

# Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

March 1 to 15, 2021

## **DIVERSITY DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

## **GAME DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

## **HUNTER EDUCATION**

Nothing for this installment.

## **LANDS DIVISION**

### ***HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:***

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Skagit WLA-Island Unit Management Changes:** Property Management Supervisor Elyse Woodruff assisted Region 4 management in obtaining approval from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to manage the Island Unit differently in the future. About half of the Unit (147 acres) was purchased with USFWS Wildlife Restoration Act funding (“PR”) in the 1950s to be managed as diked cropland and freshwater wetlands. USFWS agreed that in view of the fact that WDFW is no longer able to maintain the dikes (aging infrastructure and anticipated sea level rise due to climate change), the return of the area to its historic condition – intertidal habitat – is acceptable. Waterfowl use and hunting will continue, with additional benefits for Chinook, Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW), and shorebirds.

#### **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Chapman Lake BFP:** For many years the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) has secured Boating Facilities Program (BFP) funding for the acquisition of land and construction of a boating facilities site on Chapman Lake awaiting viability of a project to place under a grant agreement. Administrative Assistant Lisa Coffman, Region 1 Lands Agent Jerrod Ploof, and RES Manager Karen Edwards worked closely with Region 1 management and staff members, John Hansen in Capital and Asset Management Program (CAMP), and with planning staff members at Spokane County on both the acquisition and development project, on what regulatory permits/actions are required, timing, and costs anticipated. That project and its associated budget was submitted to RCO for consideration. We are awaiting a response.

Time has been reserved on the April RCFB agenda as a placeholder for RCFB consideration/decision, if applicable. In the meantime, a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was provided to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for comment. Comments have been received and DNR's requested changes will be evaluated.

**LWCF Grant Application Opportunities:** In preparation for the upcoming RCO grant application cycle, and possibly a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) supplemental grant opportunity, Administrative Assistant Lisa Coffman and RES Manager Karen Edwards met with DeAnn Beck, RCO's LWCF lead, on the expected increase in LWCF funding available, WDFW's increased interest in applying for LWCF funding for acquisition projects, and the challenge of the National Park Service's (NPS) requirements around the required 6(f) boundary restriction. DeAnn has weekly meetings with NPS and will communicate if/what options are available to address the 6(f)-boundary requirement.

**SCORP Steering Committee:** In order to maintain eligibility for federal Land and Water Conservation Funds, every five years RCO leads the process to create a state comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP). Planning and Recreation Section Manager Joel Sisolak is serving on the committee to help write the plan for 2022-2027. The Committee has met twice in 2021, including this month on March 10.

### 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Nothing for this installment.

### 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

**DNR Leases:** Property Management Supervisor Elyse Woodruff, working with regional teams in Regions 1, 2, 3, and 4, has completed the renegotiation of all 17 DNR leases for 83,400 acres statewide. The last lease in the door was a 2,500-acre lease for lands in the Methow, Wells, and Whitestone Lake in Okanogan County. Many thanks to Region 2 North Lands Operations Manager Justin Haug for pushing this one over the finish line.

**Horseshoe Bend Exchange:** Property Management Supervisor Elyse Woodruff, working with Ross Huffman in Region 3, has requested approval from federal funders of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area for a proposed land exchange. After approval from USFWS and NPS, WDFW will move forward with public and Commission review of the project which is located on the Naches River in Yakima County. The exchange would protect the last stretch of Cougar Canyon by exchanging land that has lost its conservation and recreation value due to its proximity to a rock and gravel quarry.

**Ninemile Creek Restoration:** Region 2 Lands Agent Chad Buck has assisted Region 2 biologists and the Colville Confederated Tribes by preparing the permit to allow the construction of beaver dam analogs along sections of Ninemile Creek on the Eder Unit of the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area in Okanogan County. The project will provide additional pool habitat and stream channel complexity for the benefit of steelhead.

**Violet Prairie Section 6 Grant Applications:** Administrative Assistant Lisa Coffman, Grant Manager Sasha Medlen, and RES Manager Karen Edwards have been working in conjunction with Lauri Vigue on grant applications, maps, and budgets needed for submittal of two Section 6 grant applications for the acquisition of Violet Prairie and Chester Butte properties.

**Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area:** Planning and Recreation Manager Sisolak participated in the second interviews for the new wildlife area manager for the Olympic – Willapa Hills Wildlife Area. Three candidates were interviewed in this round.

## 5) Providing Education and Outreach

**Duckabush Restoration:** Region 6 Lands Agent Alice Beals and RES Manager Karen Edwards has attended several meetings with Theresa Mitchell, WDFW’s Habitat Program Environmental Planner, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), and the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group (HCSEG) on the real estate aspects as part of the larger restoration project on the Duckabush River. This is a complex project, with many parties involved and several different funding sources. It will consist of relocating the existing Hwy 101 bridge, which is currently on fill, with a new bridge suspended on piling, and realignment of a county road off of Hwy 101. Close coordination and collaboration will continue as this project is in the design phase, which, as a result, will identify properties needing to be acquired for the larger project.

**Signage RFP:** WDFW has issued a request for proposals (RFP) for a consultant to develop Statewide Sign Standards and Guidelines. Three responses were received by the March 15 deadline. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide direction for planning, developing, and managing signs for outdoor public use areas on WDFW-managed lands. The purpose of signs is to:

- Help protect the safety of visitors to WDFW managed lands and facilities.
- Provide direction and guidance for the use of recreation lands and facilities.
- Inform and educate the public about the natural resources of the area.
- Provide a positive image and identity for WDFW and/or a managing agency.

## 6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy

**Usk Fish Hatchery Lease:** Region 1 Lands Agent Jerrod Ploof has been working with Seattle City Light to complete a 30-year lease of the grounds of the former Usk Fish Hatchery in Pend Oreille County. Seattle City Light will build and operate a “conservation” fish hatchery (not production) as mitigation for renewal of its Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license for the Boundary Hydroelectric Facility on the Canadian border.

**Region 6 Lands Agent Alice Beals:** Beals participated on the interview panel for the Olympic Wildlife Area Manager position, an opening caused by the retirement of Jim Gerchak.

**Acquisition Supervisor Recruitment:** The recruitment announcement for a new Acquisition Supervisor has been vetted through the Regional Directors and approved by Lands Division Manager, Cynthia Wilkerson. RES Manager Karen Edwards has requested assistance from HR staff members to get the recruitment out on the streets!

## 7) Other

**SageWest Communicators Workshop:** Program Specialist Trenda attended a two-day workshop conducted by the SageWest partnership on March 3-4. SageWest is a group of professionals who work in [shrubsteppe country](#), and includes a wide range of expertise. The workshop was centered around communications, and featured topics ranging from how the pandemic has impacted communications to engaging more diverse audiences.

## **SCIENCE DIVISION**

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 1**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) Managing Wildlife Populations

**Mule Deer Capture Review:** Biologist Vekasy participated in the post-capture review for mule deer projects across the state. The team identified some improvements for pre-project planning and issues to address with the helicopter vendor. Vekasy also participated in the review of a Washington State University (WSU) graduate student proposal to analyze mule deer radio-collar data. The main focus will be on habitat use, specifically determining use of Conservation Reserve Program lands by mule deer as determined by summer and winter home range use and travel corridors. Vekasy also updated and summarized current capture and survival information for the project.

**Ferruginous Hawk Survey:** Vekasy reviewed changes to the Priority classification of ferruginous hawk territories in preparation for occupancy surveys. They also inspected the recent platform installation where a nest on a grain elevator had been removed. The platform was installed within sight of the grain elevator and further away from the main road, hoping to lower disturbance potential; that and loading the platform with nest material from the grain elevator will hopefully make the new platform an attractive alternative to the elevator.

**Moose Welfare Check:** Biologist Vekasy responded to report of a sick moose between Dixie and Waitsburg. Vekasy and Conflict Biologist Kolb observed the adult bull moose resting and feeding along Coppei Creek. Although the moose had some hair loss, the body condition appeared fair and behavior seemed normal.



*Bull moose in winter wheat field*

**Elk Management:** Biologists Wik and Vekasy finished the Blue Mountains helicopter-based elk survey early in the week. This year, the survey took seven days to complete with one day for mechanical repairs after a starter generator failed, causing all electronics to turn off when the battery drained, and one day delayed due to higher winds. The estimate for the population will be completed this week. The overall calf ratio was 24:100. We recorded six moose during the survey, which was higher than any other year, and observed two wolves from the Touchet pack and four from the Tucannon pack.



*Two wolves from the Touchet pack, the collared breeding female is the bedded animal*



*Bull observed from the air in the Grande Ronde Watershed*

**Grouse Wingbee:** Biologists Atamian, Lowe, Turnock, Schroeder, and volunteer Robb identified species, sex, and age class of forest grouse wings and tails (cannot identify the sex of ruffed grouse without the tails) collected from Region 1 wing barrels during the 2020 hunting season. Of the 211 samples collected, 124 were ruffed grouse, 42 were spruce grouse, and 45 were dusky grouse; 47% of the known sex breeding age birds were female.

In District 1, there were 167 wings collected from 11 barrels by WDFW, Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge (LPO NWR), and the Kalispel Natural Resources Department staff members. All three species of forest grouse found in District 1 were collected and the breakdown by species was 19 Dusky grouse, 106 Ruffed grouse, and 42 Spruce grouse.

**Prairie Grouse:** Biologist Atamian searched the old Lone Pine sage grouse lek and the surrounding area for activity, but none was seen. Atamian completed a survey of the sage grouse windmill lek in Lincoln County, resulting in no birds being seen and no signs observed on the traditional lek sites. However, volunteer Thorburn did find sage grouse pellets in a remnant sage brush during a search of private lands and saw at least two males displaying at Windmill lek #1. Atamian also updated the annual sage grouse report based on comments from Thorburn.

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

Nothing for this installment.

### **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Radio Activated Guard (RAG) Box Redesign:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett and other state agencies biologists continued to finalize a prototype for a RAG box redesign. A field demo is being scheduled to finalize the design prior to production.

### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE):** Private Lands Biologist Gaston worked with Farm Service Agency (FSA) Technician Olsen to go over contracts enrolled in the CRP SAFE program. Cost share receipts were turned in by some landowners and the FSA wanted to check that field work had been completed.

### **5) Providing Education and Outreach**

Nothing for this installment.

### **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Culture Improvement Team (CIT) Meeting:** Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna participated on the first CIT meeting. A lot of hard discussions, questions to be answered by the steering committee, and homework resulted.

### **7) Other**

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 2**

### ***HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:***

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Prescribed Fire:** WDFW successfully conducted a prescribed fire from March 2-4 in the North Potholes area of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. Approximately 190 of the 250 planned acres were burned. The purpose of the burn was to clear decadent wetland vegetation from permanent and seasonal ponds, primarily to the benefit of northern leopard frogs. Many staff members have been involved in this project to date, those conducting the burn included M. Eberline and D. VanWoert from the WDFW burn team, C. Eidson, J. Cole and N. Bechtold from the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, M. Hughes from Region 2 Private Lands program, as well as multiple paid and volunteer staff members from Grant Co. FPD #3 (Quincy).

Those assisting the burn in planning, regulatory, and support roles include S. Dougherty and E. Grabowsky (District Bio team), E. Orling (US Bureau of Reclamation), officers Busching and Sullivan, and S. Lehman (Public Affairs). This burn was the first of its kind in recent history on the Wildlife Area and will serve as a model for future wetland burns.



*Prescribed burn in the Columbia Basin Potholes* – Photo by Hughes

**Greater Sage-grouse Lek Monitoring:** Male greater-sage grouse begin displaying on leks in Douglas County as early as February, and lek attendance typically grows throughout March until its peak in early April. Biologists Comstock and Jeffreys made their first lek visits of the season, arriving before sunrise and monitoring lek activity to obtain maximum counts. Biologists must remain at some distance so as not to disturb the birds, so binoculars and a spotting scope were used to monitor the leks. In addition to the males, a couple of females were also observed at each of the leks, walking amongst the displaying males to assess potential mates.

The three sage-grouse leks Biologists Comstock and Jeffreys monitored are located well outside of the 2020 Pearl Hill fire perimeter, but many other leks were burned. Males have been observed displaying at most of the burned sites this spring, but in lower numbers than were observed last year. Moreover, the lack of nesting habitat adjacent to the leks has the potential to decrease female productivity, which could lead to lower populations in the coming years. The toll taken on this imperiled sagebrush obligate species by the massive Pearl Hill fire will be better understood following 2022 lek counts. Private Lands Biologist Braaten completed early morning surveys for Sage Grouse leks and searched for displaced Sage Grouse from the Pearl Hill fire. Private Lands Biologist Braaten was able to relocate one lek and searched the fire perimeter for scattered leks or concentrations.





*(Left) Sunrise over Badger Mountain on the way to a sage-grouse lek*  
*(Right) Biologist Comstock counts male grouse displaying in a field from a distance*  
– Photos by Emily Jeffreys



*Sage Grouse in Flight* – Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW

**Grouse Wing Bee:** Each year during forest grouse season, biologists throughout the state place wing barrels at several locations throughout each district, in which hunters are asked to place a wing and tail from each grouse harvested. Bags with instructions and a place to record the harvest date and GMU are provided. These bags are collected and stored throughout the season, and later biologists examine the feathers to discern species, age, and sex of each harvested specimen. Biologists Jeffreys and Comstock collected wing and tail bags from barrels at several locations throughout Chelan County during the 2020 forest grouse season and sat down with Statewide Grouse Specialist Mike Schroeder this March to identify all specimens collected. Data from this “wing bee” and all others throughout the state will be used to inform forest grouse harvest statistics.



*Mike Schroeder and Leslie Robb assisted District 7 biologists with sexing and aging their collection of harvested grouse wings – Photo by Devon Comstock*

**Mule Deer Migration Study:** Biologist Jeffreys and Comstock participated in two meetings about the ongoing mule deer migration study funded by Secretarial Order 3362, which aims to map important big game migration corridors and stopover routes. We have just entered year two of data collection for the Wenatchee Mountains mule deer population. Early data show that most mule deer from District 7 employ a migration strategy and have a preliminary survival estimate in the range of typical adult female deer survival ( $\pm 85\%$ ).

**Black Bear Den Site Visit:** Biologist Jeffreys and Comstock assisted Bear & Cougar Specialists Rich Beausoleil and Lindsay Welfelt in their annual monitoring of a previously collared bear. This bear had made her den in a rock cave, which is an unusual site for bears in the Pacific Northwest. She had a female yearling cub with her. This bear had originally been collared in 2014, when she was four years old, making her 11 years old now. Each year Biologist Beausoleil and Welfelt attempt to relocate previously collared sows to check their collar, check productivity and collar yearlings.



*Biologist Beausoleil, Welfelt and Comstock measure an adult sow and replace her collar –*

Photo by Devon Comstock

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Sign Infrastructure:** As with other effected areas of Washington State, the mid-February snow events and cold weather caused an abrupt change of plans for Columbia Basin Wildlife Area staff members. The Wildlife Area’s Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew had been scheduled for a shrub planting project near the Winchester Wasteway but changed course considering the weather conditions. Instead, they began to address signs and sign related infrastructure at public access points on the Wildlife Area. Over the next several years the Wildlife Area plans to update and replace existing signs where necessary, but to also install a variety of semi-standardized sign infrastructure such as “sign boards.” Assistant Manager Bechtold introduced the crew to the wide range of signs the agency uses and the situations in which they are used, and trained the crew on the tools, materials, and installation procedures for sign boards. In total the crew installed six signs boards, repaired fencing and replaced signs at an additional seven public access points.



*Sign board at the Road 18 parking area (Gloyd Seeps Unit) – Photo by Bechtold*

**Horse Spring Coulee Unit Gate Repair:** Sinlahekin Wildlife Area staff members repaired a steel gate damaged during the winter. The gate is one of only two locations the public can access the wildlife area unit and is susceptible to unauthorized vehicle use if not repaired. The staff members repaired both braces and installed a new steel gate. This improvement will help keep vehicle traffic out of this winter mule deer area. In addition, Wildlife Area Mechanic Boulger has been busy fabricating barrier gates for those roads needing to be closed seasonally due to resource concerns.



*Before and After images of the repaired gate at Horse Spring Coulee Unit – Photo by Wehmeyer*

### 3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

**Feeding Wildlife Issues:** Specialist Heilhecker spoke with a landowner near Carlton about a neighbor feeding birds. The bird feeding attracted turkeys which then cause a nuisance situation for the neighborhood. Specialist Heilhecker asked the landowner to speak to the neighbor about discontinuing the bird feeding. The turkeys won't leave if someone is providing a food source. In addition to talking to the neighbor, Specialist Heilhecker suggested spraying the turkeys with a water hose and shooting them with a paintball gun as an added incentive to leave the area.

### 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

**Section 6 Recovery Acquisition:** Lands Operations Manager Finger continued working on the Section 6 Recovery Acquisition grant for a full section of property in the Chester Butte area.



*The Chester Butte 2021 Acquisition site; not quite ready to receive pygmy rabbits*

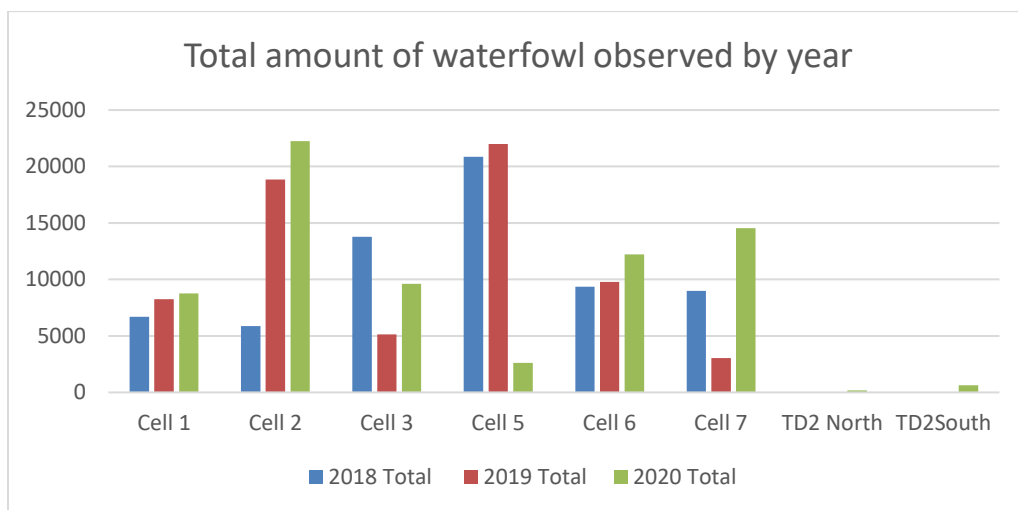
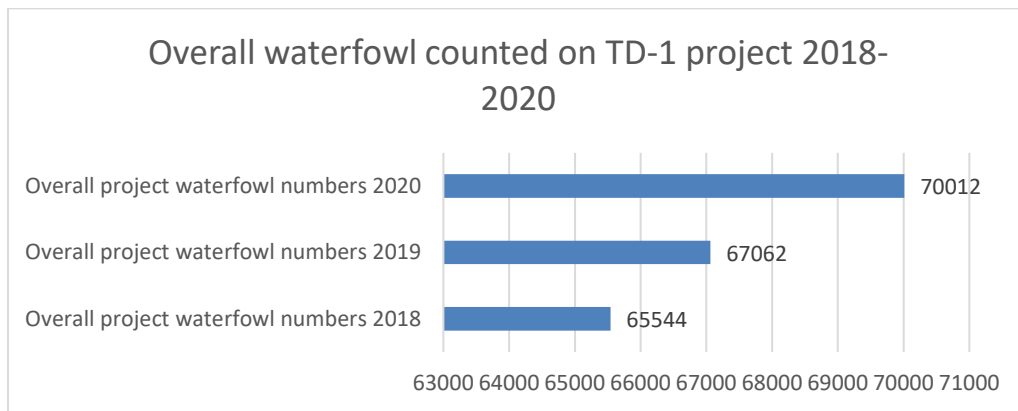
– Photo by Finger



*But upon closer look, there is hope... larkspur emerging* – Photo by Finger

**TD1 and TD2 Remote Camera Waterfowl Surveys:** Specialist McPherson deployed eight cameras (6 at TD1/ 2 at TD2) to survey waterfowl abundance at both projects. Specialist McPherson also worked on getting new versions of methods and protocols developed on Resource Monitoring which is a program sponsored by Pacific Northwest Aquatic Monitoring Partnership. The purpose of Resource Monitoring is to allow for natural resource professionals to document procedure of projects so others can use for implementation of their own research.

Specialist McPherson completed data entry and analysis of remote cameras that are deployed at the TD-1 project area. Waterfowl abundance counts with remote cameras have been occurring for three consecutive years to monitor spring migration and waterfowl response to increased moist soil management. During the 2020 remote camera survey season two cameras were added to the TD-2 project area. The intention of the TD-2 project area was to create 71 acres of hemi marsh habitat to provide brood ponds for local waterfowl production. Currently with tall emergent vegetation and sedimentation wetlands in TD-2 are seeing very low amounts of waterfowl production. Our goal is to have cameras surveying the area to establish baseline data and witness the positive response in waterfowl use as more habitat management occurs.



**Total waterfowl observed by remote camera traps (cell 5 camera in 2020 had malfunction mid-March)**

**Parking Areas and Road (Facilities) Maintenance:** With the approach of the March 1 fishing opener, mid-February is typically the start of the annual roadside and parking area vegetation management pre-emergent residual treatments. The intent is to prevent noxious weeds and other non-desirable species from establishing and spreading along WDFW public access roads and parking areas. This effort also reduces wildfire potential, as well as providing a firebreak or anchor point should a fire occur. Due to the February snowfall and windy weather, Assistant Manager Cole and Natural Resource Specialist McPherson, along with Access Manager Harmon and Assistant Manager Steele, were able to capitalize on the only day with favorable conditions to treat all the access sites associated with the March 1 fishing opener. The residual work will continue over the next six to eight weeks as weather permits.

**Safe Harbor Agreement:** Biologist Hughes informed a landowner in Douglas County about 46 new burrows that were recently found on his field. The landowner has had a Safe Harbor Agreement since 2008, which is when the field was last surveyed. The landowner was excited about the active burrows being found. Hughes worked with the landowner and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on making sure the sagebrush in this field will be left alone for the remainder of the landowner's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract. The field was just enrolled in a 3-year EQIP contract which will expire in December 2023. Hughes is hopeful that this will provide enough time to re-enroll the field into Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which would be preferred for the landowner. The field was unable to be re-enrolled into CRP this past year, but was enrolled into EQIP, due to Douglas County being at the cap for enrolled CRP acres. Hughes discussed making this CRP enrollment a priority with NRCS. The landowner will be seeding 6.5 acres of a pollinator mix for habitat enhancement. The plot will be seeded in a section of the field that was recently burned and will not have an effect on the active burrows. Based on the new findings, other areas of interest to survey have become a priority. Hughes contacted adjacent landowners to get permission for pygmy rabbit surveys. She also informed neighboring landowners of the new findings, so they are aware that the likelihood of rabbits going onto their property is increasing.

**Multiple Species General Conservation Plan (MSGCP):** Biologist Hughes met with Foster Creek Conservation District (FCCD) to discuss a recent MSGCP meeting and on-going efforts with the MSGCP. A new member of FCCD is now leading efforts with the MSGCP. Hughes provided advice on communication with landowners on the MSGCP. After spring surveys for sharp-tail and sage grouse, pygmy rabbit, and ground squirrels take place, changes to the current priority areas will be discussed. Monitoring requirements and roles DFW play for the MSGCP were also discussed with the new person leading the MSGCP.

**Winchester Wasteway Russian Olive Removal Project:** Ducks Unlimited, WDFW, and the Bureau of Reclamation have partnered on a multi-phased project designed to improve shallow wetland habitat along a portion of the Winchester Wasteway. The project has identified a number of poor to non-functional shallow wetland basins, and is systematically working to remove undesirable vegetation, excavate where beneficial, and reestablish desirable vegetation.

**Russian Olive Tree Removal:** During the past month, Assistant Manager Cole has provided logistical support for a contractor that has been removing mature Russian Olive trees, which are a state listed noxious weed. They have been removed from approximately 50 acres of decadent wetland basins and piled nearby. The majority of piles will eventually be burned, allowing access into the basins for vegetation management and additional excavation work in the future.



*Breaking down a mature Russian Olive tree – Photo by Cole*



*Pronghorn Antelope in Douglas County – Photo by Eric Braaten, WDFW*





*Western Gray Squirrel on the Pogue Mountain Unit west of Omak* – Photo by Haug



*Hiking above Lake Osoyoos on the Charles and Mary Eder Unit of the Scotch Creek WLA* –  
Photo by Justin Haug



*Spring within reach on the Charles and Mary Eder Unit* – Photo by Justin Haug



*Snow geese have been right off O'Sullivan Dam creating great opportunity for bird watchers* –  
Photo by McPherson



*Tremendous number of Northern Pintails using Winchester Regulated Access this March –  
Photo by McPherson*

**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 3**

***HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:***

**1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Bighorn Sheep MOVI:** District 8 Wildlife Management staff members provided ground support for bighorn sheep captures in the Yakima River Canyon. Approximately 75 of the estimated 100 bighorn sheep were captured and sampled. The capture was the first step in an experiment to try to clear *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (MOVI) from the population. MOVI has persisted since the initial outbreak in 2009 and is causing population decline through poor lamb recruitment. Permits hunter harvest is expected to remove some of the unmarked sheep. At a future date, any animal from the capture testing positive for MOVI will be removed.

**Elk Surveys:** Winter briefly returned to the Yakima Valley, concentrating elk on the feed sites. Biologists and Wildlife Area staff members surveyed the feed sites, counting almost 5,000 elk with 10 bulls and 27 calves per 100 cows. Calf recruitment increased from a dismal 2019 season but is still below historical averages.

**Collared Deer Mortalities:** Wildlife Conflict Technician Leuck, Conflict Specialist Wetzel, and Biologist Bernatowicz independently investigated three collared deer mortalities. One was completely scavenged and unknown cause of death (COD) but was likely age/malnutrition related. The other two were cougar kills. Specialist Wetzel found the cougar guarding the kill and video trapped the cat.



*Cached cougar kill of radio collared study deer; The adult cougar that killed this deer stayed 30 feet away and was visible from the deer during the collar retrieval*

**Elk Feeding:** Wenas Wildlife Area staff members continue feeding elk at the Mellotte feed site. The changing weather this winter has resulted in elk numbers shifting along with the weather, with current numbers around 900 head.



*Elk herd being fed at Mellotte*



*Elk tracks showing return to Wildlife Area through Hardy Canyon reentry gate*

**Nest Box Surveys:** Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Natural Resource Technician Sarah Wascisin and Manager Pat Kaelber assisted Richland Rod and Gun Club members in surveying all wood duck nest boxes on the Sunnyside Unit and took data for use over the last year-evidence of wood duck nesting, starling nests, and Western screech owl habitation. The results were that 21 wood duck boxes were checked and cleaned with 10 boxes showing evidence of nesting activity last season, and 1 box was occupied by a Western screech owl.



*Natural Resources Technician Wascisin checking a Wood Duck nest box near Giffen Lake*

**Elk Count and Feeding:** L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members assisted District 8 biologists with an elk count at Joe Watt and Robinson Canyons. There were 599 cows, 153 calves, 86 branched bulls, and 16 spike bulls at Watt. Staff members counted 442 cows, 109 calves, 44 branched bulls, and 15 spike bulls at Robinson.

L.T. Murray staff members continued feeding elk at Robinson and Joe Watt Canyons. Elk numbers have averaged around 825 animals at Watt and 600 at Robinson. A cold snap and some snow have brought icy conditions for feeding and pushed more elk into the feed sites recently. A large bull and calf elk died this month of unknown causes. Hooves were sampled on both animals for testing of TAHD (hoof disease) as the hooves appeared suspect.



*Hooves sampled from a calf (previous) and bull elk to be tested for TAHD (hoof disease)*



*Elk feeding at Robinson Canyon, L.T. Murray Wildlife Area*

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart completed building kestrel boxes and will work with volunteers to install them on the elk fence of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area and in the Quilomene Unit.

**Pronghorn Survey Preparations Underway:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with Yakama Nation Biologists on coordinating an upcoming Pronghorn aerial survey for south-central Washington. The survey will provide updated abundance and distribution information for the reintroduced pronghorn herd. Fidorra also coordinated with Safari Club International volunteers who scouted presurvey for animal locations. The survey will occur in early March.

**Band Recapture Data Not Always Perfect:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra followed up on a call from a homeowner in Richland who found a dead owl with a band in their yard. Fidorra instructed them on how to report it, but after some technical issues he picked up the bird to submit the data to [www.reportband.gov](http://www.reportband.gov) which is the reporting site for North America Bird Banding Lab. All hunters or citizens who obtain a banded bird should report the band number to receive a full history on when and where the bird was reported in the past. However, the band number associated with this bird was entered in the database for a nestling goshawk banded in the mid-1980s. Photos and further details were sent to the Bird Banding Lab to determine where the error occurred and hopefully to find more out about the history of this bird.





**Bighorn Sheep MOVI Results:** Results from the testing from Yakima River Canyon bighorn sheep found six adult sheep were positive and one indeterminate from roughly 75 sheep sampled. The positive/indeterminate will be removed from the population at a later date in an experiment to try to clear *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (MOVI) from the population. The results are similar to the previous sampling. Close to 10% of the adult population is likely shedding MOVI.

District 8 Wildlife Biologist Oates responded to another deer radio-collared deer mortality. There wasn't enough remaining of the carcass to determine cause of mortality. Biologist Oates ran a quick estimate of radio-collared doe survival to date mortality causes for WDFW collared deer in Chelan and Kittitas Counties, north of I-90. Deer collared by the Muckleshoot Tribe south of I-90 in District 8 have had their best survival (~90%) to date for the 2020-21 year.

#### **District 7 (Chelan)**

Alive = 39

Dead = 5

Survival proportion = 90%.

Causes: all were "unknown" (carcass consumed)

#### **District 8 (Kittitas)**

Alive = 37

Dead = 18

Survival proportion = 67%

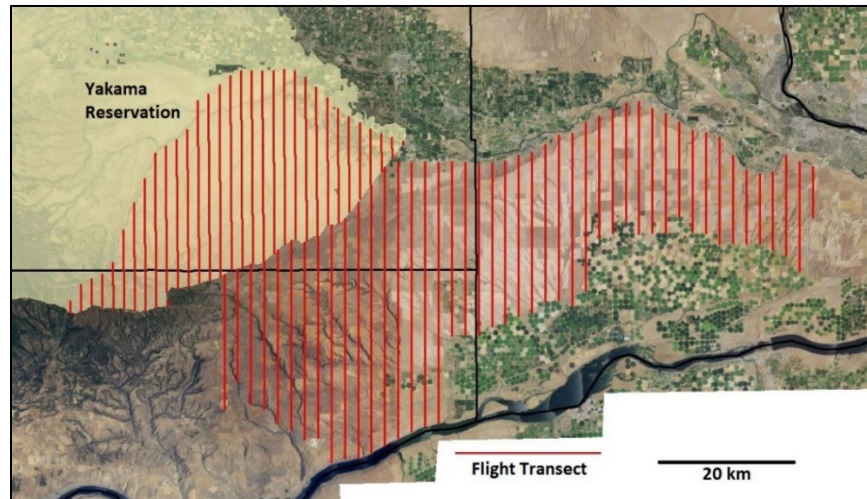
Causes (capture-related morts omitted):

Cougar = 5 (28% of morts)

Tribal harvest or poaching = 1 (6% of morts)

Unknown = 9 (50% of morts)

**Southcentral Pronghorn Flight Survey Completed:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with Yakama Nation biologists and Safari Club International volunteers to complete the 2021 pronghorn survey this month. Yakama biologists conducted the flight with SCI providing ground-based surveyors and WDFW providing funds and logistical support. The data has not yet been thoroughly reviewed but initial counts indicate that at least 228 pronghorns were detected. In 2019 our minimum count was 248. This year, weather delayed flights until groups were dispersed and therefore potentially easier to overlook. Having a relatively stable count despite severe snow and mortality after the last survey two years ago and a very dry spring last year is promising.



*Southcentral Washington pronghorn survey area*

**Burrowing Owl Burrow Maintenance:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra continued to work on visiting and repairing artificial burrows installed for burrowing owls. Many owls appear to have overwintered this year and were already on site. The Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society is a partner on the project and provided tools and volunteers who are independently monitoring some of the burrows this year. This will allow some needed repairs to finally be made and expand the project in the future. WDFW currently manages 114 artificial burrows in the Pasco area.

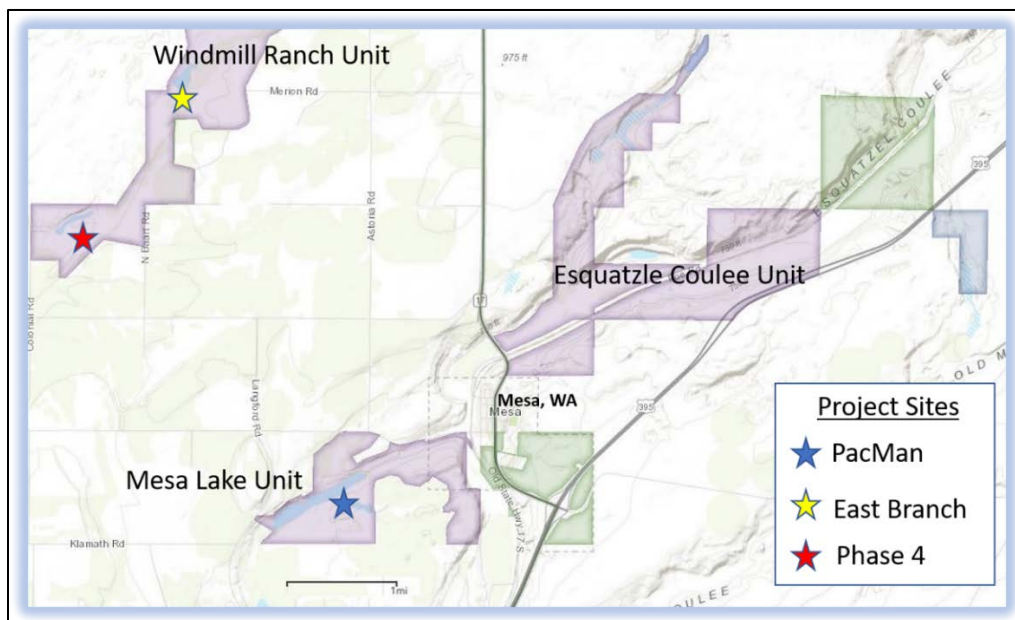


*A common cohabitant in most artificial burrows; black widow spider*



*Occupied owl burrow entrance with leftover American Robin wing and Kangaroo rat tail*

**Migratory Waterfowl and Wetland Conservation Program Proposal Submitted:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with Sunnyside Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber and District 4 Habitat Bio Ritter on a funding proposal to enhance three wetland sites on the Sunnyside Wildlife Area in Franklin County. The project would remove invasive vegetation, install levees, and flow control structures, and restore native upland vegetation to enhance breeding habitat, brood rearing, and open water habitat for winter ducks and waterfowl hunters.



*Locations of three proposed wetland enhancement projects on the Sunnyside Wildlife Area*

**More Elk Feeding:** L.T. Murray staff members continued feeding elk at Robinson and Joe Watt Canyons. With warmer temperatures, elk numbers have dwindled to around 400 animals at the Watt feed site and no animals at the Robinson feed site.



*Elk feeding at Robinson Canyon, L.T. Murray Wildlife Area*

**New Boxes:** L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart worked with a Central Washington University (CWU) volunteer to stain and add bedding to 27 new kestrel boxes. Ten of the boxes were installed along Parke Creek of the Quilomene Unit. Staff members will install the remaining boxes in the upcoming weeks.



*New kestrel box on Parke Creek*

## 2) Providing Recreation Opportunities

**Pheasant Harvest Monitoring in District 4:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra with the help of Natural Resources Technicians monitored pheasant harvest at three USACE release sites in Benton and Franklin County from the past three hunting seasons. User information collected was voluntary and often incomplete. Given the errors in reporting, data indicated >40% of released birds are harvested. The data was valuable in assessing the relative success of the program across sites. The Toothaker site is narrow and small and may be less suitable for holding released birds for harvest in the long run, relative to the other larger sites (Table 1). The data also showed a large uptick in use at the sites during the Covid-19 season compared to past years.

Table 1. Pheasants released and minimum harvest by site and year.

Year/Site	Harvest*	Released	%Harvested*
<b>2018</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>45</b>
Big Flat	197	394	50
Lost Island	114	250	46
Toothaker	47	151	31
<b>2019</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>818</b>	<b>40</b>
Big Flat	194	412	47
Lost Island	104	262	40
Toothaker	28	114	25
<b>2020</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>44</b>
Big Flat	197	408	48
Lost Island	114	216	53
Toothaker	31	160	19

\*Harvest reflects raw data of minimum birds reported on hunter slips without correction for a large number of improperly or not completed slips.

**Elk Fence Damage:** Wenas Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Taylor was notified of a hole in the elk fence behind Conrad Ranches. He and Natural Resources Technician Stultz found snowmobile tracks that lead to the hole and continued into the winter closure. The tracks went up the face of Cleman Mountain and then back out. Numerous elk tracks at the site indicate that elk moved onto private land through the hole. The information was turned over to the Enforcement Program for investigation.



*Hole cut in the elk fence by snowmobilers*

**VPA-HIP A-19s:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett completed two A-19 payment requests for the 2020-2021 hunting season. Both A-19 were for landowners in Region 3’s Voluntary Public Access- Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). After the requests were signed by the landowners, Hulett sent them in for processing.

**WHAP! WDFW’s New Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett attended a private lands meeting about WDFW’s new Waterfowl Habitat and Access Program (WHAP). This program is replacing past waterfowl programs like the Corn Stubble Hunt Program but is focused on more habitat. Where this program can help Region 3 private lands is by pairing WHAP funds for habitat with VPA-HIP funds for hunting access. Proposals for this program are due by March 15.

**Bighorn Sheep Permit Recommendation List:** Wildlife Management staff members from Olympia and Region 3 reviewed the number of bighorn sheep remaining (tested and un-tested) in the Yakima River Canyon and developed a revised permit recommendation list. Hunters will be used to sample a large portion of the unmarked sheep in 2021. Many of those are juvenile rams. Juveniles animals were not targeted for capture as test results are not meaningful for determining “shedders.” The majority of the population has been exposed to MOVI. Lambs that survive will test positive for a period of time. Most of those animals will not be chronic shedders. However, some young animals that test negative could become chronic shedders in the future. The majority of lambs produced appear to ram lambs. Removing the juvenile rams with permit harvest will increase the probability that MOVI can be cleared from the herd.

**Antlerless Elk Harvest:** District 8 Wildlife Biologist Bernatowicz reviewed permit/damage antlerless elk harvest for 2020. Master Hunter harvest is not known, but it appears that total harvest was within set goals. Not change were recommended to the current draft 2021 elk permit seasons.

**Snowmobile Use:** L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Natural Resources Technician Blore has been monitoring the perimeter of the winter closure. Blore reports extensive snowmobile use going around the gates at Shadow Creek and some entry around the Hutchins gate. Law Enforcement was notified.



*Shadow Creek Road closed to motorized vehicles*



*Hutchins gate with snowmobile tracks entering the winter closure*

**Colockum Wildlife Area Recreation:** The recent mild spring-like weather has encouraged people to get out and take a hike on the Colockum Wildlife Area, many of them taking their dogs for a walk. The area along the Columbia River below the Tarpiscan Road has been especially popular this month.



*A local resident takes his new 10-week-old Brittany spaniel puppy for a walk on the Colockum Wildlife Area*



**No Target Shooting:** Colockum staff members recently posted a popular parking area on the Colockum Wildlife Area as closed to target shooting. This site is used daily by hikers and is an unsafe location for dispersed target shooting.



**New “No Target Shooting” sign posted at the Tarpiscan Road parking lot – Colockum Wildlife Area**

**Nontoxic Dye in Mattoon Lake:** Region 3 Access Area Manager Garcia received a report of what seemed to be chemical in the water at Mattoon Lake, after further review a dye pack was discovered floating in the water. Ecology spill team was notified of the situation and informed WDFW that it was a nontoxic dye pack easily purchased off Amazon.



***Green colored water and dye pack at Mattoon Lake***

**Vandalism:** Region 3 Access Area Natural Resources Worker Barbosa reported graffiti covering a CXT at Tim's Pond. The graffiti was painted over, and vandalized signs were replaced.



*Graffiti at Tim's Pond Water Access Site*



*Tim's Pond after graffiti removal*

**Primitive Boat Ramp Repairs:** Region 3 Access Area staff members made repairs to the primitive boat ramp at the Teanaway Junction and entrance to Thorp Access, utilizing the skid steer from the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area. Warmer weather and ponds getting planted with trout has greatly increased the number of visitors to our Access sites.



*Primitive boat ramp at Teanaway Junction before repair*



*Region 3 Access Area staff members repairing Teanaway Junction primitive boat ramp*



*Teanaway Junction primitive boat ramp after being repaired*

### **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand conducted deer hazing operations at multiple winter wheat fields in the Kahlotus area. A strong wintery storm dropped 1-2 feet of snow with cold temperatures. Several master hunters and youth permit holders were deployed to assist landowners with hazing and some lethal take.



*Kahlotus Mule Deer*

**Elk Observations:** District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel and Technician Leuck patrolled the Thorp, Kittitas, Badger Pocket, and Lauderdale areas for elk activity. Technician Leuck assisted several hay growers in moving elk away from fields.

Conflict Technician Leuck patrolled the Wenas Valley several days to check for elk in areas near the burned elk fences. No significant elk numbers were observed, and no calls were received from any landowners in the Wenas area this period.

Conflict Specialist Wetzel checked a camera placed at the cattle guard on Cowiche Mill Road near the Strand Orchard. Elk were seen using the edge of the cattle guard to walk across the grate. A side plank was placed to cover the walking surface of the cattle guard edge. Subsequent footage showed the elk walking down the middle of the grate with little difficulty.



*Side plank used to keep elk from using the side of the cattle guard to cross; Elk eventually switched to walking down the center of the grate*

**Cougar Incidents:** Multiple cougar calls were reported to Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel this period. The calls were from the same areas where previous cougar calls originated due to depredations of pets or livestock. In a new incident, a cougar killed two goats in five days at a location in Glead. Conflict Specialist Wetzel assisted Officer Miller and Yakama Nation Tribal Police to remove the cougar using dogs.

Oak Creek Wildlife Area (WLA) staff members repaired an additional cougar trap for the Enforcement program. Oak Creek Manager Mackey forwarded a report of a cougar depredation on domestic goats near the town of Glead along the Naches River.

**Kahlotus and Paterson Deer:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to conduct deer hazing operations at multiple winter wheat fields in the Kahlotus area and wine grape vineyards near Paterson. Mild weather conditions have deer finding other sources of forage and beginning their spring migration north of the Snake River.



*A Flock of Turkeys near the Snake River*

**Rattlesnake Hills Expiring Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements:** District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand met with landowners with expiring agreements to get signatures and coordinate hazing strategies and hunting opportunities for the upcoming year.

**Mysterious Pig Shows Up on Private Lands:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett worked with landowners in Franklin county to find the owner of a large pig seen on land enrolled in WDFW's hunting access program. The report of the pig came from a worker at the Lower Monumental Dam who saw the pig as they drove to work. According to the worker the pig was not shy and would let people get close enough to pet it. After contacting many landowners in the area, the owner of the pig was finally reached, and the pig was safely returned to its home.

**More Elk Activity:** District 8 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wetzel checked the North Riggs elk fence and found no breaks, cuts, or wired-open return gates. One section of wing fence needed a quick repair. Many elk had been in the area, but no reported issues with elk on the wrong side of the fence yet this year.

Conflict Specialist Wetzel was contacted by two hay growers in the Badger Pocket about elk in their fields. Each was concerned about damage to gated pipe and wanted to know if compensation could be claimed for the damage. Most of the fields are still dormant but elk are starting to use the fields more.

Conflict Specialist Wetzel observed several individuals illegally accessing the Yakima Training Center (YTC) from Badger Pocket to collect shed antlers and reported it to Enforcement.

**Residential Deer Feeding:** Conflict Specialist Wetzel was called by an Ellensburg resident on Water Street with a deer complaint. Deer are fed in that area and are damaging lawns and shrubs.



*A deer group at home inside Ellensburg city limits*

#### 4) Conserving Natural Landscapes

Oak Creek WLA Forester Hartmann continued cruise plots on Windy Point Forest Restoration. Forester Hartmann also assisted with winter elk feeding operations at Cowiche.



*Left: Oak Creek Headquarters after the mid-February snowstorm*

*Right: Tools of the trade for timber cruising. The Spiegel Relaskop is used to identify trees to be counted and measured at a sample point. Additionally, it can be used to measure tree height and diameter at different heights. The laser rangefinder is used to rapidly assess tree height and distances but cannot always be used due to obstacles*

**Greenstrip Pilot Project Funds:** Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett continued working with South Yakima Conservation District (SYCD) to find supplemental funding for the final greenstrip pilot project. Originally SYCD thought they could only fund 50% of the project with their implementation funds, however, after further conversations they decided to use funds from the Volunteer Stewardship Program (VSP) which does not require any match funding. WDFW will still provide the seed and the materials for a temporary electric fence while the landowner will use his own equipment to seed the project in fall of 2021. These VSP funds will be brought to the Yakima County VSP meeting on March 23.

**Prescribed Burns:** Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Noel Ferguson worked with BPA Environmental Protection Specialist, Mandy Hope, to secure clearance for conducting prescribed burns in the Brady Wetland, Office Pond, Haystack Pond, Bounds Pond, Horseshoe Lake, and the south shore of Giffin Lake at the Sunnyside Unit. The purpose of the burns is to clear out thick stands of dried out cattail debris in order to open those areas up for regular management activities including mowing and spraying new growth. The areas will provide improved habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds in addition to increasing recreational opportunities.



Ferguson also worked with the Yakima County Fire District 5 to arrange for availability of firefighters and equipment for the burns. The firefighters use the burning activities as training for their yearly wildland firefighting training credit requirements. Ferguson additionally secured a permit from the Yakima County Clean Air Agency to burn approximately 80 acres of wetlands/fields within the Sunnyside Unit between March 10 and April 10.

On Wednesday, March 10, eight firefighters from Yakima County Fire District 5, along with two firefighters the West Benton fire district came out to the Sunnyside Unit and burned the west and south borders of Giffin Lake, the island on Giffin Lake, and the Office Pond area. A total of approximately 20 acres of overgrown cattail growth was burned that day. The fire crew plans to return on March 27 to continue burning in Brady, Haystack Pond, and Horseshoe Lake.



*South shore of Giffin Lake before burning*



*Giffin Lake shore during burning (fire was extinguished before reaching powerlines)*



*Giffin Lake island during burning*

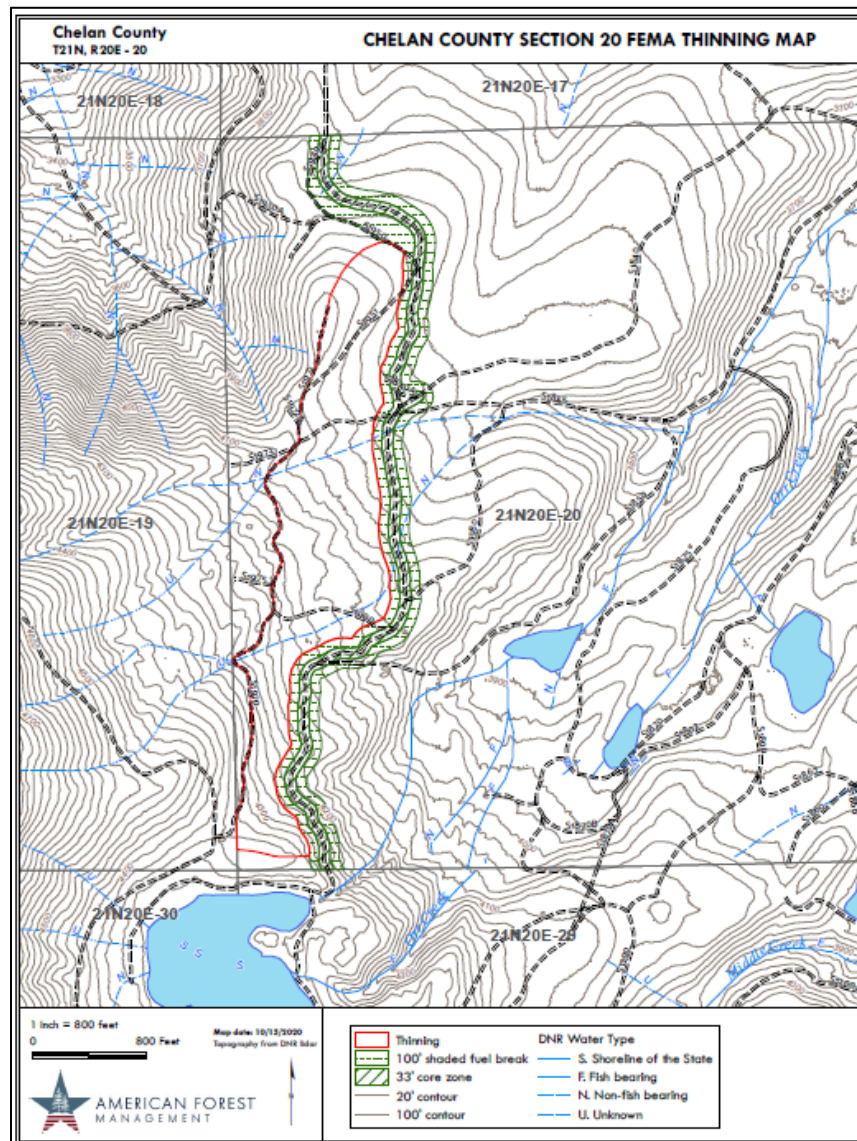


*South shore Giffin Lake post-burning*



*Office Pond post-burning*

**Fuel Break:** Colockum Wildlife Area staff members have been coordinating with Chelan County Natural Resources Department to establish a shaded fuel break along the Upper Wheeler Ridge Road, as well as thin timber to the west of the road. Chelan County was successful in getting a FEMA grant to do this work. This ridgeline separates the Stemilt and Squilchuck basins and may provide a strategic location to create a fuel break in the event of a wildfire. Both drainages contain dense, overstocked timber stands and encroaching housing development. The Upper Wheeler Ridge Road is a county road, with the adjacent property being WDFW. In the map below, the green hatched area is the fuel break along the Upper Wheeler Ridge Road, and the area outlined in red is the area proposed to timber treatment and thinning.



*Map of proposed wildfire fuel break and timber thinning along the Upper Wheeler Ridge Road, Colockum Wildlife Area*

## 5) Providing Education and Outreach

**Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Story Map:** Assistant Manager Ferguson helped Environmental Planner Patricia Jateczak and Program Specialist Matthew Trendera with edits, contributions, and photos for the WDFW website “story map” feature on the history, operations, and recreation opportunities at the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area. Retired Sunnyside Game Range enforcement officer Jesse Palacios donated photos and stories for the story map project as well.

**Waterbirds and Wetlands Virtual Event:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra assisted WDFW Public Relations staff members and partners in broadcasting a live virtual event on Waterbirds and Wetlands. Fidorra was present at McNary NWR which was one of three locations statewide where speakers discussed species ecology, conservation, and habitats important to winter waterbirds and viewing opportunities. The program gained over 300 live viewers on a Saturday morning and hundreds more on Facebook stream. A recording is on the WDFW YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NY4gYzuZazU&feature=youtu.be>



*Fidorra discusses waterfowl ecology live from a bird-less frozen pond*

**Regional Burrowing Owl Partners Meeting:** District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra organized and conducted a pre-season meeting with partners from Washington and Oregon involved with Artificial Burrows for Burrowing Owls. The group discussed methods, future efforts, and current needs for each program with the goal of providing cross-program assistance and information. Partners are currently conducting site maintenance prior to the April owl breeding season.

**Shed Hunting:** L.T. Murray WLA Manager Babik is responding to dozens of calls regarding shed hunting prospects and violations on the Quilomene, Whiskey Dick, and L.T. Murray areas. One group of shed hunters got stuck on Jacknife Ridge Road in their Honda Pilot and were extracted by a tow truck.

**Birding Video Interview:** Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Noel Ferguson conducted a short video interview with Yakima Audubon Society chapter board member Kerry Turley on highlights of birding at the Sunnyside Wildlife Area. Habitat Biologist Scott Downes helped arrange this meeting. The video will be displayed on the new Story Map feature about the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area on the WDFW website.

## **6) Conducting Business Operations and Policy**

**Building Clean-up:** Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resources Technician Wascisin are in the last phase of organizing and cleaning the former Sunnyside field office and shop building. The Saks old equipment, records, tools, and parts are now packed in boxes awaiting removal. The buildings are now much cleaner and usable. The only remaining items from the former lessee and Assistant Manager are three combines and a few miscellaneous implements.

**Clearing Tree Obstructions:** Colockum staff members spent time clearing trees that blew down in a recent windstorm and blocked roads.



*Colockum Wildlife Area Assistant Manager John Hagan clears a downed tree from roadway – Colockum Wildlife Area*

## 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 4**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### 1) **Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Elk Captures:** Wildlife Conflict staff members and Wildlife Biologists for District 14 (Skagit and Whatcom Counties) continued with efforts to capture and collar cow elk in Skagit Valley. The effort will aid in a better understanding of how elk use agricultural areas and adjacent upland forests. Currently, seven cow elk have been fitted with satellite GPS collars and released unharmed.

**White-nose Syndrome in Bats:** District 12 trapped bats at a location where there has been major die-off and near 100% white-nose in bats observed (in Yuma and Little Brown bats) in past survey, capture, and monitoring efforts. Upon arrival, bats were crawling outside known roosts midday in sunny, mid-50-degree weather (first warmer day of year). Bats were showing what appeared to be stress where no source of stress was apparent to us. No known disturbance had occurred at that time and the site is relatively inaccessible to public. Further, this is the same exact behavior noted in past at this time of year (late winter-early spring emergence) since white-nose syndrome (WNS) became prominent in the local area and local known colonies. Last season (2019-2020 winter) we had many dead or sick bats from this site at this time of year, along with reports of bats in local area showing pretty regular with long-bouts of daytime activity – in flight or crawling around. This season, there has been similar widespread reports of sustained daytime flight in bats (not a disturbance flight – but rather bats flying for extended periods in foraging type patterns and in some cases over multiple days noted at same site). This is seen not only in King County, but now in many areas in Washington. The crew of three captured bats by hand, examined for WNS status, demographic factors recorded, and then Biologist Anderson transported a selection of these bats up to one of the bat rehabbers in the state for trial WNS treatment. Dead bats were removed from structures and live bats were placed back by hand. Banding was desired for bats in these regular winter/spring roosts, but equipment issues kept that from progressing. Future efforts will involve banding to assist in monitoring mortality at roosts and annual fidelity. Upon check of all roosts three days later, there were live bats in structures at one less than the number replaced upon trapping. No dead bats found, and none seen crawling around during the day outside in a stressed manner. This effort could not have been done without the assistance of White-nose Syndrome Coordinator Biologist Abby Tobin and Seattle Public Utilities Wildlife Biologist Alex May. Big thanks to them for their expertise and extra hands! More information on WNS from WDFW can be found [HERE](#).



*A White-nose Syndrome positive bat during capture and after in “hospital”. This bat displayed necrotic holes in wings, a portion of ear showing necrosis, and other typical WNS damage. Photo of wing shows a positive field test for the fungus that causes white-nose syndrome*

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Ebey Unit Entrance Upgrades:** Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm and related staff members provided edits and comments for the Habitat Mitigation Plan required for the parking lot access improvement project scheduled for this summer. The project will provide a new gravel parking lot, walk-in boat launch, viewing shelter, and signboards. These improvements will provide increased recreational opportunities on the Ebey Unit.

## **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

Nothing for this installment.

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

**Wiley Slough Water Data:** Projects Coordinator Brokaw and Habitat Planner Jenny Baker visited the Wiley Slough restoration area and downloaded data from a series of water level loggers around the site. The loggers record water elevations, salinity, and temperature every 15 minutes throughout the year which helps WDFW understand how ground and surface water drainage is working in the area.



*Project Coordinator Brokaw downloading water level data at Wiley Slough*



*While downloading water data at Wiley Slough, Project Coordinator Brokaw observed waterbirds foraging in the restoration area as the tide came in while several bird watchers looked on*



## 5) Providing Education and Outreach

**Leque Island Presentation and Fish Monitoring:** Project Coordinator Brokaw presented the story of Leque Island restoration to approximately 100 Skagit Audubon members at their monthly meeting. The morning of the presentation, Skagit River Systems Cooperative (SRSC) collected fish data on the site and captured juvenile salmon using the restoration area.



*A juvenile Chinook and chum salmon captured in the Leque Island restoration area (SRSC)*



*A net of 40 chum and 25 Chinook salmon captured at Leque Island (SRSC)*

## 6) Conducted Business Operations and Policy

**Agricultural Lease Renewals:** Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm completed the bid process for Ebey Island and Crescent Lake ag lease renewals. Two farmers were selected, and the Draft ag lease documents are circulating WDFW staff members for review and signatures. The three ag leases total 330 acres of cropland up for lease.

**Parking Lot Upgrade:** Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Brian Boehm reports a new robust entrance gate was installed by CAMP this past month. Funding from the Ecology Cleanup Fund was used to cover the fabrication and installation costs. The gate was installed at the west parking lot.



*New secured gate being installer at Ebey West parking lot by CAMP*

## 7) Other

Nothing for this installment.

## **REGION 5**

### *HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:*

#### **1) Managing Wildlife Populations**

**Bat Emergence Survey:** Biologists Stephens and Holman conducted a bat emergence count at a residence in Castle Rock that has bats in an attic space. The attic is not accessible, so they were unable to confirm if the bats heard by the homeowners were present prior to the survey. Stephens and Holman set-up at sunset to count the bats as they exited the structure. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate, and the rain set in after three days of clear skies. No bats were observed.

**Bat Box Install at Mineral Lake:** Biologist Stephens with Cowlitz Wildlife Area staff members Steveson, Vanderlip, and Wallace erected a maternity bat house at the Mineral Lake Access Site. The house is sufficient to house up to 400 bats depending on the species. A huge thanks to Watchable Wildlife Coordinator Alex Biswas for purchasing materials and finding a volunteer to construct the bat boxes, to volunteer Bob Davies for constructing the boxes, and to Assistant Manager Steveson for planning and organizing the effort to get the bat house secured to posts 20 feet above ground.



*Maternity Bat House at Mineral Lake*

**March Elk Count on Mudflow:** Biologist Stephens conducted an elk count on the Mudflow unit of the Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area. A total of 255 elk were observed during the survey which is a high count for the season. They were classified as 122 cows, 27 calves, and 106 bulls.



*Mount Saint Helens and the Mudflow Unit of the Wildlife Area*

**East Columbia Gorge Mule Deer Movement Study:** In 2019, WDFW received funding from the U.S. Department of Interior in association with Secretarial Order 3362 - Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors, to begin a 4-year movement and migration study of mule deer in the East Cascades Mule Deer Management Zone in southcentral Washington State. To better understand seasonal movement patterns of mule deer in Klickitat County, WDFW staff members from Districts 9 and 10 have spent the last two months capturing and collaring 81 adult mule deer does throughout the county. The majority of the study deer were captured and collared by an experienced aerial net gun capture crew contracted by WDFW specifically for this study, and one additional doe was captured by staff members on the ground using a hanging net gun. The high-resolution data from these collars will improve our understanding of mule deer migration timing and potential movement barriers. This will help facilitate improved management of mule deer populations in this area by better enabling WDFW to coordinate land management and conservation actions that will benefit mule deer. When a collared deer dies, staff members will try to respond to its last known location as soon as possible to try and determine the cause of death. A huge THANK YOU to all of the staff members that assisted with captures and to Hi Line Helicopters for completing the captures safely. We look forward to following our deer for the next four years!



*Capture helicopter lands to refuel in between capture hops*



*Hanging net gun over a bait pile of apples and alfalfa (primary means of ground capture efforts)*



*Monitoring the hanging net gun from afar using night vision*



*Deer captured under the hanging net gun immediately after the net was deployed*

## **2) Providing Recreation Opportunities**

**Watchable Lower Columbia River Wildlife:** Recent field visits to the Lower Columbia River by Biologist Holman have revealed plenty of watchable wildlife opportunities. The always rich area has been made even more interesting with the arrival of a strong smelt (eulachon) run, spring green-up, and northward migration of Pacific flyway waterfowl. Species taking advantage of the abundant smelt include very strong numbers of bald eagles and gulls, harbor seals and California sea lions, and even a documented grey whale that reached areas as far upstream as Ridgefield. Species taking advantage of spring green-up include elk, black-tailed and Columbian white-tailed deer, as well as nutria and geese. Spring migrating waterfowl have been highlighted by strong numbers of cackling Canada geese. Good routes for a driving tour include Puget Island, the JBH deer refuge, State Route 4, Oneida Road, Willow Grove, Altoona Road, and Loop Road.

## **3) Providing Conflict Prevention and Education**

**Youth Damage Hunt:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen deployed and escorted a youth hunter from the Region 5 Youth Elk Damage Pool on an agricultural damage hunt in Klickitat County over the weekend. The youth hunter successfully harvested a cow elk on the first morning of the hunt. This was the young hunter's first elk harvest!



*Happy youth hunter on a cold, but beautiful, morning!*

**Injured Bald Eagle:** After receiving a call from a motorist who observed an injured bald eagle on the side of Highway 14 near Alderdale in east Klickitat County, Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen responded to the scene and attempted to capture the eagle. The eagle’s wing was injured but it could still hop extremely well. After a lengthy pursuit through the sagebrush, Jacobsen was able to corner the eagle. A passing motorcyclist stopped to assist in the capture. The eagle was successfully captured and transported to Rowena Wildlife Clinic in Oregon. Unfortunately, the eagle’s wing was severely broken – likely from being struck by a vehicle – and the eagle was beyond recovery. The eagle was euthanized at the clinic and the carcass will be sent to the USFWS Nation Eagle Repository in Colorado. The purpose of this repository is to “receive, evaluate, store, and distribute dead bald and golden eagles, parts, and feathers to Native Americans who are enrolled members of federally recognized tribes through the United States,” as well as to “develop and provide educational programs regarding wildlife trade, wildlife laws, endangered species, raptors, and the Native American eagle feather program.”

**Elk Damage to Hay Fields:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen deployed a Region 5 Damage Pool Master Hunter to a hay field in eastern Skamania County where elk have been camping out daily. The landowner regularly attempts to chase the elk out of her field with her vehicle, but the elk just run laps around the field.

**Elk Damage to Wheat and Alfalfa:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen met with several neighboring landowners in east Klickitat County regarding a herd of 50+ elk that have been causing damage to winter wheat and new alfalfa growth. Damage Prevention Cooperative Agreements were drafted up for the landowners. Hazing measures, public hunting, the damage claim process, and damage prevention permits were all discussed.



*Field of winter wheat where elk damage is occurring*

**Deer Reportedly Attacked by Cougar:** Region 5 Customer Service was contacted by a concerned member of the public regarding a deer that was “scratched by a cougar” in Clark County. A group of citizens was concerned about the possible presence of a cougar in the area. After examining photographs of the “scratched deer” submitted by the public, Wildlife Conflict Specialist Jacobsen was able to determine that the “scratches” were actually bare patches of skin where the deer was likely suffering from Hair Loss Syndrome, caused by a non-native louse species (<https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/hair-loss>).



*Deer with Hair Loss Syndrome in Clark County*

**Elk Damage:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey continued to address spring elk damage concerns. Many landowners were contacted to assess current needs. Damage pool hunters were also deployed to address conflict issues. Two hunters were successful in harvesting an elk over the last two weeks.

**Injured Deer 1:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey responded to reports of an injured deer in a yard that was no longer mobile. Upon arrival to the scene, Aubrey found a deer that could no longer move or hold its head up. Unfortunately, the deer was euthanized on site due to injuries.



**Sick Deer:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey spoke to an individual concerned about the health of a deer that frequented their property. It was a young deer that appeared to be skinny. The individual was concerned it was no longer with an adult deer. Deer biology was discussed, as well as deer body condition near the end of winter. The reporting party (RP) was going to keep an eye on the deer and let WDFW know if its health deteriorated further.

**Injured Deer 2:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey responded to a report of an injured deer along the Columbia River. There were many people in the area, but no deer was located, and no additional reports were made.

**Injured Hawk:** Wildlife Conflict Specialist Aubrey received a report of an injured hawk from a local rehabber. The original reporting party was contacted and reported that the hawk was still grounded on their property. Aubrey arrived and was able to capture the hawk and transport it to the rehabber.

#### **4) Conserving Natural Landscapes**

##### **Klickitat Wildlife Area - Fence and Water Trough Inspection and Repair on Soda Springs**

**Unit:** Klickitat Wildlife Area Manager VanLeuven and Biologist Cochran began inspecting and repairing property line fences along the Grayback and Sheep Canyon Roads. They were surprised to find that there were not many fallen trees on the fences, and that in general the fences were in good condition. Cochran spent much of the week checking and fixing fences, completing approximately 6 miles of fence lines. In addition, VanLeuven and Cochran checked two water troughs along the Sheep Canyon Road and made repairs to an overflow pipe that was handling high water volumes.

**Landowner Site Visit in Klickitat County:** Private Lands Biologist Ferris visited private lands in eastern Klickitat county to observe site conditions and wildlife habitat for a potential habitat restoration project or enrollment potential for other habitat programs. Ferris spent time walking many acres of the land while engaging with the landowner about their habitat and hunting desires for their land as well as their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrolled land designed to stabilize soil, decrease erosion, and provide wildlife habitat on converted croplands.



*Landowner and sage shrubs on his property and vegetation damage by mice*



*Landowner on his Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrolled land*

**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 6**

Nothing for this installment.