

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

March 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. Dingman investigated a mortality signal from a GPS-collared ewe and determined it was a mountain lion kill.

Golden Eagles: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman continued monitoring golden eagle nests to determine if the eagles were incubating eggs yet. Dongman also got lucky and found the Hartsock golden eagle nest in a cliff band.

Prairie Grouse Lek Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe are conducting annual sage and sharp-tailed grouse lek surveys and searches. Currently there is still one active sage grouse lek in District 2, but only two males have been observed so far. Two sharp-tailed grouse leks have birds dancing already. Other leks are not showing much activity, but it is still early in the season for sharp-tails.



Male sage grouse dancing on lek in Lincoln County

Washington Ground Squirrels Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe started the first set of surveys of the 18 squirrel grid cells in District 2. Each grid cell is 400m by 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 started running the annual raven and raptor surveys around Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

New Fire Rings Installed at Grande Ronde Access Sites: Access Area Manager Heimgartner installed new fire rings at the Faha and Pine Bar access sites along the lower Grande Ronde River.

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area – Campgrounds: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman and Natural Resource Worker Jensen continued to clean up litter in the campgrounds. Jensen cleaned out the fire rings and burned pine needles in the campgrounds.

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area – Lakes: Natural Resource Worker Jensen checked the lakes daily and kept the fish screens clear of debris. Jensen also cleaned up trash around the lakes.

Recreation and Conservation Office Grants – Land Acquisition and State Lands

Development: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman began 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. Dingham also assisted Access Technician Heimgartner with creating detailed maps for the RCO Grant proposal to create two designated campgrounds and install five vault toilets on the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Elk Salt and Lands/Facilities: Biologist Woodall, Technician Meisner, and Herder/Hazer Technicians worked this week to put out salt blocks across Asotin Creek Wildlife Area sites where the elk would typically use them. Most salt from last year was consumed. They had some snow issues to contend with and could not make it to a couple of areas but will try again in a week or so. There was a black wolf spotted on Smoothing Iron not far from a recent elk kill. A trail cam was hung nearby with some carcass bait. They also measured to confirm the Boss Big Game Guzzler water collection mat size so another can be ordered with plans to have Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation volunteer members rebuild the burned guzzler.



Waist-high snow drift across the road to an upper field. Black color is soot and dirt being blown around from last summer's Lick Creek Fire



Boss Big-game guzzler collection mat burned after fire

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Powerline Issues on Asotin Creek Wildlife Area: Wildlife Area Manager Dice was contacted by Clearwater Power Company about their intent to replace a snapped off pole on a remote ridge at Smoothing Iron. The line supplies power to our buildings at Smoothing Iron had to be immediately replaced. Unfortunately, that meant Clearwater had to enter the winter closure area with Cats and backhoes to reach the pole. We are concerned about soil damage and other issues when we learned they brought in a dozer to extricate a stuck backhoe.

RCO Grant – State Lands Restoration: Assistant Wildlife Area Manager Dingman is working with Tri-State Steelheaders and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation on an RCO Grant proposal for a restoration project on the Sweogle Unit of the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area.

Chief Joseph Wildlife Area Spring Work: Wildlife Area staff members have been readying tractors and other equipment to prepare for spring work which includes application of herbicides for preparing fields for planting and noxious weed control. Technician Stallcop has our new tractor prepared and ready for work on Bonneville Power Administration project lands.

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area Burned Areas Rehabilitation: Biologist Woodall has been working on grass seed orders for reseeding lower elevation areas burned by the Lick Creek Fire. Woodall has also been working with agency Foresters to select and implement tree planting operations at Weatherly, Lick Creek, and Smoothing Iron.

Volunteer Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Work Party Set for End of April: Volunteers from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) will gather at Smoothing Iron Ridge at the end of April for a work party to repair a fire damaged big-game guzzler and numerous small guzzlers. Parts and materials have been ordered and will be moved on-site prior to volunteers arriving on site. The volunteers will also service and cleanup water troughs and roll up fire-damaged fencing. RMEF staff members are planning on attending to film volunteers at work for a documentary.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Winter Maintenance and Training: Wildlife Area staff members have been performing winter maintenance on equipment and vehicles in preparation for spring work. Staff members have also been participating in pesticide license recertification training and other winter learning opportunities.

Natural Resource Technician Vacancy: Biologist Woodall had a meeting with Human Resources to review a position description, fix some minor issues, and submit up to the appointing authority for approval. A recruitment specialist should now be in touch for the running of the position announcement.

First Aid Training: WDFW safety office staff members conducted a first aid training for Wildlife Area staff members on Monday, March 14. They did an excellent job, and we appreciate them making the trip to Clarkston to assist us with training.

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Conflict Specialist Wetzel recovered several radio collared deer mortalities. Most were cougar predation events in the same locations where other collared deer had died in previous years.



Predation event very close to the same type of mortality location last year



Another collared deer mortality, again very close to a location of one last year

Bald Eagle Sighting: While checking an elk fence crossing, Conflict Specialist Wetzel observed a bald eagle showing signs of illness or injury. The eagle was still active and will be checked again to determine if it needs to be brought to a rehabilitation facility.



Eagle with signs of illness, but still head up and alert

Wood Duck Nest Box Maintenance: Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin recently met with Richland Rod and Gun Club members and performed annual maintenance on wood duck nest boxes throughout the Sunnyside Wildlife Area Sunnyside Unit. Several boxes that had not been maintained for many years were restored and brought back to serviceable condition, and several new boxes were installed on the Sunnyside and Byron units.



Natural Resource Technician Wascisin with a western screech owl

L.T. Murray Fence Inventory: Natural Resource Technician Blore scouted fence lines on the Whiskey Dick Unit of the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area to take an inventory on what needs to be repaired or removed.



A section of fence on the Whiskey Dick that is down with the material yet to be removed

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Waterfowl Viewing: Waterfowl are very easy to find within the Sunnyside, Windmill, and Mesa units of the Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area. Agriculture fields are being utilized by sandhill cranes, snow geese, and white-fronted geese. The wetlands of these units are a great place to observe various duck species like pintail, northern shovelers, widgeon, and mallards.



Snow geese and whitefront geese foraging near the Windmill Ranch headquarters

Plant Viewing: Despite the recent cool weather, people are still accessing the lower elevations of the Colockum to view flowering native plants. Some are especially showy, such as the snowball or hedgehog cactus shown below.



Hedgehog cactus flowering this spring on Brewton Ridge, Colockum Wildlife Area

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Moving Elk: Wildlife Conflict Technician Leuck and Conflict Specialist Wetzel moved some elk that have begun to move in or near crop fields. The cool and dry weather has slowed elk movements from two weeks ago.

Leuck also repaired several elk fence locations and moved elk back to the west side of the fence at several Yakima County locations. Wetzel checked fences and gates at several locations in Yakima County.

Rattlesnake Hills Elk Monitoring: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand met with wheat producers to discuss elk activity near Hanford's southern boundary. Although hundreds of elk can be observed at mid elevation on Rattlesnake Mountain, none have been reported outside the National Monument. With wheat crops beginning to be more vigorous, more attention to elk activity in the crops will occur to minimize crop damage.

Aggressive and Nuisance Coyotes: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand responded to two complaints concerning coyotes. In Pasco, a concerned landowner called to get information on removing an aggressive coyote that had fought with her dog, creating the need for over 40 stitches. The landowner also reported the coyote has very little fear of vehicles, horses, or people. In Kennewick, a landowner called regarding increasing numbers of coyotes being observed on his and neighboring properties. One neighbor was reported to have lost three baby goats recently. In both cases, preventive measures were discussed as well as utilizing Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators, hunters, and acoustic and motion activated hazing devices.

Pasco Deer: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to coordinate youth hunters for a large tree fruit operation near the Snake River who is experiencing tree damage to a newly planted block of cherry trees. One youth hunter off the Region 3 Youth Permit was able to harvest a deer.



Region 3 Youth Hunter

GIS Route Inventory: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff members worked on confirming roads with the WDFW GIS route data tool.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Wenas Hoover Acquisition: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes met with a landowner and multiple parties representing the landowner to continue to work on final steps for the Hoover Acquisition. Hughes met with a contractor to give him a tour of the area being purchased so he could complete an environmental assessment. The cattle crossing idea has changed and the landowner will now be crossing cattle throughout her retained property only.



Hoover Acquisition to be added to the Wenas Wildlife Area early Summer 2022

Wenas Bonneville Power Administration Habitat Projects: Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes and Assistant Manager Taylor checked on several areas of the eastern portion of the Wenas. They devised a strategy for prioritizing needs for future road work as funding allows. Roza fields and a field off Bull Pasture Loop were visited and they came up with a plan for enhancing each area. Bull Pasture has a section over 130 acres that is currently going through a two-year fallow due it being fully taken over by cheatgrass and bulbous bluegrass. Hughes began chemical fallowing the area last fall. A section of Roza, approximately 30 acres, will be fallowed this spring and be inter-seeded with native grasses in the fall of 2023. Hughes will continue to check the areas this spring and will line out aerial spraying soon for each field.



Bull Pasture Field beginning restoration work. Starting chemical fallow for seeding Fall 2023

Wenas Fire Prevention and Weed Control: Wenas Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Taylor and Biologist Daling worked on fuel reduction of Russian thistle at the Sheep Company Shooting Range and along the elk fence west of Sheep Company. After the buildup of Russian thistle and chaff is reduced, each area will be sprayed with a residual mix of herbicide. The thistle and additional vegetation here are a fire concern and they put additional stress onto the elk fence if not managed.

Sunnyside Native Grass and Forbes Seeding: Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin have been busy seeding mixes of native grass and forbs into areas that have been infested with kochia, teasle, poison hemlock, knapweeds and other invasives in recent years. Using a no-till seed drill borrowed from the Klickitat Conservation District, the two have seeded approximately 50 acres over the past couple of weeks. With recent spring rains, staff members hope to get the grasses growing and follow up with a broadleaf weed treatment when the invasives begin growing back.



No-till seed drill



Seeded rows using no-till method

Sagebrush Restoration: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber and Assistant Manager Rodgers have been busy planting Sagebrush within the Esquatzel Unit. A fire in the fall of 2020 burned most of the sagebrush in the unit. Approximately 2,500 gallon-sized plants will be planted using a skid steer ASV with auger attachment.



ASV with auger attachment used for shallow holes to plant sagebrush



Assistant Manager Rodgers planting sagebrush

L.T. Murray Habitat Restoration: Assistant Manager Winegeart and Natural Resource Technician Blore applied herbicide, harrowed, and re-seeded the Hell's Kitchen restoration site on the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area.



Hell's Kitchen restoration site on the Whiskey Dick WLA: pre-spray and seeding



Hell's Kitchen three-acre restoration project

Vantage Highway Fire Restoration: L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Winegeart evaluated the 23 acres that burned during the Vantage Highway Fire in 2021. The burn area will be chemically treated with a low glyphosate application to kill emerging cheatgrass and set back the bulbous bluegrass to give the native grass seed from the fall 2021 seeding a fighting chance this growing season.



23-acre Vantage Highway Fire restoration

L.T. Murray Seeding Projects: Natural Resource Technicians Nass and Blore seeded slash piles that were burned last fall on the Brain property, which is now part of the LT. Murray.

Colockum Creek Prescribed Fire Project: The WDFW Prescribed Burn Program Crew members were scheduled to arrive on the Colockum Wildlife Area the week of April 11, but a late season snowstorm changed the plans. Crews were planning on freshening up fire breaks and start laying water lines in preparation for this spring burn treatment. Twelve inches of wet snow will delay this project.



Access road to a Colockum Creek Prescribed Fire Unit

Colockum Wildlife Area Road Maintenance: WDFW has been coordinating with the Department of Natural Resources and the Chelan County Natural Resources Department on upcoming road improvement work. The Department Of Natural Resources is planning a timber harvest in the Stemilt Basin and will be upgrading roads across WDFW and Chelan County ownerships to be used as log hauling routes. The road work was scheduled to begin April 18, but the recent late snow has pushed that back. Assistant Manager Hagan did print and post signs alerting the public to the upcoming road work.



Signs posted on the Upper Basin Loop Road alerting public to “imminent” road improvement work, Colockum Wildlife Area

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Region 3 Wildlife Area Manager's Meeting: Manager Kaelber, Assistant Manager Ferguson, and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin recently hosted a Region 3 wildlife area manager's meeting at the Sunnyside Unit. They took managers and staff members from other regional wildlife areas on a tour of the wetlands at Sunnyside and discussed some of the successes and challenges of this unit. The tour ended with lunch and a sit-down meeting in the shop building.



Region 3 Sunnyside Wildlife Area managers discussing wetland management

L.T. Murray Business Operations: All staff members completed the WDFW iPhone/iPad migration, and our new natural resources technician began the process for receiving an agency P-card. Wildlife Area Manager Bates worked on submitting the Cultural Resources Reviews for three Yakama Nation restoration projects and one Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) project. She also continued to work on the land classification pilot project for the L.T. Murray.

Other

Cougar Fall: A local resident on a walk noticed a dead cougar on the edge of a road and notified WDFW. Officer Nasset and Conflict Specialist Wetzel located an adult male and subadult female cougar. Both appeared to have fallen off a cliff during a fight.



Location where two cougars were found after they fell from this cliff



Two cougars recovered from bottom of cliff after natural mortality event

REGION 6

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Dusky Goose and Satsop Elk: Technician Martenson assisted with dusky Canada goose surveys in Grays Harbor County and surveyed for elk activity in the Satsop area. District staff members attempted to capture a pair of elk from the localized herd to attach a GPS-collar but were unable to get within range of darting. Further efforts will be postponed until after calving has occurred.

Oregon Spotted Frog Surveys: District 11 has concluded Oregon spotted frog surveys and egg collection for the genetics study. The season was twice as long as normal due to cold and warm snaps, weeks of no rain, and weeks of too much rain. This doubled the staff members' time needed to conduct surveys and collect eggs. Thankfully, all known locations that were active in 2021 had some level of activity again in 2022 with some sites having more egg masses and some having less. Tirhi and Butler conducted a last-minute rescue of eggs at the Salmon Creek oviposition site where an egg cluster was stranded in the middle of a dry field with no connection to deep water channels for out-migrating tadpoles. Tirhi and Butler dug a trench to enable connection.



Biologists Tirhi and Butler completed collection of eggs for the 2022 spotted frog genetics study at all assigned locations with the exception of two on which the landowners would not allow access. One egg is collected per egg mass; the total number of eggs collected is dependent on the size of the population in that drainage



Left: Biologist Butler digging a trench from an Oregon spotted frog egg cluster lacking any water connectivity to deep water channels for tadpoles to migrate out. Right: Completed channel to deeper water wetland to the south, Salmon Creek, Thurston County

Purple Martin Nest Boxes: Biologist Tirhi arranged a staff/volunteer work party to improve 16 martin boxes made by the Sequim High School Future Farmers of America Club. WDFW is grateful for the effort made by this club and their teacher. The boxes were fantastic but needed some slight modifications to make them safe and usable for martins. This included sanding rough PVC edges, fixing the entrance hole size, cutting other sharp edges on the outside of the box, adding some predator guards, and widening the spacing between the boxes on each platform. Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium (PDZA) partners Hines and Hawn generously provided labor and support; PDZA collaborates with WDFW on a volunteer martin monitoring program.

Through that program, volunteers are trained to collect data each season at active martin colonies, including the site these boxes will be deployed. We also thank Montgomery with the WDFW Hunter Education Program for his assistance with making this project happen including supplies, equipment, and labor. Thanks also to the Chambers Bay Regional Park for the allowance to deploy these boxes and replace others that have since deteriorated. To learn more about martins visit <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/progne-subis-arboricola>.



Sixteen purple martin boxes with final modifications ready to be deployed at the Chambers Bay Regional Park

Streaked Horned Lark and Airports Working Group: Biologist Tirhi represented District 11 at the annual Oregon/Washington working group meeting. The meeting included the following topics: Oregon airports having larks update, Washington airports having larks update, Federal Aviation Administration and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) coordination on programmatic Biological Assessment/Biological Opinion for maintenance of airports having larks, USFWS proposed rule status update, USFWS federal lark recovery plan update (on hold), research, Best Management Practice finalization, and more. Oregon and Washington are discussing having one combined meeting per year rather than the traditional state-specific meeting held twice.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Long Lake, Kitsap County: The water access team performed a variety of different projects aside from normal site maintenance. Team members Walker and Reeves, with help from two local volunteers, cut down a blackberry patch roughly 10 x 175 feet on a hill that parallels to the property boundary. This area had been overgrown for years and the fence behind was exposed for a much-needed makeover. The team will use a variety of methods to keep the blackberries from regrowing.

Before



After



North Bay, Mason County: The Access team repaired the gate post at North Bay after it was damaged by a vehicle. With the use of a tractor, two come-alongs, a little onsite ingenuity, and ten bags of concrete, the gate post is plumb and useable.



Chimacum Creek Unit, Jefferson County: The Access crew removed the remnants of a homeless encampment on DFW lands near Port Townsend in the Chimacum Creek Unit. Freimund, Reeves, and Walker disassembled, collected and disposed of a full truck and trailer load of trash and debris from this camp and nearby locations within the wildlife area. In an effort to avoid future camps, dumping and illegal tree cutting, barrier rocks were placed to block vehicle access. WDFW regulatory signs were posted to inform users, aid Enforcement, and to encourage foot access at this particular access point.



Also on the Chimacum Unit, Program Manager Calkins worked with Jefferson County Parks and Road Departments to make repairs to the parking area at Irondale Beach. WDFW and Jefferson County share this location with each agency owning lands accessed from this point. The potholes in this parking lot had grown so large they had become a hazard for small vehicles.



Irondale Access after repairs

Kapowsin Lake, Pierce County: The Region 6 Water Access crew teamed up with Region 4 Water Access crew members Derek Hacker and John Evans for a joint effort project. Region 6 water access hopes to have numerous future projects with Region 4 this spring and other regions in the coming months. Shown below is some of the work performed at Kapowsin Lake. Region 6 and Region 4 crews addressed encroaching blackberries and hardwoods that bounded the entryway, parking, and walking areas. A second visit is soon to be scheduled for Kapowsin and nearby sites.

Before



Hardwoods

After



Blackberries



Other Work Performed: Access staff members received a new riding mower and box scraper attachment to improve performance and expand our capabilities of access site maintenance. Staff members also acquired a surplus truck from Capital Asset Management Program to bridge the gap while waiting for a new service truck. Team member Reeves has been working on position descriptions for upcoming recruitments, attending meetings on current and future access site redevelopments, scheduling restroom septic services, coordinating with volunteers for projects and preparing suggestions for potential Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grant applications.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Tree Planting Volunteer Event: Biologist Novack and Wildlife Area Manager Bechtold hosted a tree planting event with eight volunteers from the state chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) at the John's River Wildlife Area - Elk River Unit, near Westport. The RGS volunteers planted approximately 800 trees from a mix of cascara, ash, hemlock, and shore pine. The RGS not only provided the planting labor for this project, but they also purchased the seedlings as well. Plantings were placed in areas recently cleared of invasive Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry.

This event marks the end of tree planting efforts for the season. Over 4,000 seedlings were planted over an area of approximately five acres. Funding via a RCO - State Lands Restoration grant will support additional tree planting and noxious weed control efforts over the coming year.



Planting the Elk River Unit - Bechtold

Providing Education and Outreach

Snowy Plovers: Biologist Novack assisted with developing video outreach materials to educate the public about Western Snowy Plovers. USFWS, Washington State Parks, and WDFW staff members met at Midway Beach to collaborate on creating an educational video.

Biologist Novack revised scripts and arranged schedules with local radio stations to provide Public Service Announcements for protecting snowy plovers. The ads will coincide with Earth Day and razor clam digging dates.