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Department of
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WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 17 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Pacific and Grays Harbor counties

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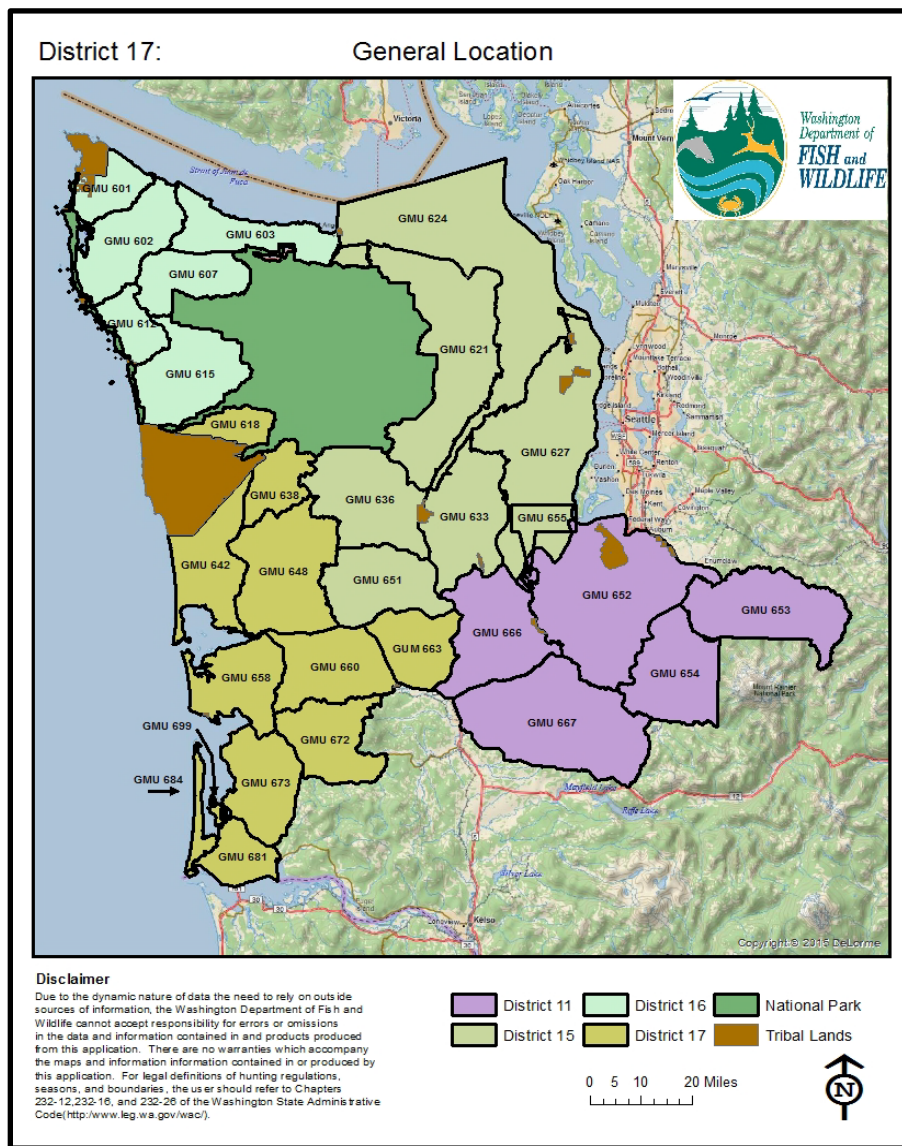
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DISTRICT 17 GENERAL OVERVIEW

District 17 includes all of Pacific and Grays Harbor counties and is one of four management districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that makes up Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) coastal region, commonly referred to as Region 6. The northern portion of District 17 (north of Highway 12) includes the southwestern portion of the Olympic Mountains, while the southern part of the district is situated in the Willapa Hills.

District 17 is in southwest Washington and consists of 12 Game Management Units (GMUs): 638 (Quinault Ridge), 648 (Wynoochee), 660 (Minot Peak), 672 (Fall River), 681 (Bear River), 699 (Long Island), 618 (Matheny), 642 (Copalis), 658 (North River), 663 (Capital Peak), 673 (Williams Creek), 684 (Long Beach).



Four administrative districts and their associated GMUs within WDFW Region 6

The landscape in District 17 is dominated by intensively managed industrial forest land characterized by second and third-growth forests. These lands are primarily dedicated to producing conifers such as Douglas fir, western hemlock, and occasionally cedar. Some tree stands focus production on red alder. Other habitats in the district range from sub-alpine habitat in areas adjacent to Olympic National Park to coastal wetlands along the outer coast.

District 17 is best known for elk hunting opportunities in the Willapa Hills and waterfowl hunting opportunities around Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and in the Chehalis and Willapa river valleys. High-quality hunting opportunities exist for other game species, including black-tailed deer, black bears, and forest grouse. The following table shows the estimated harvest for the three most popular big game species in District 17 during the 2017-2022 seasons. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

	Harvest year					
Species	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Elk	Total = 626 Bull = 506 Cow = 130	768	766	748	856	733
Deer	Total = 1,310 Buck = 1,142 Doe = 168	1562	1,476	1,674	1,542	1,258
Bear	190	142	139	202	123	109

Table 1. Total hunter harvest for selected game species during 2022 and previous five years in District 17.

ELK

SUMMARY

Success rates: Range widely depending on weapon type, GMU, and land access.

Recent trends: Decrease in harvest and hunter effort. Decline in modern firearm elk hunters.

GMUs with highest elk harvest in rank order: GMU 673, 658, 660, 681.

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

The subspecies of elk in District 17 are Roosevelt elk. Unlike other areas in Western Washington, Rocky Mountain elk were never introduced into the area, and Roosevelt-Rocky Mountain elk hybrids do not occur. Washington has ten distinct elk herds. A portion of two elk herds occur in District 17:

- Olympic elk herd (GMUs 618, 638, 642, and 648)
- Willapa Hills elk herd (GMUs 658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, and 699).

Elk hunting in District 17 varies from marginal to excellent depending on the GMU. GMUs associated with the Willapa Hills elk herd area, specifically GMUs 658, 672, 673, and 681 offer the greatest harvest opportunities.

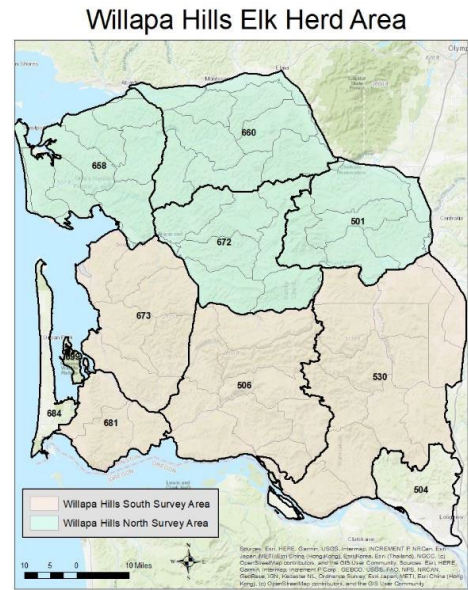
WDFW manages elk at the herd level and sets regulations at the GMU level. In general, each herd occupies several GMUs that collectively define the range of a population that minimizes interchange with adjacent elk populations.

WDFW manages District 17 with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing elk herds. To meet that goal, WDFW's objective is to maintain herds at a minimum ratio of 15 bulls to 100 cows in the pre-hunting season population and a minimum of 12 bulls to 100 cows in the post-season population. Portions of the district (such as GMU 684) must balance overall herd objectives with the equally important mission to minimize human-wildlife conflicts. Elk can cause severe impacts to commercial crops such as hay or cranberries.

WDFW doesn't use formal population size estimates to monitor elk populations across the entire district. Instead, WDFW uses harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort to supplement formal indices or estimates. This approach has limitations for monitoring trends in population size. Therefore, WDFW has a more detailed monitoring strategy specifically for the Willapa Hills elk herd to:

- Determine elk population trends
- Quantify cow to calf ratios
- Quantify bull to cow ratios

In 2023, WDFW conducted surveys across both the northern and southern portions of the Willapa Hills, which included portions of Region 5, District 10 to estimate overall abundance and ratios of calves and bulls to cows at the GMU, subherd (i.e., north vs south), and herd scales. Typically, limited funding and the large herd area requires surveying the north and south subherds in alternating years (see map). This year, the Department had sufficient funding to survey the entire herd area. Results from the 2023 Willapa Hills Elk surveys are found in the table below.



South-Subherd GMUs	Calf/Cow ratio	Bull/Cow ratio
506 Willapa Hills	32:100 = (32 calves per 100)	11:100 = (11 Bulls per 100)
530 Ryderwood	41:100	18:100
681 Bear River	36:100	18:100
673 Williams Creek	26:100	15:100
Willapa South Total	34:100	15:100
North-subherd GMUs		
658 North River	29:100	18:100
660 Minot Peak	31:100	15:100
672 Fall River	30:100	16:100
Willapa North Total	29:100	17:100
All GMU's (North and South)	32 calves per 100 cows	16 Bulls per 100 cows

Table 2: Subherd GMU ratios.

Survey results from 2023 show a healthy and stable elk population throughout the Willapa Hills. Both calf to cow and bull to cow ratios for the Willapa Hills herd area are robust, indicating a productive herd with decent harvest opportunities. WDFW will conduct yearly surveys of the Willapa Hills elk herd to sample different segments of the landscape.

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Probably the most frequent question the Department gets from hunters is “which GMU should I hunt?”. The answer depends on the hunting method and the target hunting experience. For example, GMU 699 is a small unit closed to both modern and muzzleloader hunters. Another example is that archery hunters are not allowed to harvest antlerless elk in every GMU.

Some hunters are looking for an opportunity to harvest a mature bull. Large mature bulls are found in District 17 but aren't very abundant. WDFW directs hunters seeking mature bulls to spend their efforts in either the Quinault Ridge (638), Matheny (618), or adjacent Clearwater (615) GMUs. All three GMUs are adjacent to Olympic National Park (ONP) and have the reputation of producing some very nice bulls. The best success for five-point or better bulls is garnered by the September rifle permit hunters in either the Quinault Ridge (638) or Matheny (618) GMUs.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have high densities of elk, low hunter densities, and high hunter success rates. Unfortunately, this scenario doesn't readily exist in any GMU open during the general modern firearm, archery, or muzzleloader seasons in District 17. Those GMUs with the highest elk densities tend to have the highest hunter densities as well. For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them not to hunt in a GMU where they see lots of elk. For other hunters, they might prefer to hunt in areas with moderate to low numbers of elk if that means there are also very few hunters. Note that many industrial timber companies have begun limiting access or charging a fee to access their land. This change has effectively, and sometimes dramatically, reduced hunter density on those lands.

Archers should consider that antlerless elk seasons are not uniform across all GMUs. Antlerless elk may be harvested during the general season in six GMUs, and three GMUs are open during early and late archery seasons. These differences are important when comparing total harvest or hunter numbers among GMUs. Muzzleloader seasons are not uniform either. Some muzzleloader seasons are open during the early muzzleloader season, while others are only available during the late muzzleloader season. Hunters should keep these differences in mind when interpreting the information provided in figure 2 through 4.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Elk populations do not vary much from year to year, especially in District 17, which lacks the severe winter weather conditions that might result in a winter die-off. Consequently, WDFW expects the number of elk available for harvest to be similar in size to the 2022 season. Elk harvest appeared to be higher in 2018 compared to prior years so, a slight decline in elk harvest for 2019 was not unexpected. Hunter numbers do not typically change much from one year to the next, but recent actions by private timber companies to charge for access have reduced hunter numbers in those areas affected.

Weather can be dramatically different from year to year and has the potential to influence harvest rates. As an example, 2012 and 2021 were a hot and dry summers by western Washington standards, which produced extreme fire danger warnings and caused many timber companies to close their lands to public access during the latter part of the general early archery season and the entire early muzzleloader season. Washington has witnessed record high temperatures in early summer this year, so conditions could result in extreme fire dangers in fall 2023. The best predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success.

Long-term harvest data (along with survey data) generally indicates that elk populations are stable in District 17. However, 2022 saw the lowest total elk harvest since 2008. This dip could indicate that even more elk are available in 2023. One possible factor – the Department noted fewer modern firearm hunters were afield in 2022 (>10% decline). For more detailed information related to the status of Washington’s elk herds, hunters should reference the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#).

Figures 3-4 are detailed charts on historic elk harvest for District 17.

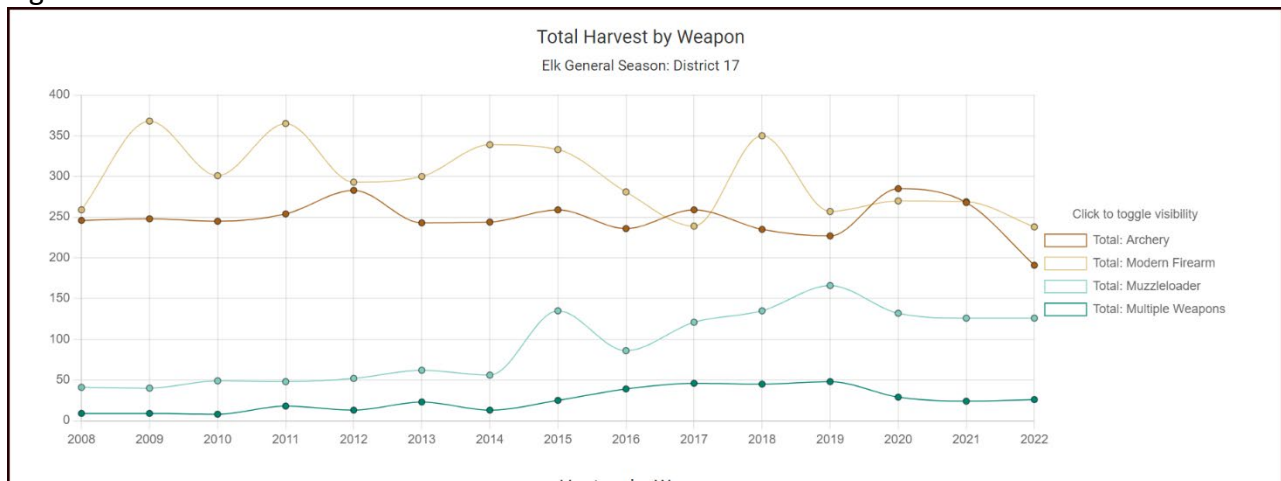


Figure 3. District 17 elk harvest totals. Total elk harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Harvest totals do not include tribal harvest.

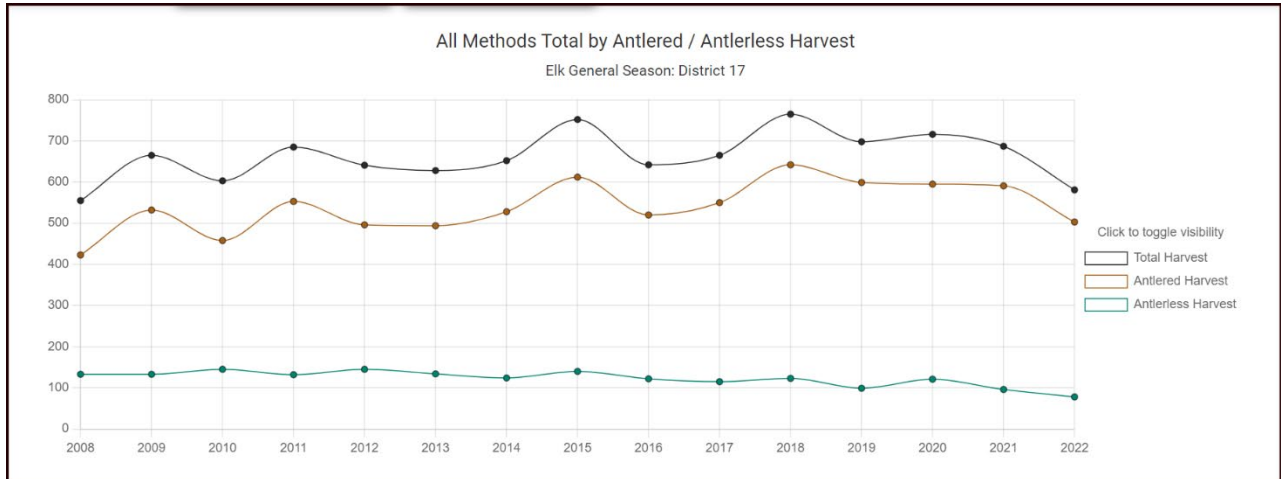


Figure 4. District 17 elk harvest totals for antlered and antlerless elk. Total elk harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Harvest totals do not include tribal harvest.

HOW TO FIND ELK

When hunting elk in District 17, hunters need to research and spend time scouting before the season opens. Predicting where elk are located is especially difficult after hunting pressure increases. Many hunters spend their time focused on timber harvests. Elk often forage in timber harvests and are highly visible when they do. Those highly visible elk often attract other hunters. Consequently, timber harvests can get crowded in a hurry. Many elk (especially bulls) will infrequently visit timber harvests during daylight hours. Instead, they may spend most of their day in closed canopy forests, swamps, or regeneration stands.



Corey Bronckhorst with elk taken from GMU 673 during the 2016 archery season.

Some generalities can be made about the landscape that will increase the odds of locating elk. When going to a new area, hunters are encouraged to cover as much ground as possible. Note areas where you see signs along roads and landings. Landings are often not graveled, making it easy to see fresh tracks. Scouting will reveal which areas hold elk and where to focus more intensive efforts.

After identifying areas with abundant elk signs, hunters should focus on areas that provide cover and are near timber harvests. During early seasons, when it is warm, these cover areas often include swamps, creek bottoms, river bottoms, or any place near water. Once the season progresses and temperatures cool, elk are less attracted to water, and locating them becomes more difficult. Hunting pressure also can force elk to use areas that provide thicker cover or are more inaccessible to hunters because of topography.

Later in the season, consult a topographic map and find benches located in steep terrain with thick cover. Elk often use these benches to bed down during the day. Finally, don't let a locked gate (provided that non-motorized access is allowed) keep you from going into an area to search for elk. Frequently, these areas hold elk that have not received much hunting pressure, making them less skittish and easier to hunt. A popular approach to hunting behind gates is to use mountain bikes with trailers. Biking on timber company lands is facilitated by high densities of maintained gravel roads.

ELK AREAS

There are two Elk Areas in District 17: Elk Area 6010 (Mallis or Raymond) and Elk Area 6064 (Quinault Valley). Nearly all permit opportunities in District 17 are antlerless elk hunts and are associated with these Elk Areas. Elk Area 6010 was established in a location with chronic elk damage problems, and its primary purpose is to provide antlerless harvest opportunities that help control the growth rate of herds in localized agricultural areas.

Elk Area 6064 was established to help foster solutions between landowners and elk hunters. Special restrictions apply in each Elk Area. In Elk Area 6064, only master hunters are allowed to hunt elk during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons.

Elk Area 6010 was established to alleviate elk damage on private agricultural lands. Elk Area 6010 also contains tracts of public or private timber company lands where elk are not problematic. For the best opportunities, hunters are advised to visit and scout the area well in advance of their hunt and make the effort to speak with farm owners in the area regarding accessing their property.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Several private timber companies in District 17 charge a fee to access areas previously open to the public. Property ownership changes irregularly. Hunters should contact landowners in areas

they intend to hunt and determine the company's current policy. See private lands access section for more information.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range, including within the Olympic and Willapa elk herd areas. While elk are susceptible to many conditions which result in limping or hoof deformities, the prevalence and severity of this new affliction suggested something altogether different. WDFW diagnostic research (2009 – 2014), in conjunction with a panel of scientific advisors, found that these hoof abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause a hoof disease of cattle, sheep, and goats called digital dermatitis. Although digital dermatitis has affected the livestock industry for decades, Treponeme-Associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) is the first known instance of digital dermatitis in a wild ungulate. The disease is currently concentrated in southwestern Washington where prevalence is highest in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, and western Lewis counties. The disease is also present at lower prevalence in elk herds that are distant and discrete from the core affected area.

Hoof disease is found throughout District 17 in both the Olympic and Willapa Hills elk herd areas. TAHD appears to be more prevalent among elk in the Willapa Herd area and southern end of the Olympic Peninsula. While many questions remain about the disease, several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male, or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals' hooves and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene. It is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** There is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

How hunters can help:

In 2021, WDFW implemented an incentive-based pilot program to encourage west-side (400, 500, 600 series GMUs) hunters to harvest limping elk, potentially reducing prevalence of the disease over time. The objective of this program is to increase the proportion of limping elk in the total harvest, rather than increase elk harvest overall. General season or permit hunters can choose to participate in the program by submitting elk hooves at one of the many collection sites in western Washington. Hunters that submit hooves with signs of TAHD (for example, abnormal hooves) will be automatically entered into a drawing for a special incentive permit for

the following license year. Multiple bull permits in western Washington with season dates of Sep. 1 – Dec. 31 will be awarded. Additionally, all participants will receive a custom, waterproof license holder.

To help combat TAHD in elk, hunters can:

- **Harvest a limping elk** from any 400, 500, 600 series GMUs.
- **Turn in their harvested elk hooves along with complete registration forms** at one of several collection sites in western Washington.
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's online reporting form.
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is working with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations, tribal governments, and others to better understand and manage TAHD. The Department's website has more information about [TAHD](#). Additional information on TAHD and this incentive program can also be found on page 65 of the Big Game Hunting Pamphlet.

DEER

SUMMARY

Success rates: Depend on weapon type and GMU hunted. For the entire district, hunter success generally ranges from 15-20%.

Recent trends: Observable decrease in harvest last year compared to the year prior.

GMUs with highest harvest: 660, 663, 672, 648

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Columbian black-tailed deer (black-tails or black-tailed deer) are the only species of deer in District 17. Deer hunting opportunities in District 17 range from marginal to very good. The best opportunities to harvest a black-tailed deer in District 17 occur in GMUs 663, 648, 672, and 660.

In Washington, black-tail harvest regulations are set at the GMU level. All areas of District 17 are managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing deer populations while minimizing conflicts with people. Management objectives include maintaining deer populations to have a minimum of 15 bucks per 100 does in the post-hunting season population.

WDFW does not attempt to survey deer populations to estimate their total numbers in District 17. Harvest trends, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort help to supplement a formal population size estimate. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor population size trends, and the agency is currently evaluating new approaches to monitor black-tailed deer populations.

Finding an effective way to monitor black-tailed deer populations has been an ongoing management challenge. Black-tailed deer are secretive and use densely vegetated habitats. Their ability to remain unseen substantially lowers the probability of detection through aerial surveys. The small number of deer observed results in insufficient sample sizes to monitor population trends or demographics (buck to doe and fawn to doe ratios).

Overall deer harvest has varied widely over the long-term (2008-2022) with a low point of 1,095 animals harvested in 2011. The most recent high point was 2016 when 1,837 were harvested. That was followed by another low of 1,258 in 2017, then varied between 1,476 and 1,674 through 2021. Last year (2022) was back down to a total estimated 1,310 bucks and does. Long-term trends in harvest data seemed to indicate somewhat stable deer populations. The seemingly steep decline from 2016 to 2017 is surprising and without an obvious biological cause. For more detailed information on the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should reference through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trends Report](#).

ANTLER POINTS AND AGE

Prior to mandatory reporting in 2001, WDFW staffed field check stations to gather information of age structure. Hunters have frequently asked if there is a correlation between age and antler points. During the fall of 1979, tooth samples were collected from bucks harvested in western Washington and sent in for cementum annuli aging. Of the total of 36 buck deer tooth samples collected, 25 (69%) were spikes and two points. The remaining bucks sampled were at least three points or better (31%), with four of the three points being 2.5 years old at time of harvest.

A more accurate assessment of the age of buck deer harvested in Western Washington has occurred recently. WDFW collected hundreds of tooth samples from successful black-tailed deer hunters during the 2019 and 2020 season. Reported number of antler points was submitted with each tooth, and samples were sent to a laboratory for analysis of cementum annuli to determine age. A table of the results is plotted below. Generally, the number of antler points increases with age. However, a 3-year-old buck may still be a spike, and an 11-year-old buck could be a 2 point. Conversely, a yearling could have 4 points.

Max Antler Points (1 side)	Average Age – Rounded to nearest ½ year	Total # of Submissions
1 (Spike)	1 Year	65
2	3 Years	120
3	4 Years	97
4	4 ½ Years	65
5	5 Years	30
6	6 Years	4

Table 6– Average age of black-tailed bucks harvested in Washington state in comparison to the highest number of reported antler points.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

The best GMU to hunt deer in depends on the hunting method and the target hunting experience. Some hunters are looking for the best chance to harvest a large, mature buck, while others want to harvest any legal deer or simply be in an area with few hunters.

The ideal GMU for most hunters would have:

- High numbers of deer
- Low numbers of hunters
- High hunter success rates

Unfortunately, the perfect scenario does not exist in any GMU that is freely open to the public during any season within District 17. GMUs with the highest deer numbers tend to have the highest hunter numbers as well.

For many hunters, high hunter densities are not enough to persuade them to avoid a GMU with many deer. Others prefer to hunt areas with moderate to low numbers of deer if they can avoid other hunters.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Deer populations do not change dramatically between typical years. Winter weather conditions rarely cause winter die-offs within District 17. Consequently, the Department anticipates the total quantity of deer available for harvest to be similar to previous seasons.

Hunter numbers do not change dramatically between typical years unless hunting regulations are significantly modified or access is closed. The best predictor of expected general season harvest is recent trends in:

1. Harvest
2. Hunter numbers
3. Hunter success

The following chart provides trend data for harvest statistics. Total harvest is consistent with low harvest years occurring in 2011 (1,095 deer taken) and 2017 (1,259 deer taken). Boom years occurred in 2009 when almost 2,000 deer were harvested by hunters and 2016 when an estimated 1,838 deer were harvested.

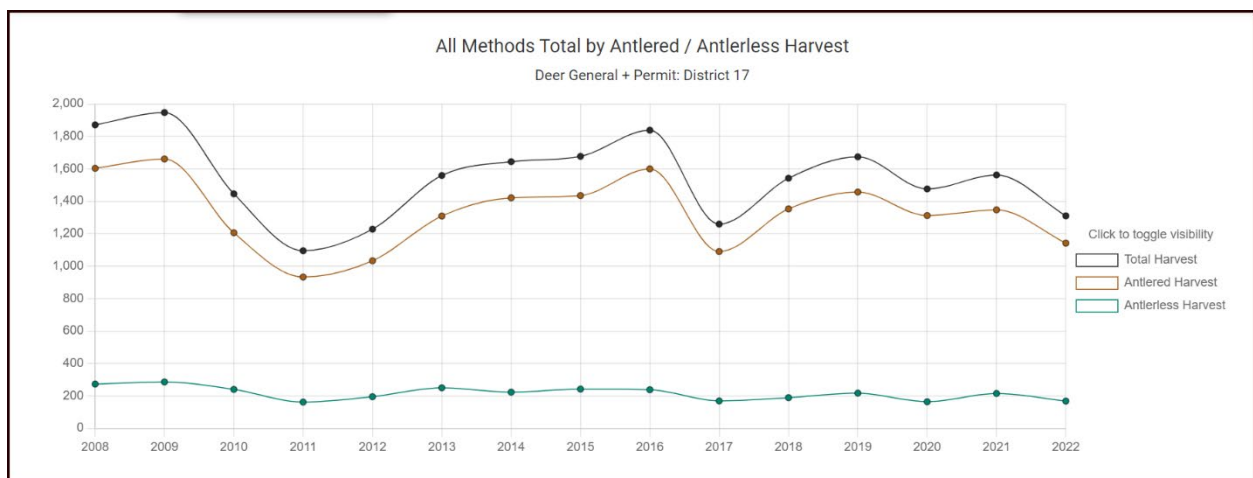


Figure 7. District 17 deer harvest totals. Total buck and antlerless deer harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader elk seasons combined, 2008–2022. Harvest totals include special permits but does not include tribal harvest.

HOW TO FIND AND HUNT BLACK-TAILED DEER

The key to harvesting a black-tailed deer in District 17 is scouting. black-tailed deer are present throughout the district and in nearly every habitat type. Deer numbers differ among habitat types and the highest deer densities are associated with 3- to 9-year-old timber harvests. These young tree stands provide large amounts of both cover and food.



Dana Morgan with spike deer taken during the late firearm season in GMU 663

Many hunters will focus efforts on new timber harvests. Deer in these areas are much more visible than most other habitats. However, deer know they are exposed and typically visit timber harvests at night, early dawn, and dusk. Hunters should also explore areas near these openings. Those areas with cover are more likely to contain deer for most the day. Large amounts of deer sign in an area indicate deer are in close vicinity.

Over several years, WDFW fitted female deer in Capitol State Forest (GMU 663) with GPS collars as part of a larger WDFW study throughout western Washington. The goal of this study was to better understand the effects timber management practices have on deer survival and productivity. These GPS collars automatically upload the deer's location via satellite several times a day. The data gives biologists a detailed look at black-tailed deer movements and habitat use.

None of the deer monitored in WDFW's doe study used an area larger than .38 mi² (243 acres). The average home range size was .14 mi² (86 acres). Some deer used an area no bigger than 45 acres in size during an entire year. If a hunter sees signs of deer in an area, but no deer, they need to be patient or change their approach.

The traditional approaches to hunting black-tailed deer include still-hunting or sitting patiently in high-use areas (timber harvests, highly traveled trails, or funnels) until the deer appears. A less well-known, or less-used, technique is rattling and grunting to simulate two bucks fighting over a doe. The rattling technique is more common with mid-west and eastern white-tailed deer hunters but can be effective on black-tailed deer as well. A quick internet search on the technique yields plenty of evidence to illustrate its effectiveness when conditions are right.

Buck movements tend to increase during the rut and, they are less wary than during other parts of the year. The last week of October and first week of November seem to be those periods of time when male deer are most susceptible to harvest. Starting in 2017, WDFW initiated a buck mortality study, which would pinpoint the activity periods and survival rates for male black-tail deer in western Washington. Results of this effort are still awaiting analysis.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Several private timber companies in District 17 are shifting to fee-access programs in areas where they historically offered free access. Typically, these companies will post signs at primary roadways, but hunters should be aware of changes. WDFW advises hunters to contact landowners in areas where they hunt to determine the individual company's current policy regarding land access. Reference the private lands access section for more information.

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears are present throughout District 17. Bear numbers vary among GMUs, and the harvest can change noticeably from year to year. The best places to harvest bears usually occurs in GMUs 648, 660, and 663. Other GMUs worth mentioning are 618, 638, 658, 660, 672, and 681.

Bear seasons are primarily designed to maintain stable black bear populations. Spring seasons are directed to areas where black bear cause measurable damage to young commercial timber stands or other sites of human-bear conflict. The existing bear populations are not expected to have much impact on big game herds. Three statistics used to assess black bear harvest are:

- Proportion of females harvested.
- Median age of harvested females
- Median age of harvested males

WDFW initiated surveys in 2019 to estimate bear density in portions of Region 6. The initial study area was in the Fall River GMU (672). The resulting estimates are expected to help the agency formulate management objectives and understand the relationship between the number of bears in the area and the habitat characteristics and annual harvest rates. For Fall River, the bear density was estimated at just under eight bears per 100 square kilometers of bear habitat in the summer of 2019.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Most bears are probably harvested opportunistically during general deer and elk seasons. Overall hunter success is low, but annual harvest can vary widely from year to year, and 2019 and 2020 had some of the highest harvest rates for the past 10 years. Depending on the GMU hunted, between 4 and 15% of bear hunters in District 17 were successful in 2019. Since 2001, overall hunter success for this district has typically ranged from 4% to 8%. District-wide, bear hunter success in 2019 was 11%. Hunter success rates are likely higher for those that specifically hunt bears compared to hunters that take bear incidentally during deer or elk season.

Annual bear harvest in District 17 increased from 2002 to 2008. Harvest declined sharply during the 2009 season but rebounded in 2010. Bear harvest has since remained generally stable to increasing, although 2014 was a low year and 2019 was a high year. Last year, 2022, was another high year for bear harvest.

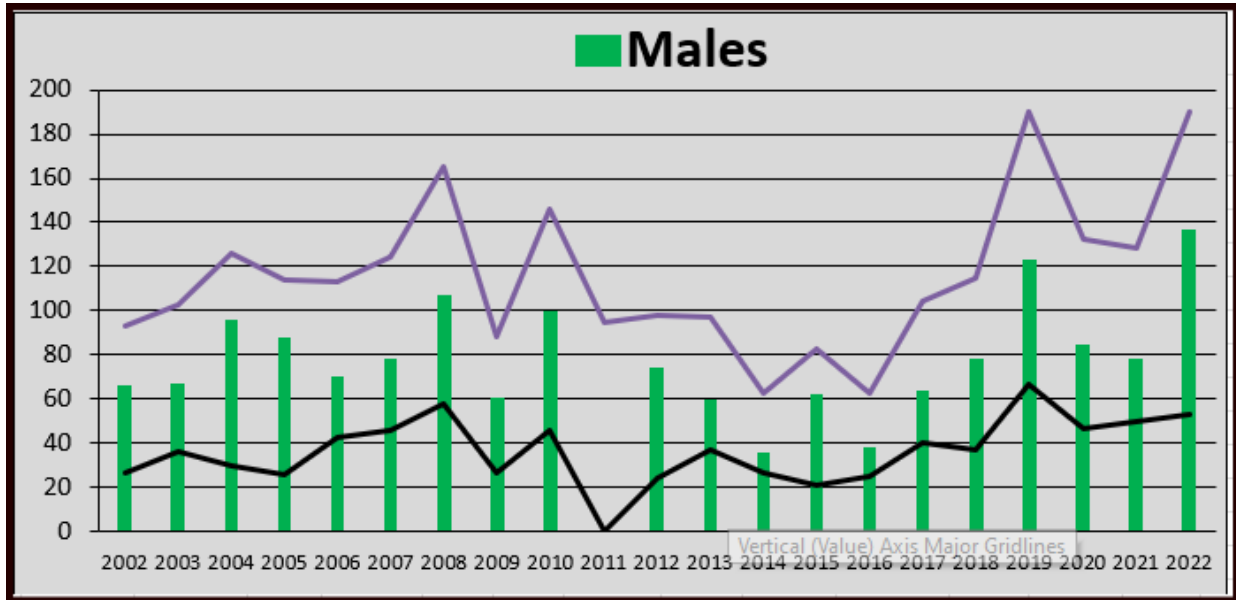


Figure 8. Trends in the number of male (green) and female (black line) black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 17, 2002–2022. Harvest estimates do not include bears harvested during historic spring permit seasons nor bears removed because of conflicts with people or timber damage. Note - The sex of harvested bears was not available for 2011.

More bears are typically harvested during the general season in GMUs 648 than any other GMU. GMU’s 642, 658, 660, 663, 673, and 681 are also regular producers of bears during the general and spring permit hunting seasons.

HOW TO FIND BLACK BEAR

Black bears are common and occur at high densities in some locales. However, bears in District 17 are seen infrequently because of thick vegetation dominating the landscape. Consequently, scouting is extremely important when hunting for black bears.

Black bears occupy a variety of habitat types, and it can be difficult to narrow down where to find them. Because bears have an incredible sense of smell, hunters should focus on open terrain. When out in the open, a bear can be seen from a distance without alerting it. In dense cover, a bear is likely to smell a hunter before being seen and move to avoid an encounter. Bears are often located in timber harvests with a lot of berry-producing shrubs. Examples include:

- Elderberries
- Salmonberries
- Huckleberries
- Blackberries
- Salal berries

During the fall, hunters should seek timber harvests with these types of shrubs and search for bear sign. Fresh signs indicate a bear is visiting that stand. Patient hunters who watch these areas for extended periods of time can increase their chances of harvesting a bear.

NOTABLE CHANGES

Bear Season starts Aug. 1 across all parts of the state.



Bear photo from GMU 672 survey site

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 17, but densities vary among GMUs. WDFW manages cougar populations in District 17 primarily to maintain a stable cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW shifted away from using season length or permit seasons to manage the number of cougars harvested and implemented a standard season coupled with harvest guidelines. The intended goal was to allow a longer season without weapon restrictions. Cougar seasons will close for a specific area once harvest reaches or exceeds a harvest guideline.



To accomplish harvest goals, WDFW established a series of hunt areas with standard season dates of Sept. 1 through April 30. The Department assesses harvest numbers are starting Jan. 1. Any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed. Anyone planning to hunt cougar after Janu 1 should take a moment to confirm the cougar season is still open. Harvest guidelines for each hunt area located in District 17 are provided in Table 8.

Starting in 2019, WDFW convened an internal group to assess the results of implementing the harvest guideline hunting structure. The harvest guidelines were changed for the 2021-2022 season to only account for adult harvest.

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline
618, 636, 638	3-5 adults
642, 648, 651	6-8 adults
658, 660, 663, 672, 673, 681, 684, 699	8-11 adults

Table 9 Harvest guidelines for hunt areas located in District 17.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2023 SEASON

Cougar harvest in District 17 varies greatly. The variability may be due to the prohibition on hound hunting and trapping. Deer and elk hunters mostly harvest most cougars opportunistically. Since 2001, the average number of cougars that hunters harvest District 17 is six animals. Young animals are overrepresented in the harvest. Most cougar harvest in District 17 has occurred in GMU 642, 648, and 651.

NOTABLE CHANGES

Subadults no longer count toward the cougar harvest guideline. WDFW reminds hunters that the season ends April 30, unless closed early. A 2023 tag and license are required after March 31, 2023.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks occur in District 17. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, mallard, green-winged teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, and common goldeneye, are present but occur in low numbers. Nesting wood ducks are often in the Chehalis River Valley early in the season and provide a unique hunting opportunity. Hunters occasionally find sea ducks, including scoters and long-tailed ducks, in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor.

Mallards are Washington's most abundant species of duck. Consequently, mallards constitute the majority of ducks harvested statewide (typically $\geq 50\%$). In contrast, American wigeon are the most abundant species of duck in District 17. During recent aerial survey flights of Willapa Bay, American wigeon typically comprised 50 to 60% of the ducks observed. Hunters should expect to primarily harvest American wigeon, northern pintail, and mallard. Green-winged teal are abundant early in the season but decrease in numbers as the season progresses.



MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY

Hunters find very few ducks during late spring and early summer. Beginning in mid to late September, birds within the Pacific Flyway will migrate south from Alaska. (Note – hunters have harvested banded ducks marked from the Central Flyway along coastal Washington, indicating that some movement between flyways does exist). Duck numbers will continue to increase until peaking in late October and early November. The migrating ducks are believed to concentrate in District 17 as resting areas. They do not appear to remain in the district for long periods of time. Consequently, the number of ducks located inside District 17 likely varies daily. Total duck numbers decline precipitously once the flow of migrants from Alaska has stopped. By the December holiday season, duck numbers are typically 5% of what they were at the end of October. Unlike eastern Washington, weather doesn't alter migration chronology in coastal Washington. Regardless of the weather, duck numbers decline at about the same point in time each year.

CONCENTRATION AREAS

In general, waterfowl concentrations occur in Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, and the Chehalis and Willapa River valleys. The exact locations where duck concentrations occur depends on many factors (hunting pressure, weather, food, etc.) that can change daily.

Waterfowl concentrations shift around the bay each winter. Small, forested wetlands also provide areas where migratory ducks may congregate. In the river valleys after large soaking precipitation events, hunters can find dabbling ducks in areas where sheet water has accumulated. The number of ducks that can use these small bodies of water can be surprisingly high. Hunters should scout a few days before hunting to locate where concentrations of ducks are currently located and/or where sheet water is likely to occur.

POPULATION STATUS

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing liberal seasons for many species. Breeding duck populations in western Washington weren't monitored until 2010, when WDFW developed and began flying established transects in five select areas of western Washington. WDFW flies surveys in April and early May. One of the selected areas occurs in District 17 and is associated with the Chehalis river valley.

Surveys have not occurred in recent years to help protect public safety during the coronavirus. In 2019, the breeding population in the Chehalis river valley was estimated at 4,130 ducks, which is lower than the 6,841 estimated in 2018. Mallard numbers during the spring breeding flights remained the same, and American wigeon numbers decreased for the second year.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

Breeding duck numbers in Alaska are the biggest factor affecting duck hunters in Washington. Unfortunately, surveys were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Historic harvest can provide insight into probable hunting opportunity. Overall, harvest trends since 2016 have been rising slightly and are more similar to the average total number of ducks harvested since 2010. For instance, the 2016 season was noteworthy for having low numbers of ducks in October. Harvest, especially for Grays Harbor, again ticked up in 2018 compared to the 2016 season. Duck hunter harvest was below average in 2021.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

Duck hunting techniques should vary depending on where hunters choose to hunt. Traditional setups work best when hunting inland waters around ponds, rivers, or feeding areas. Birds are most active in early morning and late afternoon, as they move between resting sites and feeding areas.

The tides influence hunting the coastline of Willapa Bay or Grays Harbor. Regardless of the time of day, ducks along the coastline tend to move very little at either low or high tide. Hunters can expect very little movement during tidal extremes. However, bird activity and opportunities increase when the tide is going out or coming in. A perfectly timed tide can provide success to coastline hunters at 3 p.m., unlike traditional waterfowl hunting areas that are typically limited to early morning and late afternoon. For more information, reference the [Let's Go Waterfowl Hunting](#).

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Many WDFW wildlife areas in District 17 offer good waterfowl hunting opportunities. The following map is intended to provide hunters with the general location of these wildlife areas, but hunters should visit the [WDFW waterfowl hunting page](#) or the Go Hunt application for more detailed information.

The website includes waterfowl information related to location, current waterfowl management activities, and common species. Other public land opportunities occur on the [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#).

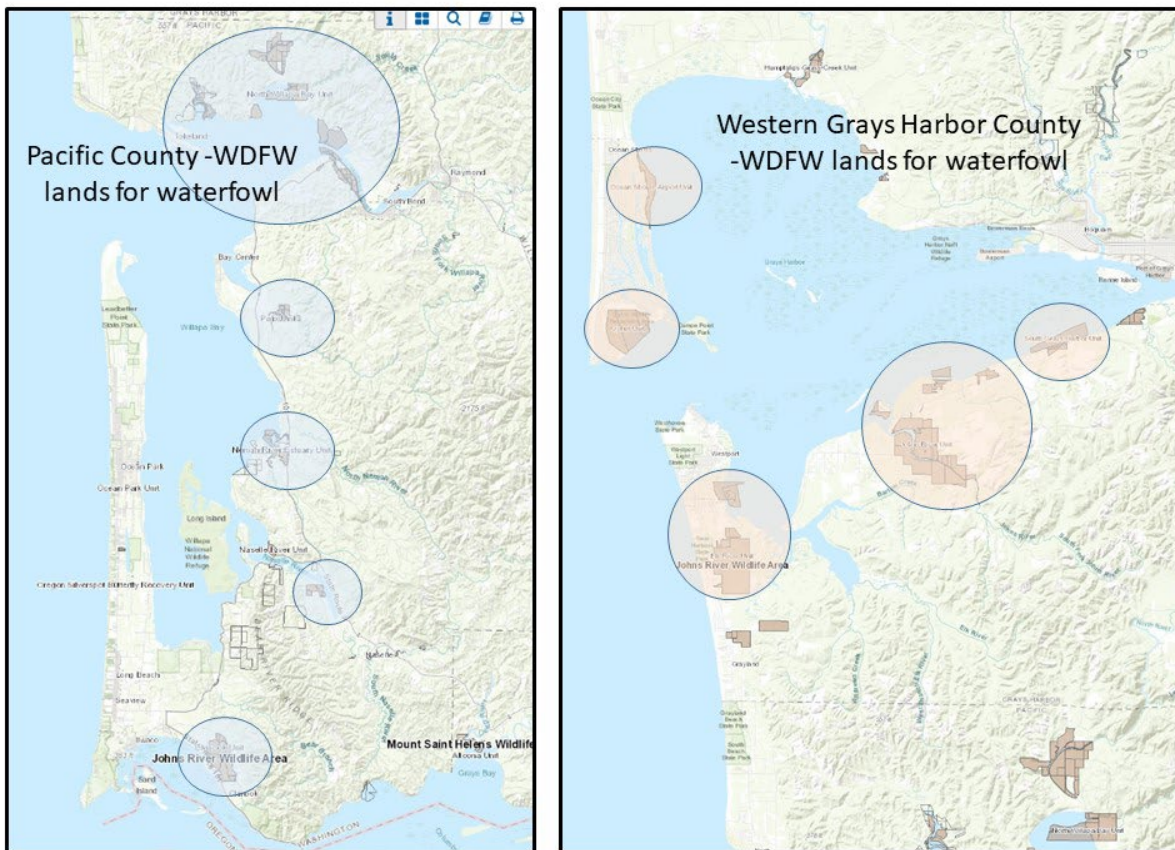


Figure 10: WDFW lands and waterfowl hunting areas within western portion of District 17.

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

The sub-species of Canada geese found in District 17 include western, dusky, lesser, taverner, Aleutian, Vancouver, and cackler. Hunters can find large numbers of black brant in Willapa Bay beginning in late January and early February. Occasional flocks of snow geese and white-fronted geese occur infrequently.



MIGRATION CHRONOLOGY AND CONCENTRATION AREAS

The timing of migration for geese in District 17 is nearly identical to that described for ducks. Few geese reside locally in the district. Starting in September, waves of migrant geese begin showing up from Alaska. One distinct difference between ducks and geese is that goose numbers do not decline in late November as sharply as duck numbers. Many geese choose to stay the winter in the agricultural areas of District 17 where they find food. Brant is distinct from the other species of geese and, are mostly found in Willapa Bay starting in the latter half of December or early January.

Most geese aggregate in areas of agricultural lands around the Willapa and Chehalis river valleys. Some properties routinely have geese on them. Generally, the specific fields where geese concentrate changes on a weekly basis. The Chehalis and Willapa river valleys are not expansive, so relocating geese is not difficult. Hunters are likely to find brant, in contrast to other geese, almost exclusively in close vicinity to areas where eel grass is found.

POPULATION STATUS

Very few geese breed in District 17. Consequently, WDFW does not survey for breeding geese within the district. Long-term goose nest surveys have occurred elsewhere in Washington. Portions of the lower Columbia River have small but relatively stable breeding populations.

Wintering populations of geese are hard to survey effectively, because geese forage widely in agricultural areas that make them difficult to locate. The number of geese observed in Washington during the midwinter-waterfowl surveys has been relatively stable since the early 2000s.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Historically, most goose harvest has occurred in Grays Harbor County during the regular season. A decline in the goose harvest for Grays Harbor County in 2015 may partially be attributed to its inclusion into Goose Area 2. Pacific County goose hunters have long been required to obtain

southwest goose authorizations, and the number of Pacific County hunters has not changed significantly. The Department expects that the number of Grays Harbor County goose hunters will gradually increase as hunters obtain their southwest goose authorization.

Given the current trends in goose populations farther north, the goose hunting opportunities in District 17 are expected to remain consistent. Hunters can expect to harvest an average of one or two geese per day.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES

Goose hunting is almost standardized. Goose hunters find agricultural areas where geese feed and set up well before daylight in portions of the field where geese are known to concentrate. In District 17, feeding geese tend to congregate in pastures containing cattle operations. Most goose hunting opportunities occur on private property. Hunters must obtain permission before hunting private lands.

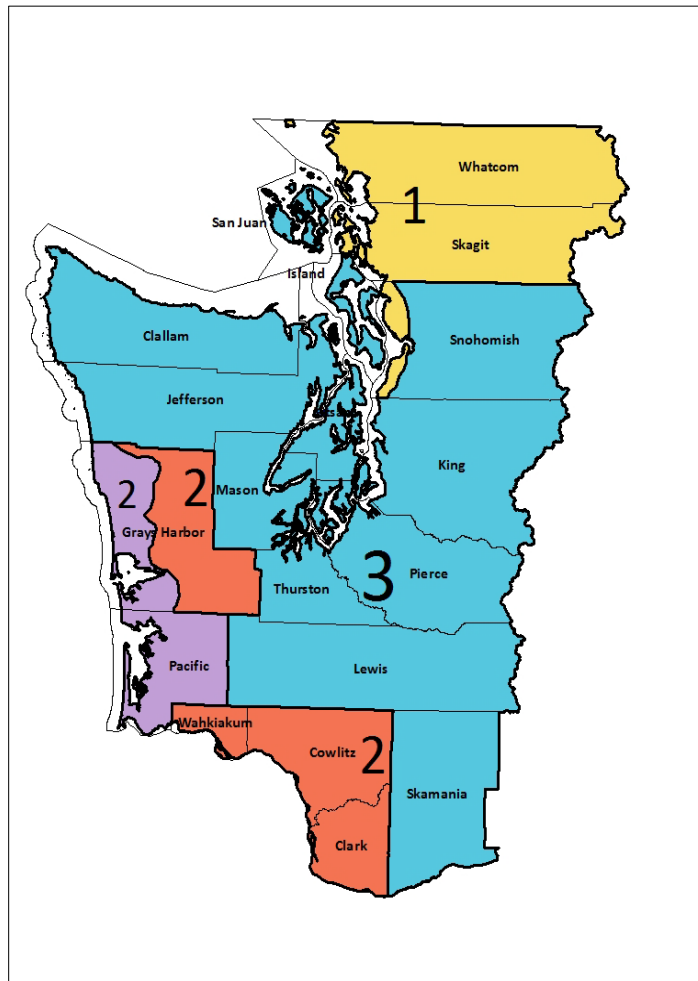
During the early September goose hunting season, noticeable concentrations of western Canada geese have been observed in and around Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay. These areas tend to congregate molting geese earlier in the season and those recently molted birds seem to continue to use those areas throughout the early season. Recent goose surveys conducted in August 2019 around Baker Bay, near the town of Chinook, documented many geese. Many of the areas where geese are found require boat access, but favorable goose hunting can occur near shore using traditional methods.

Inclement weather may force local and migratory geese further upland and into river valleys. This tends to occur more frequently during the regular goose season that starts in October. High easterly winds may force the birds to land in fields where they become less exposed to the wind but are more vulnerable to hunters.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Both Pacific and Grays Harbor counties are contained within **Goose Management Area (GMA) 2** (reference map below). Special regulations apply in GMA 2 to prevent harvest of dusky Canada geese. These special regulations include:

- Hunters must possess a valid migratory bird hunting authorization for **Goose Management Area 2** to hunt geese, except during the September goose season.
- February and March seasons are closed on WDFW Wildlife areas and USFWS Wildlife refuges.
- Hours are 30 minutes after the start of official waterfowl hunting hours to 30 minutes before the end of official waterfowl hunting hours. If a hunter takes a Dusky Canada Goose, the authorization will be invalidated and the hunter will not be able to hunt geese in Goose Management Area 2 for the rest of the season, including the special late goose season.
- Beginning in 2018, a Mandatory Harvest Report Card was issued for hunters to record the number and species composition of their daily bag. Hunters are required to report their harvest onto this report card as soon as practical, after harvesting a goose.



WDFW strongly recommends that hunters review the most recent Washington State Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Season pamphlet to ensure they are following current regulations. Pamphlets are available at any retailer that sells hunting licenses or [online](#).

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Many wildlife areas in District 17 provide a chance to hunt geese. Check the earlier map or view WDFW's "[Let's go waterfowl hunting](#)" publication for more details. Additionally, some landowners have enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. Those lands provide

additional hunting opportunities for the public. Reference the private lands section for more details or visit the [Hunt Planner Webmap](#).

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

None for 2023.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

District 17 has two species of grouse: ruffed grouse and blue grouse (sooty). Ruffed grouse are the most abundant and occur at lower elevations and valley bottoms. Throughout the west, ruffed grouse typically prefer habitats that support abundant deciduous shrubs or small trees, particularly along stream corridors and other areas along rivers. These thick, somewhat impenetrable habitats provide protective cover for ruffed grouse. West of the Cascade Range stands of red alder can provide suitable habitat conditions for ruffed grouse. Blue grouse can be found in higher elevation habitats, but overlap does occur. Blue grouse are usually found in the uplands at elevations above 2,500 feet and may exceed 6,000 feet. Across Oregon and Washington, blue grouse prefer coniferous forests dominated by Douglas fir and true fir. At higher elevations, birds are primarily found in western and mountain hemlock, lodgepole pine, and white bark pine. The Ruffed Grouse Society has developed an interactive map for blue and ruffed grouse habitat on national forest land.

Note – the map only assesses a small portion of land in District 17 that belongs to the US Forest Service. State and private lands are not portrayed. The map is only a guide to habitat and may not accurately predict where grouse can be found.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW no longer conducts surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 17. The Department uses harvest data trends to supplement formal population estimates. Total harvest numbers tend to vary with hunter numbers, so catch per unit effort (or “grouse per hunter day”) is the best indicator of population trend. In District 17, grouse harvest per hunter day has ranged from .12 to .038 birds per hunter day. The 2018 rate was 0.20 birds per hunter day, slightly higher than the .12 birds per hunter day in 2017.

To obtain better information on grouse population status and demographics, WDFW conducted a pilot effort in 2016 to collect grouse wings and tails from harvested birds in portions of Grays Harbor County. Results from the 2018 season are listed below (figure 9). This collection effort is expected to continue through 2023 with collection barrels located at strategic locations in the district.

Species	Female	Male	Unknown Sex	Juvenile	Yearling	Adult	Breeding Age*	Total collected
Ruffed	1	3	8	8	0	0	4	24
Blue	25	19	0	31	2	9	2	88
Totals	26	22	8	39	2	9	6	112

Table 11. The number, sex, age, and species type of forest grouse harvested in Grays Harbor County during the 2018 hunting season, Sep. 1 – Dec. 1.

***Breeding Age denotes birds with molt patterns that showed they were of breeding age but that could not be distinguished as yearling vs adult.**

Collecting grouse wings and tails helps the Department to monitor species, sex, and age ratios in the harvested population to inform production and composition. WDFW encourages hunters to contribute to these collections. Hunters can reference wing collection barrel locations on the [WDFW website](#). The table below identifies the percentage of birds harvested throughout Washington by species. Hunters in District 17 will either be in the Olympic or Southwest zone. Species by zone:

Zone	BLUE	RUFFED	SPRUCE
North Central	52%	29%	20%
North Puget Sound	38%	62%	0%
Northeast	16%	78%	6%
Olympic	44%	56%	0%
South Central	76%	24%	0%
Southwest	22%	78%	0%
Unknown	53%	47%	0%
Total	36%	59%	5%

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2023 PROSPECTS

Grouse harvested in District 17 has gradually been declining since 2019. Hunters harvest most grouse in Grays Harbor County. Grouse wings samples reveal that hunters harvest a higher percentage of blue grouse in Grays Harbor County compared to Pacific County. This higher take of blue grouse may be related to the amount of Grays Harbor County's higher accessible terrain, which tends to be more characteristic of blue grouse habitat and has a significant amount of USFS lands.

HUNTING TECHNIQUES AND WHERE TO HUNT

A generally effective way to hunt grouse is by walking roads and shooting birds as they flush or after they roost in a nearby tree. Grouse are present in higher densities along roads with little traffic. Consequently, hunters should target roads behind locked gates or those that have been decommissioned. To learn more about hunting grouse, please reference [WDFW's upland bird hunting publication](#).

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Forest grouse season starts two weeks later than many previous years. The season runs from Sept. 15, 2022 - Jan. 15, 2023, to protect brood hens with chicks.

PHEASANTS

The Western Washington Pheasant Release Program provides all pheasant hunting opportunities in District 17. District 17 doesn't have self-sustaining pheasant populations. The release program primarily provides an upland bird hunting opportunity and to encourage participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released at 25 sites. Two of those release sites (Chehalis River and Chinook) are in District 17. The Chinook Release Site is in Pacific County, and the Chehalis River Release Site is in Grays Harbor County. Reference the [Western Washington Pheasant Release Program](#) publication to learn more.

In a typical year, the program releases around 1,000 pheasants from the Chinook site and at Brady. A special youth hunt will occur in September as well as a senior hunt (age 65 and older). Pheasant releases end on Dec. 15. Hunters should be aware that special regulations apply on western Washington pheasant release sites. Notably:

- Hunters must buy a western Washington pheasant license.
- Non-toxic shot is required.
- Hunting hours are between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The Department has additional information about [Pheasant hunting in Washington](#).

QUAIL

Mountain quail rarely occur in District 17. This district doesn't contain any sizable population, and sightings are rare. The few sightings that occur are usually located in five- to 10-year-old timber harvests with abundant shrub cover and pine saplings. Some sightings occur in brushy cover located near agricultural land. In 2022, hunters reported very few quail harvests in Grays Harbor County and none in Pacific County.

TURKEYS

District 17 doesn't feature sizable turkey populations. Generally, hunters will report less than 30 turkey harvests for all southwest Washington during any given year. The only area wildlife managers knew to have any number of birds in District 17 was in the Willapa River Valley on DNR-managed land in the southern part of GMU 672. Any other flocks that occur in District 17 are small (<15 birds), occur on private agricultural lands, and are thought to be pen-raised birds that nearby landowners release.

Most turkeys found in in District 17 are eastern wild turkeys. About 400 eastern wild turkeys were introduced into southwest Washington from 1987-2000. Introduction was discontinued because turkey populations did not grow or expand, and habitat suitability models indicated southwest Washington habitats were not likely to support viable turkey populations.

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are primarily found below 1,000 feet elevation. In autumn, they eat mainly berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

POPULATION STATUS AND TREND

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 16+ mineral sites where band-tails congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tail populations have fluctuated through the years but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.



HARVEST TRENDS AND 2022 PROSPECTS

Band-tailed pigeon harvest in District 17 once measured thousands of birds. Bag limits were 10 birds per day until 1950, when statewide harvest was estimated at 90,000 birds. However, overharvest and habitat changes caused significant decline in overall numbers. Harvest in District 17 has previously accounted for 30% of the statewide harvest. Annual harvest in Grays Harbor County averaged 80 birds for the decade following 2002, which was the highest average annual harvest among the 19 counties where band-tails are harvested. The maximum total harvest for District 17 since hunting resumed in 2002 was 265 birds. The total statewide harvest has never exceeded 2,100 birds.

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Band-tailed pigeons frequently congregate in areas with red elderberry and cascara. These small trees are most abundant in five- to 10-year-old timber harvests where hunting can be exceptionally good. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting. Identifying specific timber harvests that band-tails use is difficult to predict. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites. Upon finding a good site, sit patiently and wait for harvest opportunities to occur.

Band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. They show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. WDFW conducts annual surveys at such mineral sites to assess changes to the band-tailed population. These mineral sites are not abundant and are hard to find. If a hunter is lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails congregate, it is likely to be a successful season.

WDFW wildlife managers knew of only one mineral site within District 17 prior to 2021, when WDFW identified additional sites as part of a newly initiated research. Please contact WDFW if you know the location of any sites where band-tailed pigeons obtain minerals in Pacific or Grays Harbor counties.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Since band-tail seasons re-opened in 2002, hunters must buy a migratory bird authorization and submit their harvest to the Department using harvest cards after the season has closed. These regulations will apply in 2022 as well. Hunters should review the 2021 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons pamphlet to confirm season dates and any other regulation changes.

RESEARCH

Starting in May 2021, WDFW initiated a project to capture and fit band-tailed pigeons with satellite telemetry devices in portions of District 16 and 17. WDFW has fitted 28 birds with transmitters that are programmed to obtain multiple locations throughout the day and periodically upload those locations via the cell tower network.

This project will help the Department to expand knowledge of band-tailed pigeons in areas where mineral sites have not been identified, which would allow WDFW to fulfill the following objectives:

- More accurately index the statewide population via mineral site surveys.
- More expertly manage our band-tailed pigeons harvest seasons to potentially allow an expanded hunting opportunity.
- Provide detailed information on resource selection to inform how to manage habitat that would increase the statewide population.

This research has helped the Department identify new mineral sites in Grays Harbor County. Hunters and members of the public are funding this research via the migratory bird stamp and artwork program. The existing project is expected to continue through the year 2025 across various districts within Region 6.

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species and furbearers that occur in District 17, but aren't covered in detail, include cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot.



Photo of coyote taken by Bob Ehlers during the 2015 season in GMU 648.

MAJOR PUBLIC LANDS

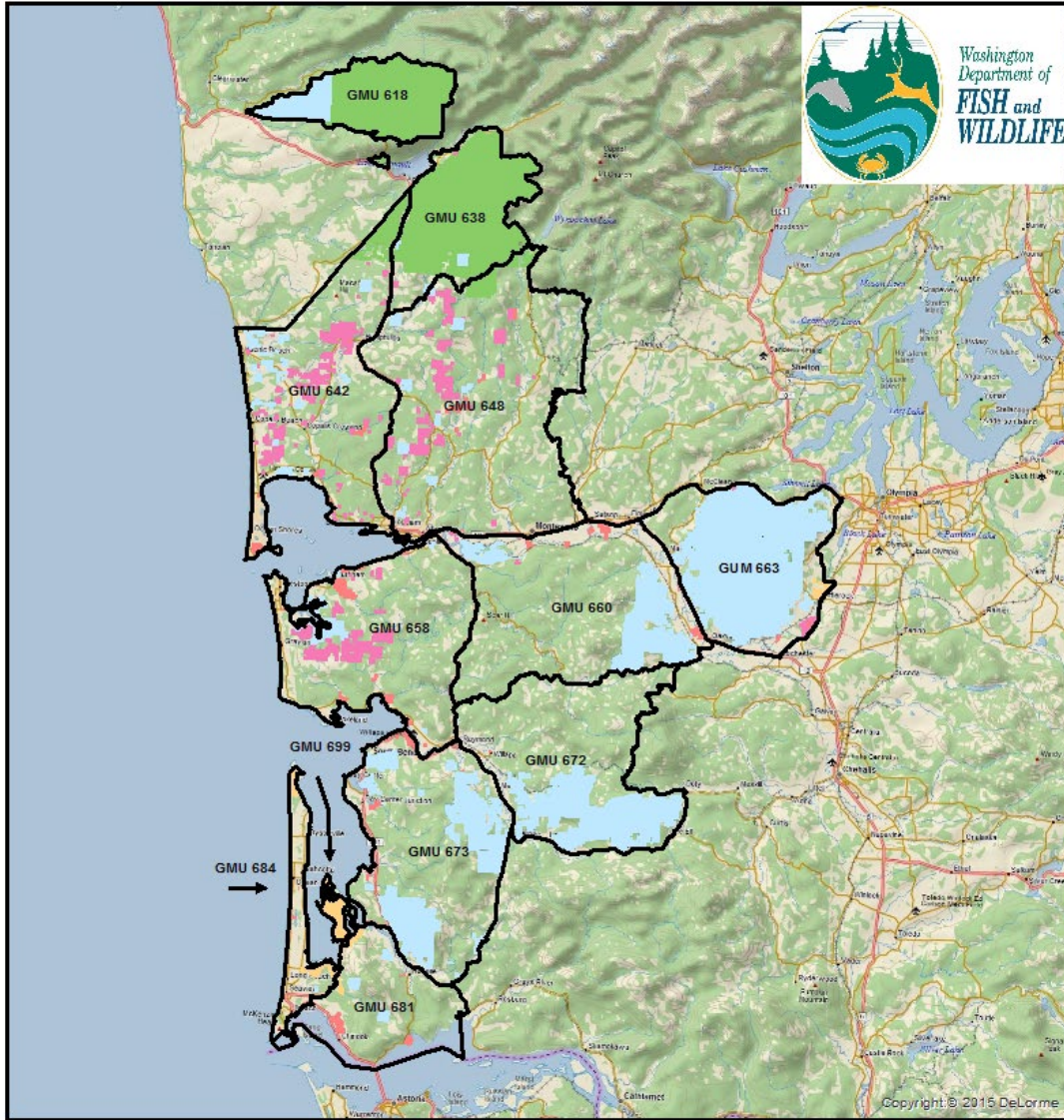
District 17 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities. However, public land opportunities do exist on lands administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), WDFW, and Grays Harbor County.

GMUs with the greatest amount of public land include 618, 638, and 663. Large tracts of DNR-managed lands also occur in GMUs 660, 672, and 673. The USFWS Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occurs in portions of GMUs 681 and 684. GMU 699 is an island, and the entire GMU is part of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

Most of all other public land opportunities in District 17 occur primarily on WDFW wildlife areas or on lands managed by Pacific and Grays Harbor counties. For more information related to the location of WDFW wildlife areas, visit [WDFW's hunting access website](#). For more information on resources available to locate public lands please reference the Online Tools and Maps section below.

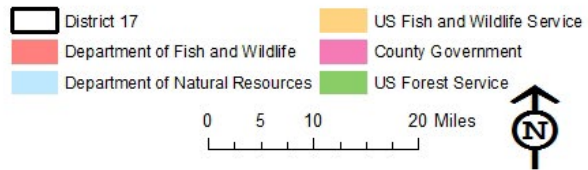
District 17:

Major Public Lands



Disclaimer

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Location of public lands open to public access within each GMU of District 17.

PRIVATE INDUSTRIAL FORESTLANDS

GENERAL INFORMATION

Most hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, occur on private industrial forestlands. Timber companies that own large tracts of land and are the most well-known include Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Hancock, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global. However, hunters should be aware that there are many other smaller timber companies with operations in District 17.

WDFW recognizes that some great hunting opportunities occur on private industrial forestlands and works cooperatively with private timber companies to maintain reasonable public access during established hunting seasons. Private industrial forestlands have always been open for public access, but hunters should always remember they are being granted access to private property and access to that property is a privilege.

There has been an increasing trend of timber companies restricting public access and shifting toward a permit system to limit the number of hunters that hunt on their lands. One of the primary reasons for access restrictions and the loss of access is hunter disrespect of the landowner rules. When hunting on private industrial forest lands, WDFW reminds hunters to remember the following:

HUNTING ON PRIVATE LANDS IS A PRIVILEGE, SO TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT

- Obey Posted Signs
- Leave Gates As You Found Them
- Pack Out Trash
- Be Courteous

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT ACCESS FOR THE 2022 SEASON

There are a variety of fee access programs in place, and they vary by area and by company. However, all current programs at the time of this writing fall into three general categories: permit-unlimited, permit-limited, and leases. These fees will also apply to all other outdoor recreational activities, including hiking, camping, mountain biking, and fishing. General descriptions of these three programs are as follows:

Permit-Unlimited: Hunters will be required to purchase an access permit, but there will be an unlimited number of permits available. Only holders of a valid permit will be allowed to recreate in areas associated with the permit.

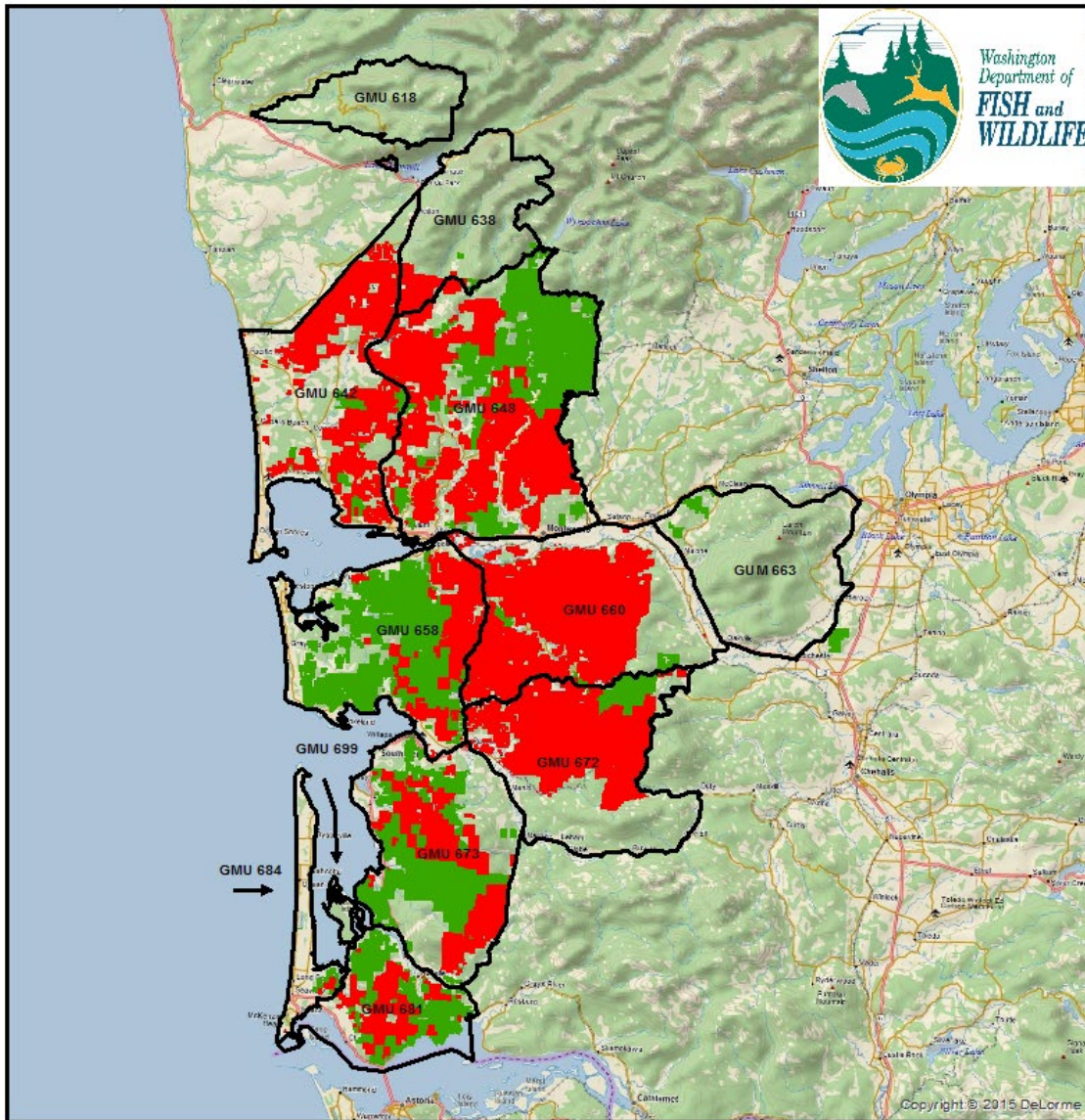
Permit-Limited: There will be a set number of permits available on a first come, first served basis. Only people who have secured one of the limited permits will be allowed to recreate in areas associated with that permit. Permit cost is anticipated to be several hundred dollars. Weyerhaeuser implemented this type of system was implemented by in their Pe Ell Unit (GMUs 672 and 506) during the 2013 season.

Leases: Designated tracts of land are leased to an individual or groups of individuals, and only the lessee and their families are allowed to access that track of land. The cost of a lease can be several thousand dollars.

Hunters need to be aware that many timber companies are charging these access fees in areas where they have historically offered free access. Consequently, it is very important that hunters take the time to contact landowners in areas where they plan to hunt, so they know whether the company's access policy for that area has changed.

The following map represents areas in District 17 where WDFW knows timber companies will be requiring a fee to recreate on their property. However, the broad implementation of access programs by several timber companies since the 2013 season has been a very dynamic process that always seems to be changing. It is important to highlight that the map represents what has been presented to WDFW as of August 4, 2017. It is very possible that some of the areas presented as free access (green) could become fee access (red) areas by the time hunting seasons begin on September 1. Thus, hunters should use this map as a general reference and should understand it is ultimately their responsibility to contact the appropriate timber company to determine how hunter access will be managed in the areas they plan to hunt.

District 17: Private Forest Lands Access



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-  District 17
-  Private Forest Lands - Fee Access
-  Private Forest Lands - Free Access

0 5 10 20 Miles



Private timber company ownership in District 17, including free access (dark green) and permit and fee required (red) lands. The map represents data available on Aug. 4, 2017, and may change at any time.

BASIC ACCESS RULES

Specific rules related to hunter access on private industrial forestlands vary by company. WDFW encourages hunters to make sure they are aware of the rules in areas they plan to hunt. Most timber companies provide these rules on signs at access points (gates), on their website (if they use one for public communication) or will provide them to hunters who call to inquire about access (see below for contact information). However, WDFW encourages hunters to follow some basic rules if they find themselves in an area, they are unfamiliar with and are in doubt about specific landowner criteria. The following are intended to be general guidelines of the basic access rules that are commonplace on many private industrial forestlands. Timber companies may have restrictive rules in place, and it is ultimately the responsibility of hunters to make sure they are familiar with those rules.

- ✓ Respect the landowner and other users.
- ✓ Read and obey all posted signs.
- ✓ A logging road without a sign does not mean it is open for public access.
- ✓ Drive slowly with headlights turned on when driving on roads opened to public access.
- ✓ Avoid areas of active timber harvests.
- ✓ No camping, littering, off-road-vehicles (ORVs), off-road driving, target shooting, or forest product removals.
- ✓ An open gate does not mean the road is open to public motorized access.
- ✓ Gate closures apply to all motorized vehicles including motorcycles and quads. This includes vehicles with electric motors that propel or assist the rider.
- ✓ Private forest lands are usually closed to public access during hours of darkness.

All users of private forest lands need to be aware that failure to obey landowner rules can result in prosecution for trespassing and or even a *persona non grata* from the landowner.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ACCESS ALLOWED BY MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Hancock: Hancock industrial forestlands have different levels of access based on management areas. All Hancock industrial forestlands in GMUs 658, 673, and 681 are only open to non-motorized access. During modern firearm seasons, they will open some key main lines to disperse hunters and allow access to interior areas.

Rayonier: Rayonier currently has three levels of access: seasonal permit, recreational lease, and general permit access. For seasonal permit and recreational lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to access rules established by Rayonier. Areas under general permit access require the purchase of a permit from the company. District 17 GMUs with Rayonier lands include 638, 642, 648, 658, 673, and 681. Maps and other information are available on their website.

Forest Investment Associates (FIA): FIA owns large blocks (more than 30,000 acres) of former Rayonier land primarily in Pacific County (GMUs 673 and 658) with some parcels in Grays Harbor County. FIA will respect leases and permits associated with those Rayonier lands. Other FIA lands are open for hunting. AFM manages the permit system for much of the FIA holdings.

Green Diamond: Green Diamond manages hunter access using the dot system and posts access rules at their gates. All of their lands in District 17 are currently open to non-motorized public access. As hunting seasons approach, they will usually begin opening additional roads to public access if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Green Diamond ownership are 642, 648, 658, and 660.

Campbell Global: Campbell Global uses the dot system to manage hunter access and posts access rules at their gates. As hunting season approaches, Campbell Global will normally open some roads to motorized access for the hunting seasons if fire danger is low. District 17 GMUs with Campbell Global-managed timberlands are 648, 658, 672, 673, and 681.

Weyerhaeuser: Weyerhaeuser currently has three levels of access in District 17: general access permit areas, enhanced permit areas, and lease areas. For permit and lease areas, access is only allowed for the permit and/or lease holder and is subject to rules established by Weyerhaeuser. District 17 GMUs with Weyerhaeuser ownership are 648, 658, 660, and 672.

The Nature Conservancy: The Nature Conservancy owns more than 6,000 acres in Pacific County in GMU 681. There is open walk-in access during most of season. Vehicles are not allowed.

SPECIAL NOTICE FOR ARCHERY AND MUZZLELOADER HUNTERS

Private timber companies have traditionally opened their lands to modern firearm hunters during established seasons. Archery and muzzleloader hunters should be aware they may not have full access, particularly vehicle access. Access levels change and can vary by season, year, or landowner. Most often, access is influenced by industrial fire classification issued by DNR. Hunters are urged to respect the landowners and adhere to any access restrictions the landowners have implemented.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE “DOT” SYSTEM

Several timber companies in District 17 use the dot system. Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Green Diamond, and Campbell Global all use this system. The dot system is a system of colored dots posted at the start of a road to indicate what level of access is allowed beyond that point. It is intended to give the public a clear understanding of what roads are open to public motorized access.

Normally under the dot system, access is granted for daylight hours only. Landowners usually understand that some hunters will go in an hour or so early to get to their hunting areas and sometimes they may come out a little late. Hunters should always stop and read signs. While

several landowners use the dot system, they all have their own minor differences. In some cases, landowners will close gates in the evenings to prevent unauthorized access.

- Red Dot – no motorized access
- Yellow Dot – Motorized access on weekends only
- Green Dot – Motorized access for licensed vehicles on maintained roads
- No Dot – Some landowners use this, and it means the same as a red dot.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR MAJOR TIMBER COMPANIES

Some landowners have hotlines and/or websites where hunters can find information about public access. However, many of these landowners do not have staff members dedicated to answering hunter questions. Hunters are encouraged to call the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to public access on private industrial forest lands.

Timber Company	GMUs	Phone Number
Hancock (<i>no website</i>)	658, 673, 681	1-360-795-3653
Hancock	Various other GMUs	1-800-782-1493
Rayonier	Various	1-360-533-7000
Green Diamond	Various	1-360-426-3381
Weyerhaeuser	Various	1-800-636-6531
Forest Investment Associates	658, 673	404-261-9575
Grays Harbor County	642, 648, 658	<i>No phone number</i>
Olympic Resource Management	642, 648, 658, 673	<i>No phone number</i>
Lewis and Clark Timberlands	684	<i>No phone number</i>

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

One of the most common questions the Department gets from hunters is, “what is hunter access like in the GMU I want to hunt?”. Generally, this question is referring to the amount of motorized access and not access in general. It is important to differentiate the two, because hunters enjoy a high level of access in all District 17 GMUs. However, the type of access varies between motorized and non-motorized access.

The Department developed the following rating system for District 17 GMUs to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they are thinking of hunting. Access ratings are specific to the level of motorized access allowed and does not refer to the level of access in general. Several GMUs have some type of fee access areas that grant the permit or lease holders a higher level of access. The following ratings are based on a hunter not having a lease or permit.

More information about each rating is available below:

- **Excellent** – Most, if not all, of the main logging roads are open, as well as most of the spur roads.
- **Good** – There is a mix of open and closed roads, with some main logging roads open, but many of the spur roads are closed to motorized access.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is closed to motorized access but may be open to non-motorized access.

Information provided is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Information is updated when available. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) if they have questions related to hunter access that have not been answered.

GMU 618 (MATHENEY) – ACCESS RATING: EXCELLENT

GMU 618 is dominated by federal lands included in the Olympic National Forest. The minority of land not managed by the USFS is under state management via the DNR.

GMU 638 (QUINAULT RIDGE) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

The majority of GMU 638 is associated with the Olympic National Forest and managed by USFS. There are numerous small landowners in areas outside of the national forest. Much of the more productive areas of this GMU are private lands not considered industrial forest lands. The Quinault Valley is not recommended for hunters who are not familiar with landownership boundaries. Rayonier also has some signed recreational lease areas.

GMU 642 (COPALIS) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

The primary landowner in this GMU is Rayonier. They have recreational lease, seasonal permit, and general access areas in this GMU.

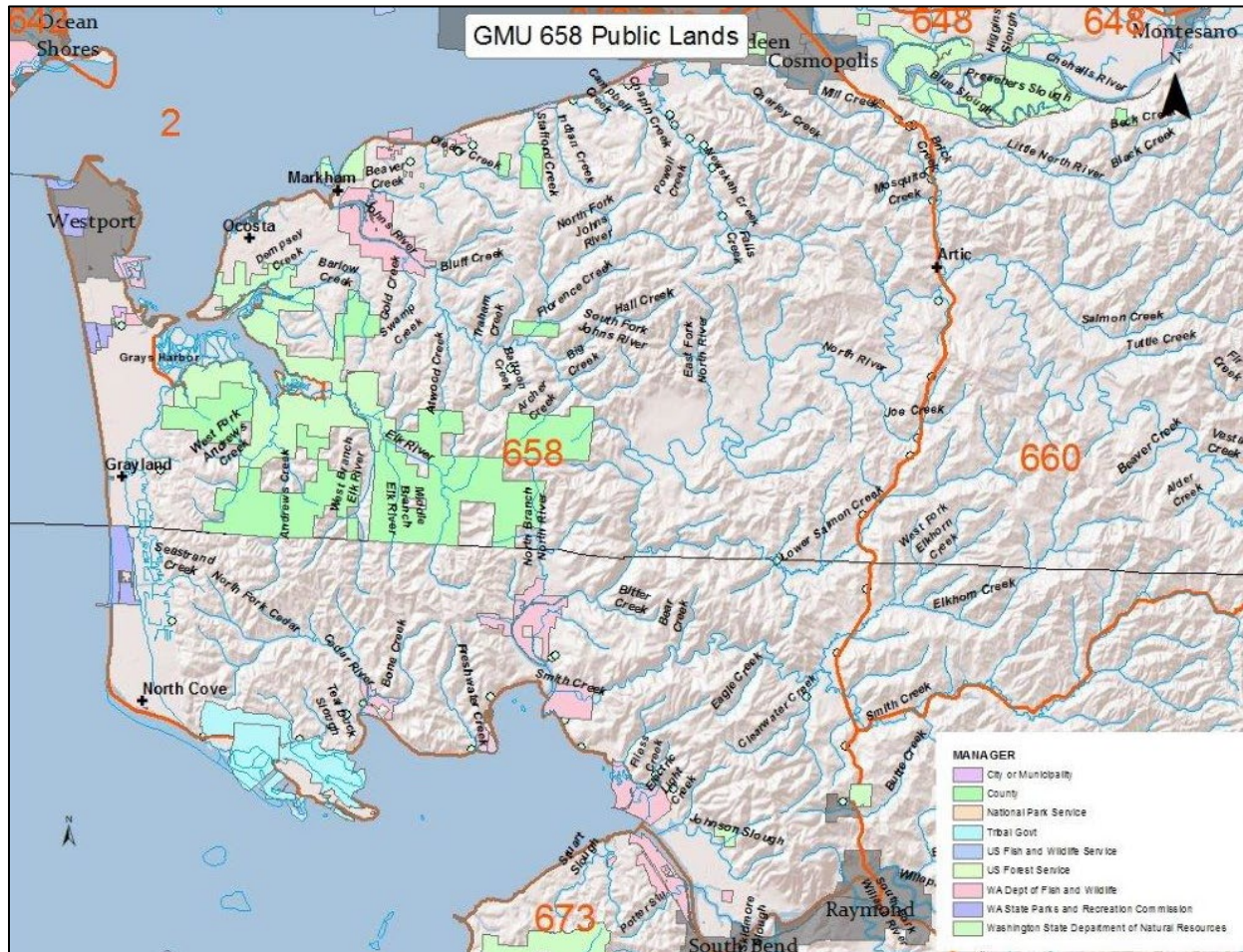
GMU 648 (WYNOOCHEE) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

Overall, GMU 648 consists mostly of private industrial forestlands, but there are also several smaller landowners. Primary landowners in GMU 648 include Weyerhaeuser, Rayonier, Green Diamond, Fruit Growers, Grays Harbor County, and Campbell Global. A portion of the GMU comprises the Hoquiam and Aberdeen watersheds, which are closed to all public access. In addition, several landowners have a cooperative road management agreement with WDFW. Hunters should be advised to read and follow all posted signs. Rayonier has a few leased access areas in this GMU signed. Most Rayonier lands in this GMU are managed under their general access program.

GMU 658 (NORTH RIVER) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

Primary landowners in GMU 658 are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, Grays Harbor County, Campbell Global, Green Diamond, and DNR). Overall, access is good but will vary among landowners. The majority of Hancock property will be gated, but some main logging roads will be open during the general modern firearm season. DNR lands in this GMU are surrounded by private forest lands but are accessible by non-motorized access across private timberlands. Many of the landowners surrounding the public lands will open gates for reasonable access to public lands for hunting seasons once fire seasons are over. Rayonier has some recreation leases and general access areas in this GMU. Access to Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU is restricted to permit and lease holders.

Note – WDFW recently added 1,500 acres to the Elk River Unit just south of Westport and east of Twin Harbors State Park. These lands are not yet included in the following map.



GMU 660 (MINOT PEAK) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

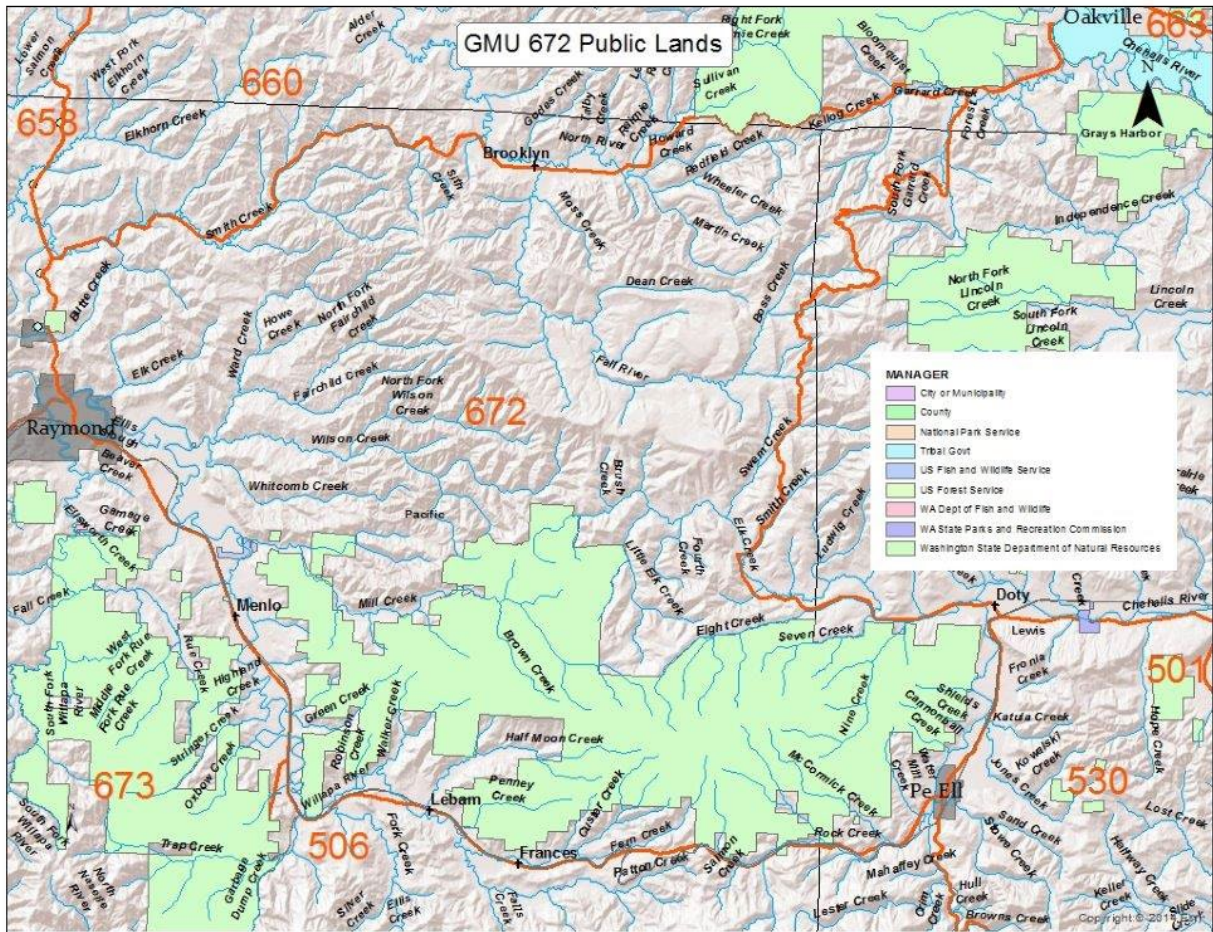
The primary landowner in GMU 660 is Weyerhaeuser. All its lands in this GMU are managed under their general access permit program. A small portion of this GMU is owned by DNR. To prevent elk from being pressured onto farms in the Chehalis Valley, motorized access is limited on DNR-managed lands.

GMU 663 (CAPITOL PEAK) – ACCESS RATING: EXCELLENT

The majority (more than 80%) of GMU 663 is owned and managed by DNR, and most roads are open to motorized access during the modern firearm deer season. This area also has ORV trails. Hunters are advised to make sure they read and adhere to all posted rules.

GMU 672 (FALL RIVER) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

The primary landowners in GMU 672 are Weyerhaeuser and DNR. All Weyerhaeuser lands in this GMU are only accessible to permits holders.



GMU 673 (WILLIAMS CREEK) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

Access in this GMU is quite variable and depends on the landowners. Primary private timberland owners are Hancock, Forest Investment Associates (FIA), Hampton, and Campbell Global. DNR also owns large tracts of land. In most areas, Hancock will limit access to only include non-motorized but will open a few of the main logging roads during the general modern firearm season to disperse hunters and allow some interior access. FIA has recreational lease and fee access areas in this GMU available through the [American Forest Management company](#).

GMU 681 (BEAR RIVER) – ACCESS RATING: GOOD

Hunters can expect a lower level of access than in the past. The dot system is used by some owners, but it is not consistent because of the checkerboard ownership. Primary private landowners are Hancock, Rayonier, Weyerhaeuser, and The Nature Conservancy. Rayonier has some leased lands in this GMU and some general permit access areas. Portions of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 681, and hunters planning to hunt on refuge lands

should [contact the refuge](#) before doing so, as special regulations do apply in some areas. Hunters can also call the refuge at 360-484-3482. Nature Conservancy lands are open to hunting, but motorized access is restricted. Weyerhaeuser has recreational lease and permit access areas in this GMU.

GMU 684 (LONG BEACH) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

Except for Leadbetter Point, the majority of this GMU consists of private property. Hunters are advised to make sure they have permission to access private property before they actively hunt in GMU 684. Portions of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge occur in GMU 684, and hunters planning to hunt on refuge lands should [contact the refuge](#) beforehand or call 360-484-3482, as special hunting regulations apply.

[Lewis and Clark Timberlands](#) owns some property in the unit. Access is allowed via a no-cost permit.

GMU 699 (LONG ISLAND) – ACCESS RATING: POOR

The entire GMU is owned and managed by the USFWS. Access is by boat only, but camping is allowed in designated areas. Hunters should contact the [Willapa National Wildlife Refuge](#) for more details or call 360-484-3482.

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

There are several private landowners in District 17 enrolled in WDFW's Private Lands Access Program. However, at the time of this writing, cooperative agreements with these landowners have not been finalized. Most landowners are expected to renew their cooperative agreements for the 2021 hunting season. Hunters are encouraged to check [WDFW's Hunter Access website](#) or call the Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) to periodically check for updated information.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 17 are a checkerboard of ownerships, and it can be challenging to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. Fortunately, there are several online tools and resources available. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources:

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES PUBLIC LANDS QUADRANGLE (PLQ) MAPS

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands is [DNR PLQ maps](#), which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website.

ONLINE PARCEL DATABASES

Hunters can search Pacific County tax parcels using [Mapsifter](#), which is a user-friendly mapping program that allows users to zoom in to their area of interest, click on a parcel, and identify who owns that parcel.

Hunters can search Grays Harbor tax parcels on the [Grays Harbor County website](#).

Private industry has downloadable mobile applications, which can be user friendly and highly functional when afield.

WDFWS "PLACES TO GO HUNTING"

WDFW's updated web page includes additional information on "[places to go hunting](#)". This page provides additional information on various hunting opportunities including large format printable GMU maps.