

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

April 1 to 15, 2022

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Tucannon Bighorn Sheep: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman continued to conduct weekly observations of the Tucannon bighorn sheep herd.

Prairie Grouse Lek Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe are conducting annual sage and sharp-tailed grouse lek surveys and searches. There is still one active sage grouse lek in District 2, but only two males were observed this year. Currently only two sharp-tailed grouse leks have males dancing, but the season is just getting started so hopefully a couple of more active leks will be found.



Ungrazed SAFE field on the left of the fence (where a sharp-tailed grouse was observed dancing last year) versus grazed field on the right



Sunrise looking over the lone sage grouse lek in Lincoln County

Washington Ground Squirrels Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe wrapped up the first set of surveys of the 18 squirrel grid cells in District 2. Squirrels were only heard or seen in three of the grid cells. Each grid cell is 400m X 400m and has 10 transects spaced 40m apart running north to south or east to west. Transects are walked until at least one squirrel is heard/seen or an active burrow is detected. If no squirrels are detected the grid cell is surveyed once more. These surveys are conducted every five years.



Washington ground squirrel hiding under a sagebrush in one of District 2 survey grids

Raptor and Raven Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe continue running the annual raven and raptor surveys around Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. A few rough-legged hawks are still hanging around the area.



Rough-legged hawk perched on powerline insulator



American badger in den alongside the road on the raven/raptor survey route

Providing Recreation Opportunities

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area: Natural Resource Worker Jensen checked the lakes daily and kept the fish screens clear of debris. He also cleaned up trash around the lakes and worked on clearing brush along the access road between Deer Lake and Watson Lake.

Recreation and Conservation Office Grants: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman continued working on the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Grant proposal for purchase of a parcel of land adjacent to the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area. She also continued working on the RCO grant application for the project on the Asotin Creek Unit of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area.

Big Game Hunting Pamphlet: Biologists Atamian and Lowe reviewed the draft pamphlet and submitted correction for errors and suggested edits to the pamphlet editors.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Range Rider Coordination: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett continued season planning with potential range riders on possible assignments and contract changes. This included individual and group meetings associated with stakeholders.

Conflict Prevention: Wildlife Control Specialist Samsill retrieved several trail cameras in the Togo wolf pack territory. Samsill assembled a list of current and prospective range riders for the 2022 grazing season. He emailed all range riders the 2022 Request for Qualifications (RFQ) contract and questionnaire. Samsill relayed a report of a wolf cluster in a cattle pasture to a producer that grazes cattle in the Togo pack territory. In response, the producer checked his cattle in the pasture and identified a deer killed by wolves near his cattle. The producer decided to move all his cattle in the pasture to pasture on the other side of the Kettle River.

Producer Check-ins: Wildlife Control Specialist Kolb conducted numerous pre-grazing check-ins with producers throughout the week. Information gathered included estimated number of livestock expected to be turned out, date of turn out, stated desire for data sharing or cost sharing programs, and proactive non-lethal deterrent measures to be taken. Kolb spoke with a producer who has a pending livestock damage claim. The producer is weighing their options on an appeal based off the initial offer. Kolb encouraged the producer to reach out to the wildlife conflict Head Quarters section if they have any questions.

Pre-grazing Season Check-ins: Wildlife Control Specialist Wade conducted multiple pre-seasons grazing check-ins with producers who will be grazing in known wolf territories. Most producers are reporting that they will be turning out in early May with a few producers planning to turn out in mid-April. Wade shared current wolf activity information with all producers.

United States Forest Service Check-in: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade checked in with United States Forest Service (USFS) Range Manager Druffel to share information and talk about summer grazing plans on USFS Allotments. Range Manager Druffel supplied Wade with current allotment schedules.

Wolf Non-Lethal Deterrents: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb spoke with a Walla Walla County producer who wants to implement non-lethal deterrents on their pasture this grazing season. Although not in a wolf core use area, and the pasture area being relatively small, the producer wants to be proactive as possible. Kolb will provide the producer with some deterrent tools to implement.

Target Shooting: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife officer Slusher in providing information to reference regarding target shooting on Feel Free to Hunt properties as there have been several points of contacts made by both on Feel Free to Hunt access sites where the individuals thought it was okay for them to target shoot.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Recreation and Conservation Office Grant: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman continued working with Tri-State Steelheaders and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation on a Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Grant proposal for a restoration project on the Swegle Unit of the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area.

Lick Creek Fire Restoration Work: Several hundred acres of lower Charley Creek and lower Dry Gulch burned in the Lick Creek Fire were seeded by helicopter to a blend of native grasses and sagebrush by Leading Edge Aviation. Additionally, several hundred acres were sprayed for noxious weeds in the vicinity of Warner Gulch and the breaks of the south fork of Asotin Creek. Yellow star thistle and scotch thistle were the main targets.

Spring Farming Activities: Technician Wynn has been preparing fields with glyphosate herbicide and seeding spring crops. Two fields were seeded to spring wheat along Joseph Creek. Wynn moved our new 6130R tractor to Smoothing Iron ridge and began spraying. Seeding fields to spring wheat and spring oats to take place sometime near the end of April.



Natural Resource Technician Wynn and our brand-new John Deere 6130R tractor loaded up and heading to Smoothing Iron Ridge for spring work

Spring Livestock Turnout: Livestock were recently turned out on permitted grazing areas on east half of the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area. The east half permit areas begin April 1 of each year while the west half begins May 15 of each year.

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area 2022 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Work Party: Wildlife Area Manager Dice along with wildlife area staff members have been making preparations for a volunteer work party on the weekend of April 30 with volunteers from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). Planned activities include repairing several guzzlers burned in the 2021 Lick Creek Fire. One of the guzzlers is a 2000-gallon big game unit that needs a collection apron and fence replaced. Materials and supplies were moved to Smoothing Iron by staff members. A film crew from RMEF headquarters is planning on attending to document the volunteer efforts. At last count, 22 volunteer members were planning on attending. Most will be staying in their own campers near our buildings. Other volunteer activities include tearing out burned fences, maintenance of springs and troughs, and placing salt blocks out for elk.

Providing Education and Outreach

Post-graduate Wolf Livestock Research Project: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb assisted a University of Idaho post-graduate researcher contact area livestock producers for an on-going research project on the impacts of wolves on their livestock operations.

Inland Northwest Wildlife Council Presentation: Private Lands Biologist Gaston recorded a presentation for the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council (INWC) Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) subgroup. The presentation focused on how to find hunting access properties enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program and how to utilize the resources on the WDFW webpage, such as the Hunt by Reservation Only program.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Cleanup and Weed Control at 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area staff members converged at the Bucannon place on the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area on April 6 to cleanup scrap cattle panels, pickup old baling twine, burn piles, and spray rampant scotch thistle patches. This has been a long time coming. Hopefully our efforts will keep the weeds suppressed for the season.



Wildlife Area staff member vehicles at the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area



Baling twine left lying on the ground near a hayshed on the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area



Natural Resource technician Meisner transferring scrap livestock panels from a trailer into our white truck for a final trip to recycling

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Washington Ground Squirrel Surveys: District 4 Wildlife Biologist Fidorra worked with volunteers and Wildlife Technician Aurthur on the fixed-plot squirrel survey for Washington Ground Squirrels (WAGS). The survey is to assess the status and trend of WAGS across the Washington Range at survey sites repeated every 5 years. Initial impressions are that squirrel occupancy appears to be lower than 2017 but more surveys remain to be done though the end of May.

Cougar Sealing: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand sealed a cougar that was harvested recently in GMU 145 (Mayview). Biological samples were collected, and harvest information was inputted into Survey123.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Wildlife Viewing: On the last weekend in March, members of the Yakima Valley and Tri-Cities Chapters of the Audubon Society came out to the Sunnyside Unit of the Sunnyside Wildlife Area for a spring birding trip. Many species of shorebirds and waterfowl were observed by the birders, with highlights including observations of Virginia rails, nesting bald eagles, and great horned owls.



Audubon members near Giffin Lake

Silver Dollar Land Hunters Permits: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand and Region 3 Private Lands Biologist Hulett met with a landowner of the Silver Dollar Land Hunters Permits to discuss hunting success, permit allocations, and reporting.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Rattlesnake Hills Elk Monitoring: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continues to monitor elk activity near the Hanford National Monument. Over 12 inches of fresh wet snow on Rattlesnake Mountain made access to observation locations difficult.

Kennewick Coyote Complaint: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a complaint from a Kennewick area homeowner who called to report that a coyote had attacked his small pet dog. No reportable injuries had occurred, and the coyote left the area after being chased by the landowner. Education on coyote behavior, lethal and non-lethal control techniques, and reference to “Living with Wildlife” was discussed.

Prosser Calf Losses: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand met with a cattle rancher in the Prosser area concerning the loss of two of his calves recently. One of the calves had been almost completely consumed by scavengers, so cause of death could not be determined. The second death was believed to be from difficulty during birthing.

Horse Heaven Hills Deer: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a new deer damage complaint from a wheat producer in the Horse Heaven Hills. The landowner reports that over 100 deer have been observed in his crops over the winter and is looking for possible hazing solutions. A field tour of the property is planned for next week.

Kahlotus Deer Success: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand met with a large wheat grower from the Kahlotus area concerning past deer damage. The landowner reported that they will not be filing a damage claim this year and was appreciative of our efforts to minimize damage impacts to his crops, especially with hunting permits and youth hunters.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Hoover Acquisition: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes participated in a meeting regarding the water rights associated with the Hoover Acquisition. The anticipated date for the sale to close is in June 2022. The water rights have been an ongoing process to figure out with this new acquisition. WDFW is working with the county on exploring options for putting the water rights and will be obtaining from the sale into North Wenas Creek, which will benefit habitat. A property inspection with the appraiser will be happening next week. Everything is still moving along and is on track for the sale to go through.

Wetland Activity: Sunnyside Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin are beginning to draw down the water in the wetlands on the Sunnyside Unit in preparation for dry-season management activities.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Wenas Fencing Removal, Maintenance, and New Equipment: The Wenas Wildlife Area staff members have been working on multiple fencing projects. Technician Stoltenow, Technician Rodriguez, and Biologist Daling prepared sections of barbed wire fencing to be rolled up and removed near Mellerguard. This old stock fence has been burnt and was falling apart. The area is being cleaned up to prevent wildlife from getting caught in it. Additionally, the team has been working on building a mile of elk fence on the northeast end of Cleman Mountain. Technician Rodriguez and Technician Stoltenow attached fencing hangers to the fence poles on Cleman to support new elk fence. Lastly, Assistant Manager Taylor has been designing a new mechanical wire unroller and stretcher for elk fence that attaches to a compact loader. Taylor is one very innovative guy. Taylor and Rodriguez began building the wire unroller and stretcher.

Access Site Cleanup: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Natural Resources Technician Wascisin recently cleaned up and installed new signs on the kiosk at the Vance Ferry Unit parking lot.



New signs posted and litter picked up at Vance Ferry Unit

Other

Security Added: The installation of the alarm system at the Sunnyside Wildlife Area HQ Unit was completed recently with the installation of security cameras. The system is now fully functional and is monitored by Stanley security to notify law enforcement of alarm triggering events.

Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resources Technician Wascisin picked up the new entrance gate that was fabricated and powder-coated by SMK Tri-Cities. The gate is a heavy-duty steel structure weighing over 2,000 pounds and will have a frame that is buried underground in concrete to support the swinging gate. Installation of the gate will begin in the next couple of weeks.



New gate loaded for transport to Sunnyside HQ



Support frame and swinging gate assembly at Sunnyside Headquarters