of new seedlings.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

Upland Bird Clinic and Mentored Pheasant Hunt: Richland Rod and Gun, Ringold Pheasant Forever, Limits Game farm, and WDFW personnel collaborated to hold a pheasant clinic on March 30, 2020. The weather on Saturday was perfect for the 21 participants that showed up out of the 32 that were registered for the event. WDFW's Bob Oke Game Farm provided pheasants to be released. Limits Game Farm, Pheasants Forever, and Richland Rod and Gun Club members provided the mentors and other volunteers to run the clinic. Region 3 Hunter Education Field Coordinator Garcia presented a class on upland bird hunting and how to find places to hunt and WDFW Sergeant Fulton spoke to the group about the role of WDFW Enforcement and how they protect our resources.

Participants were divided into two groups, half of them showed up at the Connell Gun Club to receive instruction on wing shooting and practice on the trap range. They then met at Limits Game Farm where they were assigned to their mentors and led to the hunting area. The second group then met at the gun club, followed by both groups meeting up for the clinic portion and lunch. The second group then left for their hunt.



The participants were very successful in harvesting at least one bird, and they all had a great time!

Hunter Education Instructor Support: The Hunter Education Division administrative assistant prepared new hunter education instructor packets for fourteen newly certified instructors. These packets contain vital information for the new instructor as well as their instructor credentials. The Hunter Education Division administrative assistant maintains the instructor database for the 1,035 certified instructors statewide. In March alone these 1,035 instructors donated over 2,400 hours of volunteer service teaching new hunters and ensuring our hunting heritage is carried forward to the next generation of safe, ethical, and, legal hunters.

Region 5 Hunter Education Coordinator Elliott traveled to a traditional class in Goldendale. While she was there, she collected three new instructor applications and spoke to a person who is interested in the Master Hunter Permit Program. On the way to the Goldendale class, she was also able to meet up and deliver supplies to an instructor team in White Salmon.

Region 5 Coordinator Elliott is working with a new instructor to get a class set up to accommodate a student with ADA needs. The class will be held at a local gun range in Camas that hasn't hosted hunter education classes before. The range has invited the instructor to begin holding classes there regularly, and after this initial class is complete the instructor, coordinator, and management from the range will meet to develop a long-term plan.

Region 6 Coordinator Montgomery held a pre-service training in Sumner for new instructors, five registered three attended, disappointing, but the program did get three new instructors certified and working with hunter education teams. There was also attendance of hunter education classes in Bremerton, Shelton, Tacoma, and Sequim, conducting evaluations and delivering supplies.

Washington State Trappers Association Winter Rendezvous: Hunter Education Program Specialist Kris Thorson attended the Washington State Trappers Association (WSTA) winter rendezvous at the Thurston County fairgrounds on March 30. He answered questions on trapper education and some general trapping questions. The rendezvous also offered seminars on different trapping techniques and demonstrations. WSTA President Bruce Vandervort demonstrated skinning and fleshing a river otter he trapped this season. Also, this was a great opportunity to discuss a possible change to the trapper education cards with the trapper education instructors in attendance. All the instructors provided great feedback to Thorson and he will incorporate their suggestions.



Joey Dettrich Foundation: Hunter Education Coordinator Dazey visited a hunter education class sponsored by the Joey Dettrich Baseball Foundation. Joey Dettrich was a promising young baseball player from Arlington who was drafted into the Tampa Bay Rays baseball system, fulfilling a life goal. Tragically, Joey was killed in an auto accident in 2013. The foundation was established in Joey's name to assist promising young athletes from the greater Arlington area to be able to advance to the next level in their sport. Joey's love of the outdoors and hunting has led the foundation to sponsor one hunter education class each year. Joey's father, Bill Johnson, graciously made the classroom available at his facility and provided lunches both days for the 31

students registered. The hunter education teaching team provides instruction on both days. The class is well run and the support from the foundation is much appreciated.

Pacific Lutheran University Outreach: Hunter Education Field Coordinator Dazey presented to a group of exchange students studying at Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) in Tacoma. The students were in the United States studying business and had previously visited several large businesses in the Puget Sound area. Dazey’s presentation covered the mission and composition of the WDFW as well as the economic return to the state from hunting, fishing, and outdoor activities on our lands. Dazey also covered the jobs performed by our 1,900 dedicated employees every day, including endangered species protection and recovery, habitat protection, managing wildlife, fishing, and the administrative duties needed to make it all work. The presentation and tour of our Region 4 office were very well received. After the visit to the regional office, each student submitted a report with pictures detailing what they came away with. Other than one report referring to Dazey as “the old man” the reports were very insightful and show that the students had learned a lot and had a better understanding of the importance of WDFW and the jobs that we do.



Dazey presenting to PLU business students from China on economic return to Washington State



The PLU students found the tour of the Region 4 office very interesting especially the taxidermy



The visit wasn't complete without a picture of students in front of the WDFW Region 4 sign



Following the visit, the day was capped off by a meal of traditional Chinese dishes at a local buffet

Coordinator Visit to Hunter Education Class: Hunter Education Coordinator Dazey traveled to Bellingham Gun Club to visit and evaluate the team that was teaching there. This is a new venue that has requested to support additional classes in the future and will be a good addition to the number of venues in Whatcom County. The team that taught there was composed of instructors who were from other teaching teams. Dazey was able to receive one new instructor application to start the process of building a teaching team to take over the teaching at the Bellingham Gun Club. Dazey also was able to deliver ammunition and supplies to one of the other teams that teach in the county. This proved to be a very productive trip.



Students learning to be able to select the correct ammunition for firearms



Instructor Eason presenting to the class



When receiving a firearm from someone, first check to be sure the action is open and unloaded



Students learning about safe zones of fire

Sequim High School Career Day: Hunter Education Field Coordinator Montgomery attended a career day at Sequim High School, where 600 students attended. Students were engaging, and many were surprised that the WDFW didn't just employ biologists and enforcement officers.

Washington Ornamental Game Birds Breeders: Hunter Education and Volunteer Coordinator Dazey attended a meeting of the Washington Ornamental Game Birds Breeders on Fir Island at the breeding facility of one of their members. The group was able to get a demonstration of the use of falcons for bird abatement used for industries and agriculture having conflict issues with starlings, pigeons, and other birds. Brad Felger of [Airstrike Bird Control](#) has participated in National Hunting and Fishing Day for the department in years past and always manages to put on a very informative presentation. The falcons are used to haze the birds from areas where they have become a problem damaging crops and creating health hazards. The club tour also included a tour of a breeding facility where threatened and endangered waterfowl are captive bred for release into their native habitat.



Airstrike Bird Control CEO Brad Felger explains to the group about his falcon before giving a flying demonstration



Some of the facility on Fir Island



Brant displaying ID tags on their legs. These tags are visible from a distance and identify where the birds were banded

Bighorn Outdoor Show: Region 1 Hunter Education Coordinator Whorton participated in the Inland Empire Wildlife Council's Bighorn Show, where he talked and made numerous contacts with the public regarding hunter education programs, as well as contacts with the Inland Empire Wildlife Council's hunter education folks.



National Hunting and Fishing Day: Region 6 Hunter Education Field Coordinator Montgomery spent time working on the [National Hunting and Fishing Day event \(NHFD\)](#). Montgomery also met with several of our sponsors/partners:

- Scott Vanderway, Director of 4-H Adventure Education to explain the NHFD history and how 4-H could participate. We received a call the next day from the 4-H Youth Development State Shooting Sports, and discussed the event and activities, and will be meeting later to discuss youth shooting and hunting opportunities.
- Chris Towe, Environmental Education Program for Pierce Conservation District; discussed the NHFD project, as well as volunteer projects in the county.
- Hunter Education Instructors from Tacoma Sportsmen's Club discussed NHFD and what we needed from them for the day. They will be the range safety officers for the event in September.



6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Region 1 Hunter Education Coordinator Whorton spent considerable time with the Office of Risk Management trying to help the City of Newport understand the standard certificates of liability that Risk Management issues cover any concerns the City of Newport had with using their facilities for Hunter Education classes.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

LANDS DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Nothing for this installment.

2) **Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

3) **Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

2020 Aquatic Noxious Weed National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permit:

Weed Coordinator Heimer applied for and received the 2020 Aquatic Noxious Weed National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit from the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and sent land managers an email outlining the requirements and a description of how to use it.

Skagit Grant Restoration & Sampling: Weed Manager Zimmerman received support to try native seed plantings for a Milltown Island Waterfowl Enhancement grant and participated in a site visit of Milltown with the Skagit River System Cooperative staff members to determine the challenges for sampling fish.

Elk River Scotch Broom Test Cut: Weed Manager Nunez and Warren Michaelis cut old-growth Scotch broom at the Elk River Unit as part of a restoration project. While there, they encountered Representative Blake and Commissioner Lake who Anthony Novack spoke with about the project.

Vancouver Lake Aquatic Weed Control: Weed Coordinator Heimer participated in a meeting with AquaTechnex, Clark County and Friends of Vancouver Lake (FoVL) to discuss the two sampling methods that were used to delineate Eurasian milfoil and estimate acreage. Heimer provided supporting information to Clark County for treatment cost estimates associated with using two,4-D, and reviewed the plan's Shoreline Environmental Protection Act.

Grazing Permits: Range Ecologist Burnham checked the Methow Frey permit renewal for completeness and forwarded the collated renewal package to Section Manager Dahmer who reviewed and signed with one slight edit. Burnham, before the health orders and governor's proclamation, traveled to the 4-O Ranch Unit and Big Bend Wildlife Area and discussed fencing options with wildlife area staff members and other measures for implementing the Annual Operating Plans for reducing wolf-livestock conflict on the 4-O Ranch Unit. Burnham met Big Bend Wildlife Area personnel and the grazing permittee in the field to discuss livestock use in riparian areas, circumstances under which effects are more likely, and possibilities for off-site watering facilities.

Wenas Wildlife Area Seeding Data: Range Ecologist Burnham met with wildlife area staff members to review several seedings over the years for which Manager Confer-Morris has some sampling data. Staff members discussed possible data analyses and identified the next steps.

Northwest Power and Conservation Council Wildlife Workshop: Vegetation Ecologist Merg remotely attended a day-long workshop to update indicators and monitoring of wildlife response to mitigation efforts for federal dams on the Columbia River. This workshop was one of several held by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPPCC) to accomplish their update of the 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program.

Twelve Agriculture Leases Reviewed: Vegetation Ecologist Merg reviewed and updated twelve agricultural leases on wildlife areas this month. Section Manager Dahmer reviewed and signed leases working to clarify the use of in lieu language. Merg also signed off on four United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill-related enrollments or program reports located on an additional four agricultural leases.

Wildlife Program Climate Change Workshop Planned: Vegetation Ecologist Merg remotely attended three meetings this month to plan and prepare materials for the climate risk assessment that will be done by the Wildlife Program next month. This program-wide assessment is part of an agency-wide assessment aimed at anticipating the impacts of climate change on WDFW's work.

Bonneville Power Administration Mitigation Spending Plan: Vegetation Ecologist Merg reviewed and annotated an advanced draft of the nearly complete plan for allocating the additional operations and maintenance (O&M) funding that our mitigation wildlife areas will receive from Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) this year. The increase this year is part of a one million dollar increase in O&M pledged to WDFW by BPA over five years, resulting from the settlement negotiations that concluded in 2017.

Palouse Prairie Restoration: Vegetation Ecologist Merg reviewed seed mixes for two zones in the pending Palouse Prairie Restoration Project on the Cheney campus of Eastern Washington University.

Rx Fire Staff Personnel Working: Before the “Stay Home Stay Safe” directive, crews were preparing for the spring burn season by testing and training on equipment used for prescribed burning. Pumps were set up and put through the paces. Hose lays were deployed which gave crews time to understand different water delivery systems. Crews also prepared new burn units by consolidating slash into piles along control lines to reduce the potential of escape. Precommercial thinning was also accomplished providing an opportunity for quality saw training.

More recently, Rx fire staff members have been planning for the future. Training sessions have been taking place daily to help personnel train for the next level in their fire career. Many of these classes are available online but supervisors have been creating other training opportunities that are more specific to the WDFW Rx fire program. Virtual classrooms are used to deliver training materials and provide real-time conversations.

Prescribed Fire Training Exchange: A decision was made on March 19 to postpone the northeast spring Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TRES) training due to COVID-19. Members of the Washington Prescribed Fire Council and TRES planners had a virtual meeting on March 19 to discuss plans and when a new date could be set deciding to postpone at least until this fall and possibly next spring.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

COVID-19 Webinars and Guidance: Staff members viewed or joined several webinars and reviewed other guidance regarding COVID-19. We have fielded many questions regarding specific work from home opportunities and issues, and questions on filling out total time to provide clarity for all staff members. A list of telecommuting activities was developed for all personnel for the two weeks and beyond.

7) Other

Rx Fire Staffing: Online interviews were completed on March 24 to fill the vacant positions in the Rx fire program including the North Crew Unit Manager and the on-call burn boss position. This was the first time an interview was performed like this where each panel member and candidate were in different locations. Despite the challenges, interviews went well. References are now being checked. We plan to offer positions with delayed start dates.

Duckabush Estuary Restoration/Habitat Project Cultural Resource Work: Archaeologists Major and Kelly have spent over 250 hours working on a large restoration project including development of a draft ethnographic context report to support evaluation of the project's potential to affect historic properties, site visits with contractors, technical staff member coordination with Skokomish, Jamestown S'Klallam, and Port Gamble S'Klallam tribes. Other efforts include writing historic and ethnographic studies, reviewing/approving contract scopes, establishing research design, and project review protocols.

Scatter Creek and Wildlife Area Plans Cultural Resource Input: Archaeologists Kelly and Major reviewed plan documents drafted specific goals, tasks, and performance measures.

Cultural Resource Management Policy and Master Contract Development: Archaeologists Kelly and Major worked on revisions to the draft cultural resource policy, procedures and the cultural resources master contract to facilitate cultural resource survey and consultation using contractors.

Project Review and Consultation: Archaeologists are working on dozens of project reviews and consultations confirming project elements, creating project files, tracking paperwork, creating shapefiles and maps, and setting up WISAARD folders.

Pre-commercial Thinning and Prescribed Fire Consultation Protocols: Archaeologist Major is developing protocols for 05-05 consultation to simplify the process for pre-commercial thinning and prescribed fire projects with eastside tribes. This included meetings and communication with several Lands Division staff members in the Land Stewardship and Operations Section, and communication and official consultation with tribes, the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

SCIENCE DIVISION

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 1

HERES WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Prairie Grouse and Raven/Raptor Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe, along with Jason Lowe, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) biologist, and Kim Thorburn WDFW continued conducting sage grouse lek surveys and searches, as well as, running the spring raven and raptor surveys in and around the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and BLM Twin Lakes recreation area. The sage grouse lek in Lincoln is still active, but only three males seen recently compared to four earlier in the season. No new sage grouse leks were found though several early mornings were spent searching. The sharp-tails are hanging nearby to leks, but not much dancing has been seen yet. The ravens and raptors are doing well, rough-legged hawks still hanging around the area and northern harriers are courting.



Greater sage grouse strutting in the restored field on BLM land in Lincoln County

Bighorn Sheep Survey: Biologists Wik, Vekasy, Cotterill, and others from Idaho Fish and Game and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife conducted the first of two ground mark-resight surveys of bighorns from the Mountain View herd. Unfortunately, this was the last day that we could work in the field. It is unclear whether another survey will be conducted in time to be meaningful in estimating the population.

Harvest Data Management: District 3 biologists Wik and Vekasy worked on updating harvest data spreadsheets for deer and elk. Biologist Wik also updated tooth age data collected by branched-bull permit holders since 2012. The elk data was shared with biologists from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation in preparation for future co-management discussions.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

WT Wooten Wildlife Area Closures: Access Manager Dingman printed, laminated, and hung signs closing the campgrounds until April 30. She assisted Wildlife Area Manager Dice with placing ecology blocks in the entrances of campgrounds 1, 2, and 3. She then printed, laminated, and hung signs closing the state lands as directed by the Governor. She assisted Dice with moving the road closure barricades and cable from the turn to the hatchery to the Wooten headquarters to close access to the wildlife area.



Tucannon Road is closed near the Wooten Wildlife Area buildings with concrete ecology blocks and a cable gate

Heller Bar Access Area Closed under WDFW Order: Access Manager Greg Heimgartner and Wildlife Area Manager Bob Dice closed the Heller Bar access area along with all other WDFW lands and access sites last week. Heller Bar has not been a popular closure with the public. Dice installed a sign just outside of Asotin warning the public that the site is closed, and installed barricades loaned to WDFW by Asotin County. The last word from our Enforcement Program was that people were simply driving around the barricades to launch jet boats and ignoring the closure.



Closure barricade at Heller Bar



A sign posted just outside of Asotin informing the public that the Heller Bar access site is closed

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Nothing for this installment.

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Nothing for this installment.

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Nothing for this installment.

7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 2

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

Northern Leopard Frogs: Before COVID-19 work restrictions, several call surveys for northern leopard frogs (NLF) were completed at Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. No NLF activity was observed, likely due to cooler weather, though many Pacific tree frogs were active. Biologist Grabowsky has focused on obtaining funding to continue the NLF reintroduction into 2022. This involves communicating with partners to establish goals for the next few years, establishing a budget for the proposed work, and receiving feedback from partners regarding the proposal narrative. Biologist Grabowsky also participated in a conference call regarding NLF conservation in British Columbia and Alberta where they are facing similar challenges with survey work during this unprecedented time. By sharing information about our programs, we hope to identify the most effective methods to handle changes during this survey season. Biologist Rowan assisted Biologist Grabowsky with a frog egg mass survey, but no masses were found. Ponds in the A Unit remain a challenge with very dark tannin water and thick tall emergent vegetation surrounding most ponds.

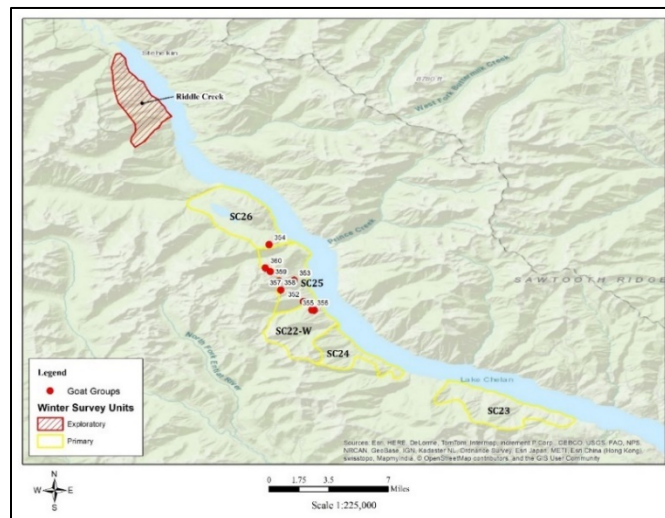
Scotch Creek Sharp-tailed Grouse Surveys: Manager Olson completed the first round of sharp-tailed grouse surveys before the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order was issued. The total number of birds observed on three leks at the Scotch Creek unit was 35. Presumably, these are all or mostly males while on the lek, and with a 50/50 sex ratio in the population, we estimate the total number of sharp-tails here on the Scotch Creek unit at 70 birds. No birds were observed on the Happy Hill lek, despite mowing four likely lekking locations last fall. The Chesaw Unit lek was not snow-free at the time so no counts have been made on that unit.

Douglas County Sage Grouse Lek Survey: Private Lands Biologist Braaten completed grouse surveys before the telework directive. Biologist Hughes conducted lek surveys for Dutch Henry and Alstown. Alstown has a new high count of eleven, compared last year's high count of eight birds. Biologist Jeffreys visited three greater sage-grouse leks in Douglas County to count males as part of a range-wide survey of Washington's greater sage-grouse population conducted during the spring breeding season each year. Further surveys have been postponed until we are approved to conduct fieldwork again.



Sage Grouse loafing near the lek

Lake Chelan Mountain Goat Survey: Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock completed the 2020 Winter Mountain Goat Survey Report for Chelan Public Utility District (PUD) Number 1. This report includes information about the aerial survey that Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock conducted in February to estimate the population of the South Shore Lake Chelan mountain goat herd. Submission of this report fulfills WDFW’s obligation under a 2019 interagency agreement in which the PUD reimburses costs associated with conducting aerial big game surveys within the Lake Chelan Basin.



Map of mountain goat groups detected during winter aerial surveys conducted in February

Washington Ground Squirrel Surveys: Biologist Comstock identified survey quads to target for Washington ground squirrel occupancy surveys, created maps, and prepared training materials to deliver to volunteers assisting with surveys in 2020. Washington ground squirrels are a state candidate species that depend upon shrub-steppe and native grasslands and, much like other shrub-steppe species in Washington such as the state threatened greater sage-grouse, have experienced major declines across much of their range since the beginning of the 20th century. Due to Governor’s “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order, Washington ground squirrel survey training, and subsequent surveys have been postponed until we are approved to conduct fieldwork again.

Sage Hills Deer Count: Biologist Jeffreys met with Chelan PUD biologists to perform a ground survey of mule deer on winter range at the PUD’s 960-acre Home Water Wildlife Preserve, which, together with neighboring Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (CDLT) lands, forms the Sage Hills trail complex west of Wenatchee. Like some other trails in the Wenatchee Foothills, Sage Hills is closed to the public from Dec.1 to March 31, with some discretion, each year to protect important winter range for mule deer. Every winter, these deer depend on the milder conditions and forage available at lower elevations throughout the foothills.

Towards the end of the exceptionally mild 2019-2020 winter, PUD biologists observed significantly fewer deer on the Home Water Wildlife Preserve during their weekly surveys than had been recorded in previous years. Similarly, while surveying the Preserve on March 18, PUD biologists and Biologist Jeffreys observed only 74 deer, as compared to upwards of 200 deer recorded using this area in mid- to late March in previous years. This is likely because low precipitation and higher than average winter temperatures which resulted in earlier snowmelt at mid-elevations, already easily observable on south-facing slopes, and earlier green-up, allowing mule deer access to a greater foraging area in March 2020 than is usually the case. Biologist Comstock provided recent GPS location data for collared mule deer using lands within or nearby the Preserve to further inform any management decision.

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Summer Falls Test: WDFW personnel participated in a “dry run” for the Summer Falls Test Release scheduled for July 2020. Staff members were preparing to collect pertinent data with regards to how an emergency release from a nearby hydropower plant would impact a proposed boat launch at Summer Falls Park.



Photo by R. Finger

The proposed boat launch location is between the sagebrush and the manicured grass of Summer Falls Park. In the background is Summer Falls which only spills water when Columbia Basin Hydropower is shut down (can happen due to a power outage on the west side). This image shows about 1,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) coming over the falls. An emergency release could be up to 10,000 cfs. Our July test is planned to occur with a high potential for peak cubic feet per second, but irrigation operations will cause variation beyond our control.

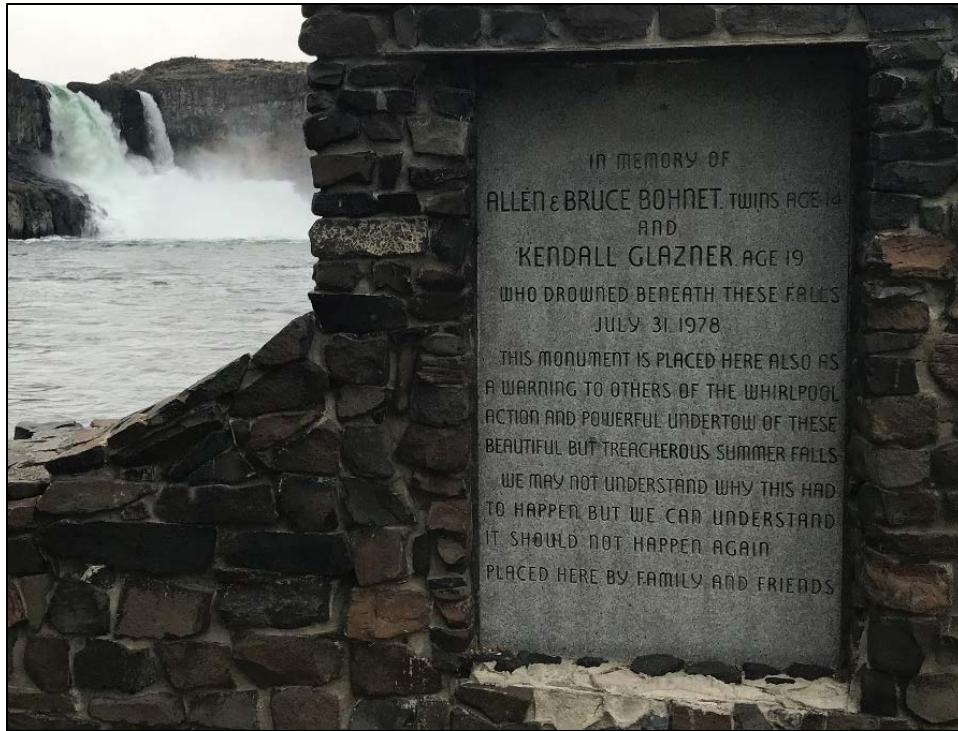


Photo by R. Finger

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement: Specialist Heilhecker responded to a landowner concerned with deer damaging his garlic field. The landowner stated it was an emergency because the deer would return that evening. Specialist Heilhecker gave him verbal permission over the phone to harvest a deer. When she made a follow-up phone call three days later, no deer had been harvested. Specialist Heilhecker wrote a damage prevention cooperative agreement and mailed a kill permit to the landowner.

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Methow Grazing Permits and Agricultural Leases: The Methow Wildlife Area is currently working through the process of renewing one grazing permit and four agricultural leases. All these renewals are straight forward as all lessees and permittees have a solid track record of compliance with WDFW. The grazing permit is for Texas Creek Feeders (Darwood), who have been model grazers over the last few years and have been great to work with. The agricultural leases up for renewal are Acord, Stokes, Port, and Russell Flats Ranch (Kiefer). All the lessees are eager to renew, which is a big benefit to the Methow Wildlife Area. These leases all exist in

old, historic agricultural fields. If these fields weren't farmed, they would quickly be overrun with noxious weeds that provide little wildlife benefit. Instead, the lessees grow wildlife-friendly crops while simultaneously combatting noxious weed infestations and are therefore providing a benefit to our lands and wildlife.

Future Recreation and Conservation Office Habitat Enhancement: Sinlahekin staff members have been working on completing and submitting a Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) State Lands Restoration grant proposal for restoration work on the Chiliwist Unit along with some areas of the Methow Wildlife Area. The restoration work will restore some old agricultural fields to native shrub-steppe vegetation.

Okanogan Recreation and Conservation Office Project Development: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug worked has been busy working on four Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) critical habitat acquisition projects and two WWRP state lands development projects. Work included finalizing the short descriptions of the acquisition projects and beginning on the expanded descriptions for each project. Haug also worked on illustrations and visuals for the two development projects and assisted other wildlife area managers with their WWRP state lands restoration projects.

Russian Olive Management: The WDFW has recently concluded seasonal pile burning operations at the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. Burn piles are mostly comprised of Russian olive, a multi-trunked tree, and highly invasive noxious weed that can grow upwards of 40 feet tall and wide. The agency treats this species with a variety of methods, typically either chemically (herbicides) or mechanically (heavy equipment), but due to its size, the treatments leave behind an abundance of biomass which is eventually piled and burned. Most of this year's burning occurred near the Frenchman Regulated Access Area (FRAA), where the primary management focus is waterfowl. In this setting, the trees have an overall negative effect on waterfowl habitat by providing a perch for hungry raptors and by developing into closed-canopy forests that provide little ground cover and subsequently limit ground-nesting habitat. For the past several years WDFW has been using heavy equipment to knock down and pile trees at this site to improve waterfowl habitat, expand the FRAA and provide more huntable area come hunting season. In total, wildlife area staff members (Manager Eidson, assistant managers Cole, and Bechtold, Wetland Specialist McPherson) and Private Lands Biologist Hughes burned over 30 piles throughout the wildlife area this winter.



Photo by N. Bechtold

Douglas County Conservation Reserve Program Waiver Meeting and Tour: Private Lands Biologist Braaten responded to a last-minute request from Washington State Conservation Commission Executive Director Carol Smith and Douglas County landowner Wade Troutman to explain benefits Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has to sage grouse and other important wildlife. Private Lands Biologist Braaten was able to show Director Smith a sage grouse lek with many active birds, afterward, Braaten spoke about stock assessment and fishery evaluation CRP and CRP in general and how these programs benefit sage grouse. The arrangement of CRP contracts on the landscape allows for increased movement of wildlife and how that is beneficial for other wildlife. We discussed how the Douglas County CRP waiver made all that possible. It was great to show real examples and how they work towards the conservation of habitat for wildlife. Director Smith was headed to Washington D.C. to meet with the head of the [Farm Service Agency](#) to discuss the Douglas County CRP waiver with a fresh understanding of the benefits it can have for landowners, farmers, and wildlife.

Sage Grouse Initiative and Douglas County Expiring CRP: Private Lands Biologist Braaten and Private Lands Biologist Hughes assisted Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Scott Scroggie with identifying important expiring CRP parcels that had specific values (leks, connecting habitats, etc.) for sage grouse and pygmy rabbits via mapping. By identifying properties with these values for NRCS, it allows them to talk with specific landowners to reenroll expiring acres into NRCS 645 Cover practice to benefit wildlife directly.



Identifying expiring CRP with habitat value

Douglas County Riparian Habitat Project Planning: Braaten and Hughes completed one habitat project in north Douglas County before the mandatory telework period began.



Replanting trees and shrubs into previous habitat projects - Photo by Eric Braaten

Habitat Enhancement: Biologist Hughes, Biologist Braaten, and Assistant Manager Bechtold planted 700 shrubs on two upland habitat plots that Hughes developed for upland birds. Biologist Hughes and Braaten worked on getting the mulch layer working in the field, after rebuilding a new one from old parts. Hughes seeded these sites last spring with warm-season grasses and will be monitoring the development of each plot. Both areas are part of the Hunting by Written Permission program in Grant County.



Habitat circle corner shrub rows in Grant County - Photo by Eric Braaten

6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

COVID-19 State Lands Closure: Lands Operations Manager Finger assisted Region 2 staff members (Eidson, Cole, Bechtold, McPherson, Steele, Follet, Peterson, Blake, Rios, Ruiz, and Zubreznik) in acquiring, distributing, and even posting nearby signs for the COVID-19 State Lands Closure per the Governor's Order. Finger posted the Gloyd Unit, which is adjacent to his home, and Billy Clapp Lake boat launch, where there were two families fishing and demonstrating wide social distancing. One family was contacted and was appreciative and understanding and was made aware that they had the rest of the day to enjoy themselves. Unfortunately, the reality is that social distancing at some sites is difficult to impossible, particularly on a weekend.



A sad day for the agency, let's hope we never have to do this again (Stay Home, Stay Healthy)

- Photo by R. Finger

Methow Wildlife Area Covid-19 Closures: In the face of a worldwide pandemic, the Methow Wildlife Area, along with all other WDFW lands has temporarily been closed until further notice. Once the word came down from Olympia, Methow Wildlife Area (MWA) staff members quickly cruised as much of the wildlife area as seasonally possible to hang closure notices and to educate the public along the way. Understandably, there are many adults and kids in the valley who are feeling the cabin fever after just coming out of winter and then being ordered to stay home. This cooped up feeling accompanied by a state lands closure has resulted in a lot of people simply ignoring the closure to get out and recreate. There have been multiple reports of ATVs and dirt bikes ripping around the Texas Creek area. There have also been reports of a plethora of people continuing to recreate at the beloved Lewis Butte trail. There were even reports of

hoverboards on the Lewis Butte trail. WDFW Enforcement was doing the best they could to safely contact people and educate them on the state lands closure.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Covid-19 Closures: While putting State Land Closure signs out on the Sinlahekin Unit, Manager Wehmeyer was able to see some turkeys on the wildlife area. Turkeys have become more prevalent in the wildlife area over the last few years. He was able to get a picture of a lighter colored turkey. With the closures in place, the wildlife area has been very quiet, with little traffic coming through the valley.

Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Covid-19 Closures: Manager Olson posted “State Lands Closed”, “Campgrounds Closed”, and other COVID-19 informational signs at the most popular access points on Scotch Creek units. Since the stay at home order, all fieldwork has ceased.

Scotch Creek Meetings and Training (pre-Covid-19): Before the order was issued, staff members completed several planned meetings. The annual Wildlife Area Advisory Committee meeting was held with 12 members attending. Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Manager Wehmeyer and Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Manager Olson presented the management plan performance measures and had a good discussion with the group about accomplishments and suggestions for future work. Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug held a meeting with Lands Division staff members across the county. Several pertinent issues were discussed including new grazing and agricultural lease news, coordinating Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) projects across wildlife areas, weed control record-keeping, irrigation metering, internship possibilities, and other miscellaneous items. Thanks to Region 2 Wildlife Program Manager Monda for making the drive to attend. Staff members also attended the quarterly district team meeting and the Prescribed Fire RT-130 annual refresher.

Bureau of Reclamation Funding Opportunities: Lands Operations Manager Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson participated in a conference call with the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) personnel to discuss an opportunity to receive Title 28 funding earlier than anticipated. Though we were already in the process of pursuing this funding, we learned that there was unanticipated availability beginning in 2020. The funding requires a 50/50 non-federal match, which can be matched simply by revenue funds from either the Block 26 agriculture fields or Live Nation agreement. The funding will be used to support ongoing operations and maintenance activities. Eidson and Finger are working to submit the paperwork.

Lands Operations Manager Finger also received notices from BOR that ‘Additional Capacity Funding’ was available and to submit any projects we might have. Eidson and Finger had a proposal that was previously coordinated with BOR for \$250,000 of O&M work. In addition to that, Finger worked with Environmental Planner Dengel to submit a proposal for a \$100,000 project to dredge material from Crab Creek channel, which is causing issues with water control structures being overtopped during spring flows, BPA transmission line inundation, and a neighboring landowner who has taken to building a berm on the edge of his field to isolate it from spring floods. Finger contacted the landowner (who owns the property where the dredging would occur) and will arrange a conference call between them, BOR, and Dengel to determine

how to proceed with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or access agreement to do the work on private lands. Funding for this effort could also come from the funds that BOR provides the Irrigation District for infrastructure maintenance on WDFW lands.

Lands Information Network Knowledgebase Team: Lands Operations Manager Finger participated in the Lands Information Network Knowledgebase (LINK) core team kickoff meeting to discuss the LINK. Under Matthew Trenda's leadership, this project will see a buildout of a centralized knowledge base that will bring the entire WDFW Lands portfolio including infrastructure, recreation rules, and other Lands information into one accessible location.

Fire Suppression Contracts: Lands Operations Manager Finger continued coordination and communication with Real Estate Services, the Budget Office, and Lands Division on an approach to update our 26-year old contracts with our local Fire Protection Districts. Many of the contracts are based on crude maps (partially hand-drawn) which has generated confusion about which lands are under contract. Also, WDFW has acquired lands since these contracts were developed, and therefore we have a fair amount of lands that are not currently covered by fire protection. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the local Fire Protection Districts are not being fairly compensated for their support. Finger hopes to revise several of our larger contracts with full implementation of new contracts during 2022. Some new concerns were recently brought to Finger's attention with regards to the approach to cover infrastructure, for which we lack a consistent source of information for valuation.

Recreation Strategy: Lands Operations Manager Finger participated in meetings for recreation planning and recreation rules modules. Most of the planning discussion has been around which recreation planning framework will work best for WDFW. Finger was unable to prioritize the review of planning frameworks and was feeling like dead-weight in this group. The biggest challenge is trying to see the forest through the trees. With urgent and specific needs for managing recreation, it is very difficult to find the discipline to work towards building a comprehensive framework but the importance of it is clear. Rules discussions have been focused on the establishment of a tool to help prioritize which rules should be addressed first. Fortunately, the tool appears to be prioritizing things as would be expected and Finger looks forward to tackling some of the bigger issues such as road and trail designations so we can address issues surrounding electric bikes before they get out of hand.

7) Other

What was going on 20 years ago?

Gretchen Fitzgerald (Upland Restoration): Finished contacting landowners and locating sites for 50 guzzlers and are currently coordinating work party details. Had two fires last week, the McNeely plot had the most damage. The fire was accidentally started by a neighbor burning cattails. Northward migrating waterfowl and sandhill cranes were feeding on last year's food plots and consuming all the available food.



Douglas County antelope - Photo by Eric Braaten



Group of turkeys near Sinlahekin headquarters - Photo by Wehmeyer



A pair of hooded mergansers on Forde Lake - Photo by Justin Haug



Upland bird winter wheat field near the Sinlahekin headquarters. Blue Goat Mountain in the background with significant snow remaining in late March. Photo by Justin Haug



Blue Lake reflections on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area - Photo by Justin Haug

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) Managing Wildlife Populations

District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz continued checking for and collecting dead waterfowl die-off in the lower Yakima Valley. A total of 211 dead ducks have been found over the past two weeks. Mallard comprised the majority of dead ducks, but pintail became more common the last few checks of the pond. At the end of the month, the canals were filled, resulting in a lot more water in the area for ducks to roost. Few dabbling ducks were using the pond and finding carcasses along miles of moving canal water proved difficult. The “Stay a Home” order ended searches. The die-off was hopefully ending. No immediate cause of death was determined from samples sent to the National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC). NWHC personnel sent off samples for aflatoxin and poison testing.

Conflict Technician Leuck and Conflict Specialist Wetzel recovered one deer collar from a cougar-killed deer that was found in the Park Creek area this week. A second deer mortality could not be investigated due to travel restrictions.



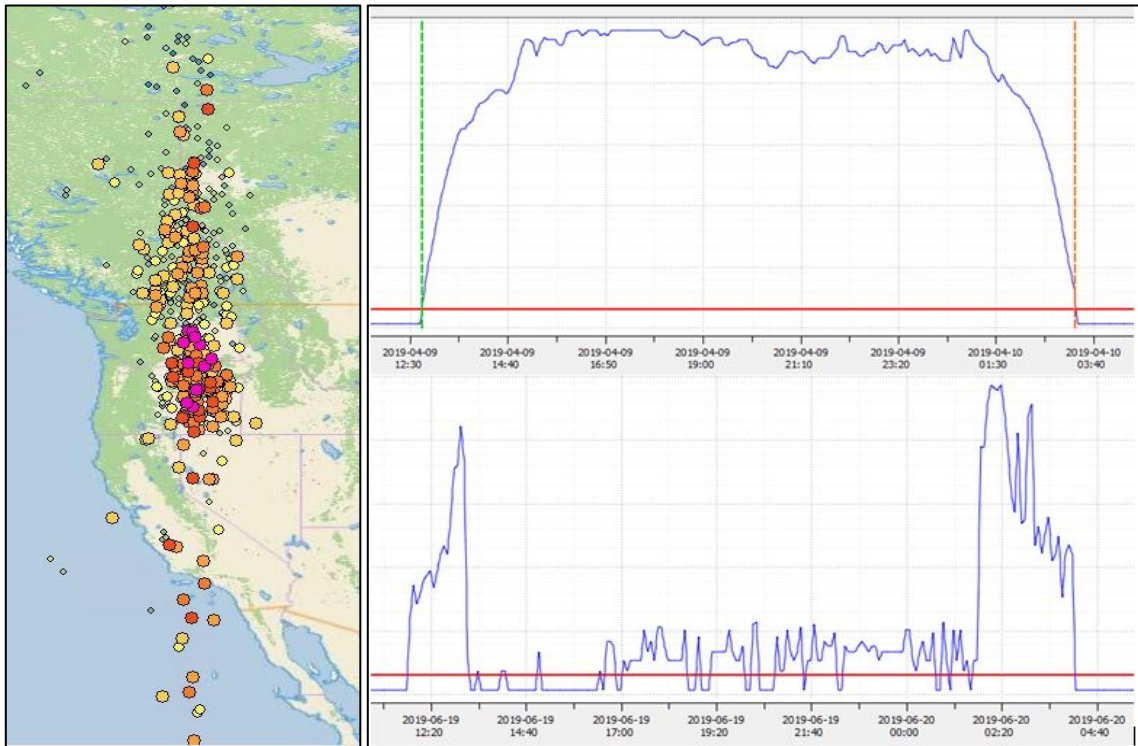
Cached cougar-killed deer in the Park Creek area

Burrows Ready for Burrowing Owls: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra wrapped up annual maintenance on 84 artificial burrows. Several volunteers helped and were trained on burrow maintenance to assist with future checks and repairs. With the mild winter, many owls were already on site, even some pairs by mid-February. Of the 28 sites checked, owls or fresh owl sign was detected at 15 sites. Nest checks are planned to start in middle to late May. Many thanks to volunteers from the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society and Richland Rod and Gun Club who assisted.



Artificial burrow entrance partly dug up and exposed by a predator (left) repaired (right)

Wood Ducks Nesting Brings a Year of Data from Geolocators: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra is assisting the Richland Rod and Gun Club's Wood Duck Nest Box Project with the processing of Geolocator data. Geolocators were placed on 16 wood ducks captured in nest boxes in Tri-Cities during spring 2019. As ducks return and are recaptured during checks, the geolocator is removed so that the data can be downloaded. Geolocators capture light level data and software can be used to estimate location by using day length and the curve of the light intensity change at sunrise and sunset. The location is imprecise with the best accuracy around 150 miles. However, the light data also can be used to interpret behaviors, like coming and going from dark nest boxes.



Geolocator data from a wood duck: Map of location estimates with red and pink being most accurate locations, but still very imprecise (left), and a comparison of light level data from a geolocator on a clear day (top right) vs on a duck incubating inside a nest box through the middle of the day.

Ground-squirrel Survey Preparations and Rare Gyrfalcon Sighting: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra spent considerable time (before travel restrictions) searching for Townsend’s ground squirrel colonies to use for training sites for staff members and volunteers during the upcoming survey efforts. Fidorra was unable to locate ideal colonies in locations where past squirrels were seen. It was unclear if the animals were no longer using the sites or were still inactive. Some active animals were located but not in ideal locations for training. However, an exciting encounter with a gyrfalcon being harassed by a pair of prairie falcons was very entertaining.



Gyrfalcon being chased by prairie falcon in Horse Heaven Hills!

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Grant Awarded for Hunting Access: Private Lands Biologist Hulett learned that WDFW was awarded a VPA-HIP grant from NRCS. This grant will help fund additional hunting opportunities in Region 3 as well as other regions. Additionally, this grant will fund various parts of the Private Lands Access Program like updating the Hunt by Reservation System and signage for hunting access properties. At this time the regional allotments are being finalized but Region 3 will be getting funding to support opportunities for waterfowl, upland birds, big game, fishing, wildlife viewing, and habitat incentives.

Private Lands Biologist Hulett met with Waterfowl Program Specialist Spragens, Waterfowl Coordinator Wilson and Private Lands Access Program Manager Strickland to tour past waterfowl hunting opportunities and various cropping systems in Benton County. This tour was to facilitate the discussion about new programs to replace the previous corn stubble program that did not receive funding last year.

Wenas Wildlife Area Biologist Daling met with Manager Confer Morris and Assistant Manager Taylor to survey possible gate locations on Lower Buffalo Road. While out they looked at an issue with users parking on the shoulder of the road by the Lower Buffalo gate, potentially blocking the driveway to a neighboring house. Pictures and road measurements were taken. Manager Confer Morris ordered 'No Parking' signs to post on the private lands side of the road. She also provided an update on the issue to Lands Operations Manager Huffman and Regional Wildlife Program Manager McCorquodale.



Wildlife Area staff members reviewing possible gate locations on Lower Buffalo Road

Wenas Wildlife Area staff members locked entrance gates and posted 'State Lands Closed' signs in response to Governor's 'Stay Home, Stay Healthy' directive. While replacing missing signs two days later, Assistant Manager Taylor found that the OK Corral kiosk had been rammed and debris had been dumped at the Durr Road parking area. There were also several people still out recreating on state lands.



Kelley Hollow kiosk with closure posted



Sheep Company entrance with closure signs posted



OK Corral kiosk



Parking area for Manastash Ridge trails

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand spent much of this reporting period working from home. Some of the activities completed included staff meetings, mandatory training completion, computer file organization and clean-up, hazing and survey equipment cleaning, and hunting regulations review.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand handled a complaint from a hay farmer in the Paterson area dealing with increasing numbers of waterfowl, primarily ducks, foraging on new alfalfa hay seedlings. Advice on hazing techniques and strategies were provided as well as contact information to the USFWS for additional resources.

Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand coordinated with landowners on Rattlesnake Mountain concerning elk observations and movements and damage permit issuance.

District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck patrolled the Thorp, Kittitas, Badger Pocket, and Lauderdale areas for elk activity. Technician Leuck located several groups of elk and will continue to monitor them if possible, as green-up continues.

Conflict Technician Leuck and Conflict Specialist Wetzel hauled fencing materials to several livestock operators in the Green Canyon area who are constructing predator-deterrent fencing for sheep and goats. More fencing will be delivered to this location as soon as possible.



A load of fencing materials used for predator-deterrent fence construction in Green Canyon

Wolf Activities: Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck checked for wolf presence in several areas of Kittitas and Yakima counties. Activity seems to be increasing as verified reports, pictures, and tracks of wolves from several areas within the Naneum Pack. Several cameras have been placed in areas of observed wolf activity. Two livestock depredation investigations were conducted this week. Neither was confirmed wolf predation.



Area of wolf activity on the Colockum Wildlife Area

4) **Conserving Natural Landscapes**

Nothing for this installment.

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 4

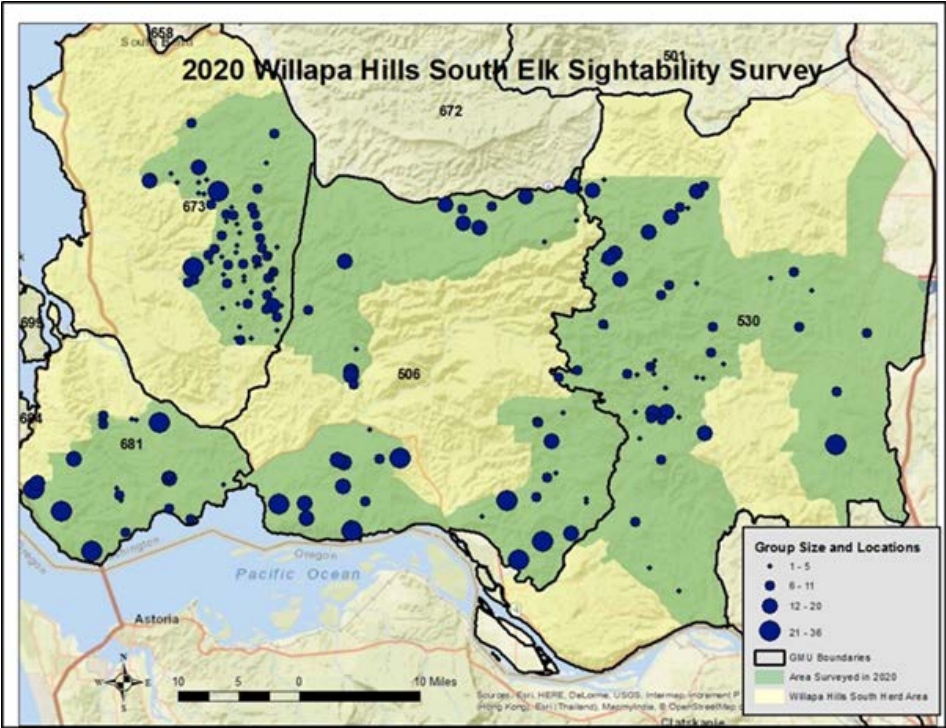
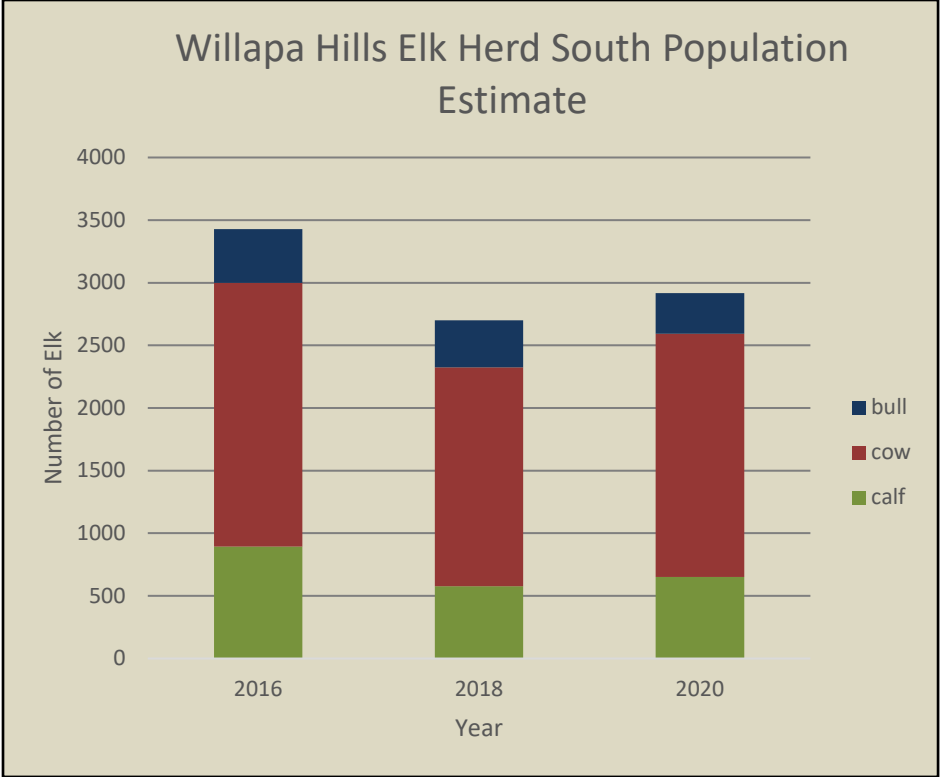
Nothing for this installment.

REGION 5

HERES WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Willapa Hills Aerial Elk Surveys: Region 5 biologists Stephens and Holman in participation with Region 6 biologists Novack, Michaelis, Sundstrom, and Tupen conducted the annual aerial survey of the Willapa Hills elk herd. The herd area is split into a south and a north half and each half is surveyed in alternating years. This year, portions of the south half of the herd area were surveyed. In total, over the three-day survey period, surveyors saw 181 groups of elk across portions of GMUs 530, 506, 673, and 681. A stratified random sampling design and elk sight-ability model were used to estimate the total elk population of the southern portion of the elk herd based on the areas surveyed. The population is estimated to be 2,984 elk which is up slightly from the previous estimate of 2,863 elk in 2018. A special thanks to the Region 5 customer service staff members, Varley, Smith, Rainwaters, and Koppi as well as Wildlife Program Manager Jonker for flight following during the effort. Also, much thanks to Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey for spending nearly a whole day shuttling vehicles for us. As always, Pilot Comstock of JL Aviation did a magnificent job of keeping everyone safe and herding the sometimes-uncooperative elk so that we were able to classify nearly every group.





Elk group near Naselle and Chinook



View from the air



Pilot Comstock with helicopter at the Naselle Hatchery

Dusky Canada Goose Surveys: Biologist Holman conducted dusky Canada goose surveys in Cowlitz County. The purpose of the surveys is to count dusky geese observed and read alphanumeric codes on any red collared dusky. Wildlife managers survey the geese multiple times across their primary wintering grounds and use the data to generate survival estimates. The dusky geese are collared on their breeding grounds in Alaska every other year. During the survey only cackling Canada geese were observed. Also, Biologist Stephens conducted a dusky goose survey in Wahkiakum County. A large group of cackling geese were seen in a couple of locations and six dusky geese were seen on the fringes of one of these groups near the Julia Butler Hansen Wildlife Refuge.



Cackling Canada geese near Longview



Cackling geese in a field on Puget Island

March Mudflow Elk Survey: Biologist Stephens conducted the monthly winter elk count on the mudflow. Visibility fluctuated with fog and rain, which made counting and classifying a challenge, but a total of 275 elk were observed. The elk were classified as 107 bulls, 109 cows, and 51 calves. There was no snow on the Mudflow itself but there was snow in the hills surrounding the valley.



Bulls on the Mudflow

Cowlitz Wildlife Area Amphibian Surveys: Cowlitz Wildlife Area Manager Vanderlip, Assistant Manager Steveson, and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey joined biologists Holman and Stephens to search the Spears Unit of the Cowlitz Wildlife Area for breeding amphibians. Conditions were dry with limited shallow ponded habitat to search. Common species were located during the effort including tree frogs, long-toed salamanders, and red-legged frogs.



Red-legged frog egg mass nearing hatching

Final Oregon Spotted Frog Surveys: Before the Governor’s “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order went into effect, biologists Wickhem, Bergh, and Jacobsen completed final Oregon spotted frog surveys of the season. They surveyed on parcels of private land in Glenwood Valley, and property owned by a private timber company in the Trout Lake Valley. Unfortunately, no egg masses were found at either site. Water levels at all Klickitat County sites have been extremely low this season after a record-dry February, which may be contributing to the lack of activity. Hopefully, there will be enough water to support the eggs and soon-to-be tadpoles that were located earlier in the season.



Biologist Jacobsen searching for Oregon spotted frog egg masses in the Glenwood Valley

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

State Lands Closed to the Public to Limit Spread of COVID-19: WDFW took the unprecedented measure of closing the wildlife areas and water access sites to the public this week to limit the spread of COVID-19. Wildlife area and access site staff members worked diligently to cover a lot of ground to post signs on the Klickitat Wildlife Area, Cowlitz Wildlife Area, Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area, Shillapoo Wildlife Area, and water access sites within Region 5 to notify the public of the closures.



'State Lands Closed' sign on the Klickitat Wildlife Area

3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Injured Eagle: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen followed up on a report of an injured eagle. The eagle was reported by a hiker along a popular urban jogging trail. Jacobsen was unable to locate the eagle after extensive searching.

Cougar Sighting: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by a landowner in Clark County regarding a cougar sighting on the landowner's property. The landowner also reported several dead chickens that were let out to free-range on the property but was not sure what had killed them. Some advice was given on livestock husbandry and cougar behavior. The landowner will keep WDFW updated on additional cougar sightings in the area.

Elk Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen contacted several landowners in Klickitat and Clark counties regarding elk activity and elk damage. Master hunters were used to put pressure on the elk. Several landowners renewed their Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements, and Damage Prevention Permits were issued to some of the landowners.

Calf Necropsies: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was contacted by Klickitat County Deputy Cole regarding newborn calves that had been found dead and consumed on the morning that they were born. After conducting a necropsy on both calves, it was determined that the calves were likely killed by coyotes shortly after birth, but due to the heavy feeding and scavenging on the carcasses, cause of death could not be conclusively identified.

Deer Damage to Floriculture Operation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with a producer in Clark County who is currently growing several varieties of ornamental flowers and grains for the cut-flower market. Deer have been cropping the tops of most of his flower stalks and have also been puncturing and tearing his ground tarps with their hooves. The landowner renewed his Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreement, and Jacobsen will work with the landowner to increase the effectiveness of the existing electric fencing around the property.



Deer damage to flowers and ground tarps

Cougar Concerns: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen spoke with a couple of concerned neighbors in Clark County after a cougar was observed standing outside one of the landowner's large living room windows. Some advice was given, and the landowners will contact WDFW if the cougar is seen again.

Cooperative Fencing: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen worked with a landowner to obtain fencing materials as part of a Cooperative Fencing Agreement to protect his vineyard from elk and deer damage.

Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements and Permit Reporting: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen worked with several landowners in Klickitat County to sign and submit their

annual Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements electronically, given the teleworking mandate. Jacobsen also worked with these landowners to collect information on Damage Permit reporting.

Lewis County Elk Damage: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey continued to work with Lewis County landowners experiencing elk damage. Youth and master hunters were deployed to properties, and hazing advice was discussed in areas where elk are beginning to become nocturnal visitors to fields. Aubrey spent a night in an area with particularly bad damage hazing elk. Landowner permits and hazing advice and supplies were handed out as needed for each situation

Deer Damage to Trees: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey spoke with an individual who recently planted several young cedar trees that deer have been causing large amounts of damage to. Tree caging and other fencing options were discussed, along with potential hazing strategies that could be used to deter deer from the area.

4) Conserving Natural Areas

Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area Merrill Lake Reader Board Installation: Wildlife Area Manager Hauswald, Assistant Manager Wildermuth, and Volunteer Davidson installed a new reader board in the Merrill Lake Unit this week. Posters on the board inform visitors of key features and species in the unit, maps of the area and vicinity, and the partnership between the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and WDFW to purchase the property from a private landowner.



Merrill Lake reader board

Klickitat Wildlife Area Simcoe Mountains Unit: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven visited the Simcoe Mountains Unit to check on road conditions and see if any repairs need to be undertaken. The area received fresh snow during the past weekend, and Van Leuven found that the top of the ridge has an average of about four inches of snow with small drifts up to a foot deep.



Klickitat Wildlife Area Simcoe Mountains Unit

Klickitat Wildlife Area Basking Rafts for Turtles Deployed: Five rafts were taken from winter storage and placed in ponds on the Sondino Unit to provide places for turtles to bask in the sun. Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven and Assistant Wildlife Biologist Wickhem selected locations in three ponds with good sun exposure and anchored the rafts in place.

Klickitat Wildlife Area Meeting with Mid-Columbia River Fish Enhancement Group: Klickitat Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven met with a representative of the Mid-Columbia River Fish Enhancement Group (MCRFEG) to look at a prospective fish enhancement site on the Swale Creek Unit this week. A small tributary of Swale Creek that is known to harbor fish has excellent quality fish habitat except at its confluence with Swale Creek. MCRFEG is interested in pursuing a proposal for the design of a habitat improvement project at that location.



Swale Creek Tributary

5) Providing Education and Outreach

Assisting Elk Entangled in Fencing: Biologists Holman and Stephens along with Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey, Officer Sympson, and Managers Vanderlip and Steveson from the Cowlitz Wildlife Area, teamed to free an elk that had become entangled in fencing. The yearling bull elk had gotten rope-like fencing material twisted around his antlers and was unable to free himself from the reporting landowner's fence. The WDFW team was able to dart the elk and immobilize it. While sedated the rope was removed from the antlers, multiple lacerations, and a puncture wound were treated with antibiotic ointment, and the elk was released. The young bull was observed by the reporting party the following day and seemed to be recovering from the ordeal. Thanks to the Lewis County landowner who reported the situation to WDFW.



WDFW personnel monitoring the sedated elk's condition, restraining the animal and removing the entangling rope



Yearling bull elk following release from entanglement in fencing

Klickitat Wildlife Area Cottonwood Planting with Trout Unlimited: The Goldendale Chapter of Trout Unlimited and Klickitat Wildlife Area personnel are working to establish trees along the south bank of Spring Creek on the Hatchery Unit of the wildlife area. Past efforts have produced inconsistent results, probably due to seasonal drought and competition from reed canarygrass affecting the trees. During the planting party, a watering tube was set into the soil beside each tree to help water soak into the root zone, and Trout Unlimited has committed to sending volunteers out to water the trees during the summer. The plan is to cut down the competing grass and water the trees to give them a greater advantage. Manager Van Leuven gathered a baker's dozen of cuttings from the wildlife area to plant, and volunteers did the rest. Since the planting will need ongoing care, a limited number of trees were put in. If this works as planned, we will expand the effort in future years and eventually establish enough trees to shade much of the creek.

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

Wolf Camera Monitoring: Biologist Tirhi reviewed video footage from wolf monitoring cameras in the White and Carbon River drainages. Still no wolves, but some great video of elk, deer, bobcat, bear, cougar, and various birds, as well as one limping elk, possibly suffering from [Treponeme Associated Hoof Disease](#) (TAHD).



Bull elk captured in videos on cameras deployed for wolf monitoring

Oregon Spotted Frog Oviposition Surveys: Biologist Tirhi, with assistance from volunteer Terry, completed spotted frog oviposition (egg mass) surveys in the north arm of Salmon Creek, Fish Pond Creek and various marshes and wetlands around Thurston County. Tirhi located one potential new oviposition site at which she took a voucher for genetic confirmation. District 11 staff members, with the assistance of volunteers, completed over 25 surveys this season, many of which took several days to complete. Two new spotted frog oviposition sites were potentially located this season pending genetic confirmation.



Potential Oregon spotted frog egg masses found at a new location associated with the north arm of Salmon Creek, 2020. Survey tracks of a subset of the spotted frog surveys completed by District 11 personnel.

Biologist Butler and Technician Pignatelli conducted Oregon spotted frog egg mass surveys throughout the Black River drainage with a focus on surveying new areas. Aerial imagery and wetland mapping were first assessed to determine where potential habitat was located. Butler and Pignatelli worked to contact landowners and request permission to survey these areas. While Oregon spotted frog egg masses were not discovered on most of the areas surveyed, genetic samples were taken at a few sites found with questionable, or presumed Oregon spotted frog egg masses. A few known oviposition sites were also surveyed this season. Despite the frogs having an early start this year, recently laid egg masses were still being found late March alongside egg masses ready to hatch.

Western Pond Turtle: Biologist Butler and Technician Pignatelli started to excavate the 2019 western pond turtle nests this week. During the 2019 western pond turtle nesting season, 22 nests were found. Of those, six were transported to the Woodland Park Zoo for the head-starting program, and 16 nests were left in the ground to over-winter and emerge this spring. During

these excavations, some nests were found with hatchlings only partly out of their shells while two nests had hatchlings that emerged. Out of caution, every nest was searched thoroughly for signs of emergence, but only 10 of the nests were fully excavated. If hatchlings were found still partly in their shells, they were reburied. In total, 8 hatchlings were found fully hatched and were marked with a Vi-alpha identification tag. Due to the “Stay home, Stay healthy order”, additional excavations will not occur in the immediate future. Instead, doors were cut into the remaining nest’s predator guards to allow hatchlings to emerge safely on their own.



Seven new western pond turtle hatchlings

Bat Colony Recon: Biologist Ament completed field visits to two sites in the district to monitor bat activity. On March 17, 2020, she was joined by volunteers Ryan Ollerman and Bob Davies in a visit to a site near Forks where a new maternity colony was documented last fall. The landowner had to remove an old greenhouse structure that was housing most of the colony. Fortunately, the bats were found roosting in several other locations on the property. A total of 101 bats were counted roosting in the siding below a window late last September. The landowner is trying to exclude the bats from the siding and the roof. One bat box was installed at the property last fall. Another bat box was installed on the residence during the recent site visit. A total of 11 bats were observed below the window and it is likely they roosted there for the winter. The landowner has agreed to allow capturing of bats from this location for WNS testing. This project will hopefully proceed this spring after “Stay at Home” orders are lifted.



Myotis yumanensis bats roosting between siding boards



Ryan and Bob installing bat box



Ryan shows location of roosting bats

Bat Colony Recon (continued): Biologist Ament had gotten a call from a man earlier in the month that reported having bats in an abandoned structure on a property where he lived as a caretaker. He would not disclose his name or the location. Apparently, 30-40 bats were disturbed last summer when a deck structure on the building was power washed. Several other single bats had been observed flying within the residence on a few occasions. Biologist Ament answered questions about how to exclude the bats and expressed the need to learn more about the bat activity at the structure.

The caretaker was relieved to hear there was no cost for the site visit. He spoke with the landowner and called back a week later to grant permission for a site visit. Biologist Ament and volunteer Ryan Ollerman conducted a site visit to the property near Lake Sharron, approximately 8 miles SE of Port Angeles. A total of 5 bats were found roosting between boards in the main residence and one bat was found roosting in another adjacent structure.

Several sites were located where guano had accumulated but no bats were observed. Two old dead bats were collected. There were a significant number of small openings throughout both structures where bats could easily enter. Bat exclusion methods were discussed. The caretaker was not capable of buying or building any bat boxes. Fortunately, Biologist Ament had two freshly built bat boxes that were later provided to the caretaker. Efforts will continue to monitor this newly documented bat site.



Abandoned structures w/ roosting bats



Bat guano located in several locations



Bat boxes provided to caretaker

Taylor’s Checkerspot Distance Point Count Survey Prep and Training: Two occupied Taylor’s checkerspot (TC) sites west of the Elwha River are monitored by WDFW using a Distance Point Count Method. This method was initiated in 2018, surveyed by two field staff members, Biologist McMillan and Biologist Ament. The 2019 season included two additional surveyors, Biologist Bell and Biologist Murphie. The same four staff members will be surveying routes again this season. Biologists McMillan, Bell, and Ament spent time this month reviewing each survey route and completing the point preparations on-site for this season’s Point Distance Count TC surveys. Missing point markers were replaced if needed and the limbs were cleared off survey routes. The preparation work was completed for all routes that will be surveyed this upcoming season.

Biologists McMillan and Ament also conducted separate visits to an area that was proposed for a new survey route. Biologist Ament wanted to review the habitat improvement work that was completed and investigate for a new survey route. Biologist McMillan located a new route along the slope and installed point markers. She gathered the required point information for each point. This includes a GPS fix, estimated slope, and percentage of view obscured by vegetation. Several TC larvae were encountered during the TC route prep work. Research Scientist Olson had planned a refresher training session for all TC surveyors on March 27, but this will be postponed due to the Stay Home directives.



Gary re-marking a sign at TC survey point



Taylor's checkerspot larvae found along survey routes

Taylor's Checkerspot Habitat Improvement: Biologist Ament has been continuing the work initiated by retired WDFW biologist Dave Hays to work with DNR staff members to improve TC habitat at the known TC locations documented west of the Elwha River. A new habitat unit was cleared of trees and brush last season. The unit was adjacent to an old landing site that contains TC host plants. A more suitable habitat is located along the slope directly to the west of the unit. Slash piles within the unit were burned last fall. Biologist Ament conducted a site visit on March 21 to review the unit. DNR will be contacted to discuss proposed seeding of burn pile areas and the need to control bull thistle infestation.

Assistance with Sick Deer: Biologist Ament received a call from WDFW Enforcement regarding a sick or injured black-tailed deer that was in distress at a residence in Port Angeles. No local officers were available to respond. She spoke with the respondent and got more information before initiating a response. She consulted with Program Manager Calkins and Conflict Specialist Blankenship to explore options for others who could dispatch the deer (if needed). Fortunately, Officer Wessel was able to discontinue a boat survey for a fishing derby and was able to respond. She dispatched the deer and conveyed that it was likely going to die within a short period. Biologist Ament looked over the young deer and saw no major broken bones or injuries. She found several smaller old healed wounds and a more recent bruised area on the inner left flank. However, there was a tremendously high volume of lice on the deer. There may have been other factors influencing the immune system of this animal, but deer hair loss was very prominent and likely led to poor health conditions. Thanks, much to Officer Wessel for assisting with this deer. The respondent was certainly grateful for the response from WDFW personnel. She will continue to monitor other deer that frequent her yard.



Officer Wessel with dispatched deer



High volume of lice found on sick deer

2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

Cities Pelt Sealing: Biologist Butler met with three hunters who needed their harvested bobcats and river otters sealed. After checking each hunter and trapper's license, all the required information was collected, and the animals were properly sealed.

Restroom Replacements: New CXT vault restrooms were installed at the Bogachiel River Wilson Bridge Access Site and the Sol Duc River Maxfield Access Site. Both sites had 50-year old, round fiberglass restrooms that were non-ADA compliant, dilapidated and in dire need of replacement. Final grade to be completed when the existing ground firms up.



Maxfield



Wilson

Lake Aldwell Access Tree Removal: The access team was notified by Enforcement that two large cottonwood trees were illegally fell, blocking the Lake Aldwell parking lot. Team members Mitchell and Freimund spent three hours cutting and moving the logs to the edge of the parking area. Several other piles of limbs and debris were addressed as well.



Before



After

COVID-19 Emergency Site Closures: The access team spent three full days closing gates, restrooms, and posting signs at all Region 6 water access sites.



Other Work Performed: While Access Team Member Reeves conducted routine fieldwork, he found and disposed of 66 needles at the Union River Access Site and 23 at the Black River Site in Gate. This problem continues to grow in all counties of Region 6.



3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Public Concerns: Natural Resource Technician Tupen responded to multiple phone calls from concerned Grays Harbor County residents referencing dangerous and nuisance wildlife sightings. Species of concern included cougars, elk, and beavers. Tupen handled these situations with advice over the phone.

Fladry Removal: Tupen assisted Biologist Sundstrom in removing fladry that was surrounding a tulip field in Grays Harbor County. This fladry had been placed to protect the flowers from potential elk damage.

Injured Wildlife: Tupen assisted Officer Bolt with an injured seagull in Raymond. The seagull had a broken wing. Tupen transported the seagull to a local veterinary office for treatment.



Lead Poisoned Swan Collection at Lake Tapps: Biologist's Tirhi and Butler spent a morning in their second attempt to capture a swan suffering from lead poisoning at McIntosh Lake, Thurston County (see previous reports to follow District 11 lead poisoning response work). A lakefront landowner had been keeping in contact with Biologist Tirhi to report the status of the swan. Once the swan was unable to fly, Tirhi and Butler were more likely to capture it, which they did. The swan was barely able to swim and not overly difficult to capture using a boat and long-handled net. Tirhi then delivered the swan to Biologist Jordan with the Northwest Swan Conservation Association, who transported it northwards to the evaluation and rehabilitation facility. Unfortunately, the swan's lead levels were too high for rehabilitation and the swan was euthanized. Removing sick and dead swans from the landscape does prevent wildlife scavengers from also getting lead poisoning from the sick swans. Questions about this program can be sent to our Region 4 office.



Swan captured on McIntosh Lake, Thurston County awaiting transport to a rehabilitator

4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Scotch Broom Removal: Wildlife Program staff members performed some scotch broom removal at the new Elk River Unit and developed funding applications for further restoration work.

Olympic Wildlife Area Maintenance and Operations: The Olympic crew has been wrapping up tractor maintenance and repairs as troubles arise and parts show up. Mowing scotch-broom on the new Grayland acquisition led to many problems ranging from flat tires to broken wiring and bent or missing metal. With most of the repairs completed, the Olympic crew moved on to building kiosk's which will be placed at the Grayland acquisition. Two kiosks are almost complete. The crew then switched gears and posted all wildlife area access points with signs closing areas. Collectively, the Olympic crew posted all areas from upper Wishkah to Chehalis Wildlife Area and John's River to Chinook. Many signs were posted stating "social distancing" in the days before posting areas "closed."

The Olympic crew then ensured that all the end of the month paperwork was completed before the end of the workday before our operations were shut down due to Coronavirus. The Olympic crew is now self-distancing at home as per Governor Inslee's request and each member assigned tasks from home. Manager Gerchak has been working on public records reports and project files

getting caught up on things after being out sick for so long in addition to checking on staff members and tasks that will have us ready when things improve.



Kiosks under construction at the Olympic shop

5) **Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

6) **Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

Nothing for this installment.

7) **Other**

Nothing for this installment.