

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

April 16 to 30, 2022

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Translocation: Biologists Atamian and Lowe assisted in the capture of sharp-tailed grouse in British Columbia, for translocation to Scotch Creek Wildlife Area and the Colville Confederated Tribes lands to augment the local population. Birds were captured on lek in walk-in traps, processed (e.g., measured, banded, and radio collared), given a health check by Canadian and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) veterinarians, tested for avian influenza (all were negative), and released on or near currently active leks the morning following their capture.



Sharp-tailed male displaying on British Columbia lek



Sharp-tailed grouse male displaying on lek in British Columbia, caught mid flutter jump



Two male sharp-tailed grouse (edges) displaying for a female in center who is about to duck into walk-in trap

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Canid Concerns in Pend Oreille County: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett continued to work with landowners in Pend Oreille County preparing for the upcoming grazing season. Preparation included deterrent planning and possible range rider usage. Trail cameras were checked with no photos of wolves.

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

Pre-grazing Season Check-ins: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade wrapped up pre-grazing season check in this week. Wade will continue to touch base with producers to provide updates between now and their turnout dates.

Fladry Removal: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb and Natural Resource Technician Rimmelspacher removed ¼ mile of fladry from a producer's pasture in Columbia County. The fladry was deployed to discourage elk from jumping a particular portion of fence line next to a seeded field. The fladry deployment worked for approximately six weeks, which was longer than initially expected, and the producer was appreciative of the effort.

Garfield County Depredation Investigation: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade, with the assistance of Private Lands Supervisor Earl, conducted a depredation investigation of a calf in Garfield County. Wade and Earl determined that the calf died of unknown causes and then was scavenged upon by coyotes.



Calf carcass as it was found

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Habitat Enhancements: Private Lands Biologist Gaston, Region 1 Private Lands Supervisor Earl, Natural Resource Technician Barron, Natural Resource Technician Janowski, Lands Access Manager Dzieken, and volunteer members from a local Audobon chapter assisted Private Lands Biologist Baarstad with a tree and shrub planting in Lincoln County. The habitat enhancement was on a property recovering from wildlife damage that had occurred.



Tree and shrub planting on a fire recovery site on private lands in Lincoln County

Private Lands Biologist Gaston finished planning a food plot to be completed next week on a property enrolled in the Private Lands Access Program. The four food plots will total about 10 acres total.

Presentation: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked on putting together information and gathering handouts to distribute to attendees at the Pheasants Forever Women On The Wing “Learning to Shoot Clinic” to be presented next week.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Private Lands Biologist Gaston attended an online meeting with other partner agencies to assist the Palouse Conservation District with outlining their newly funded Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant. The local RCPP grant will provide conservation programs for landowners to join, with a focus on riparian habitat enhancements, soil conservation, and wildlife habitat restoration.

REGION 2

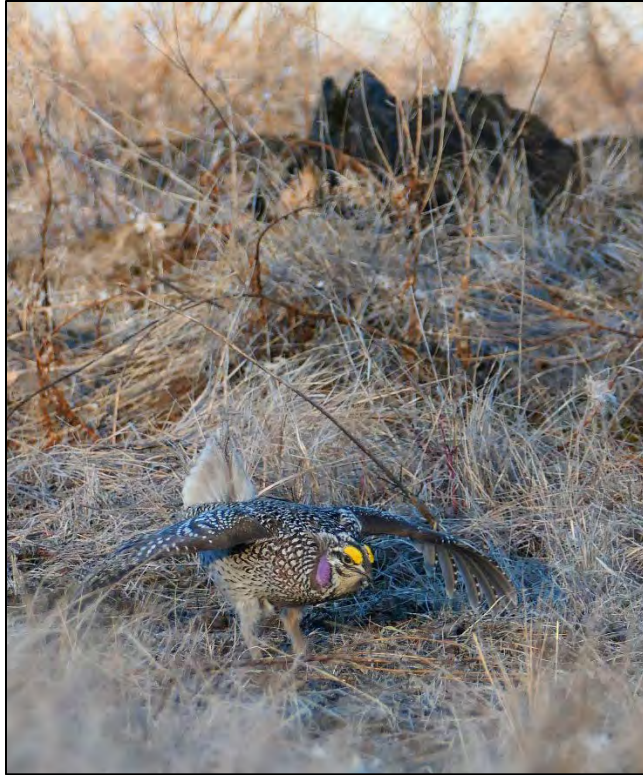
HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Sharp-tailed Grouse Translocation: Despite the ongoing avian influenza outbreak and dizzying array of roadblocks and hurdles, Biologists Fitkin and Heinlen along with several other WDFW staff members, Colville Confederated Tribes biologists, British Columbia (B.C.) wildlife biologists, and Boise State University staff members and students successfully completed the translocation of 40 sharp-tailed grouse from South Central British Columbia to Okanogan County. The birds were released on active leks on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area and the Colville Reservation. Project objectives include bolstering numbers and enhancing genetic diversity in the Okanogan County meta population. The endeavor was a team effort in the truest sense of the word. We give a heartfelt thanks to all who participated and volunteered to be on standby. In addition to the translocation, project staff members identified and surveyed many new leks in the capture area and shared the data with B.C. Ministry staff members. With any luck we will be able to repeat the effort next year.



Capture crew member setting up traps on a B.C. lek – Photo by M. Schroeder



Displaying male and interested female on a B.C. lek – Photo by S. Fitkin



Capture crew member collecting samples and readying birds for transport – Photo by S. Fitkin



Birds being released on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Photo by J. Haug

Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug also documented the translation of several sharp-tailed grouse from southcentral British Columbia to the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. Wildlife Area Manager Dupont, Assistant District Biologist Heinlen, and Professor Gala from Boise State University led two separate releases onto WDFW property.

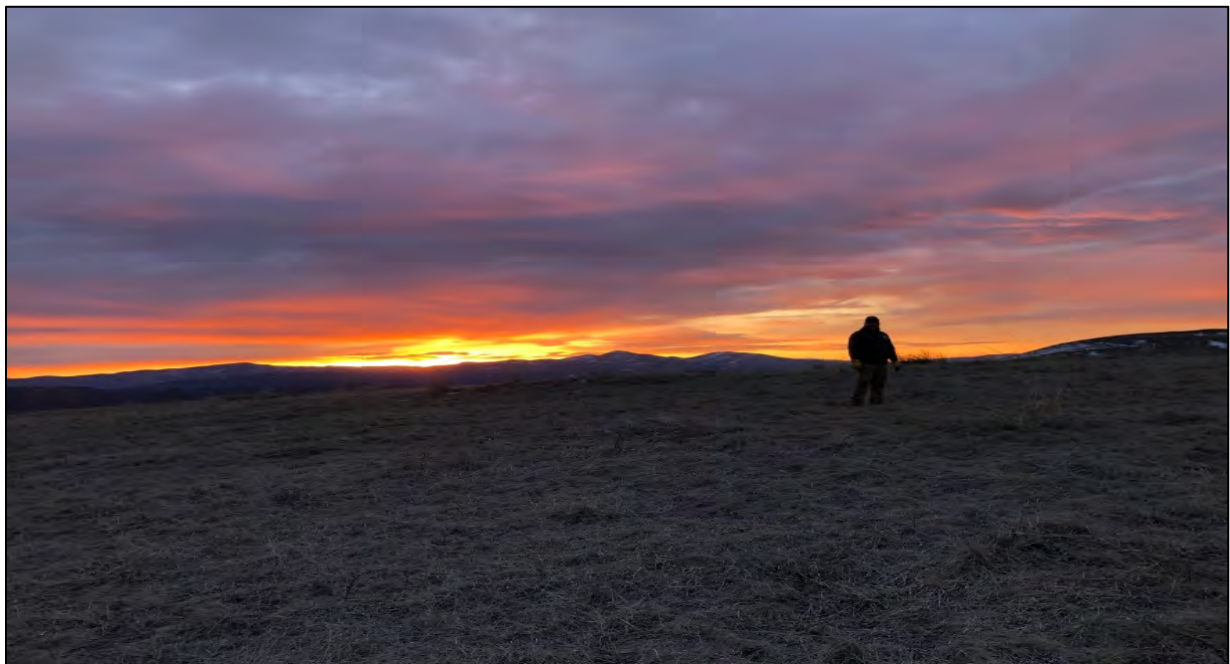


Dupont, Professor Gala, and Heinlen preparing sharp-tailed grouse for release before sunrise on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Photo by Haug



Manager Dupont pulling the trap door and releasing the grouse – Photo by Haug

Scotch Creek Sharp-tail Grouse Surveys: Staff members began lek surveys on the Scotch Creek, Tunk, and Chesaw Units. Attendance at leks has increase from the previous round of surveys and females have been observed around the leks.



Scotch Creek staff members conducting lek surveys on the Scotch Creek Unit – Photo by Dupont

Ground Squirrels: Biologist Dougherty welcomed a new technician dedicated to spring ground squirrel surveys. Biologist Dougherty and Technician Kathleen have been diligently working to complete 100 plus ground squirrel surveys before the end of May.



Washington Gound Squirrel glaring while enjoying some sun – Photo by Sean Dougherty



While conducting ground squirrel surveys, Biologist Dougherty was being watched by a burrowing owl – Photo by Sean Dougherty



Ground squirrel droppings observed while conducting surveys – Photo by Sean Dougherty

Northern Leopard Frogs: Biologist Grabowsky and the northern leopard frog team began northern leopard frogs egg mass surveys on April 1 after first hearing males calling on March 31, indicating breeding season has begun. Three egg masses were found on April 1 in the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. On April 4, portions of these egg masses were collected for transport to Oregon Zoo where they will be raised through metamorphosis and then released at our reintroduction site. Unfortunately, the weather during the week of April 11 was not conducive to frog breeding (windy, cold, and snowing). Egg mass surveys are scheduled to start again on April 18 when the weather looks more favorable.



Northern leopard frog egg mass found on April 1 – Photo by Emily Grabowsky

Pygmy Rabbit Release Effort Expansion: After more than a year of planning, coordination, and permits, we are finally ready to utilize two new release areas, Rimrock Meadows (private land held in conservation easement by the Nature Conservancy) and Palisades (owned by the Bureau of Land Management). Both sites are located within the existing Sagebrush Flat and Beezley Hills recovery areas and have established Safe Harbor agreements in place. This will be the first time rabbits are released into areas with active grazing, which the grazer has been very supportive and hopes we can demonstrate species recovery and grazing can be compatible.

We set out to establish three acclimation pens in each area and were grateful to have the assistance of the Washington Conservation Corps through the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI). Together we were able to set up all six acclimation pens and are ready to go.

Science Technician Clements and Conservation Northwest also arranged for high school students from the Quincy Innovation Academy (an alternative school to address student needs) to join us for a day to help set the pens up and learn about the conservation taking place in their backyard.

Pygmy Rabbit Enclosure Population Management: One of the main goals of the recovery projects is to maintain a self-sustaining breeding enclosure population to serve as a source of rabbits for reintroduction efforts. This is always a challenging task and even more so following huge losses of enclosure rabbits following the wildfires in 2017 and 2020. These fires not only eliminate those individual rabbits, but their genetic heritage and diversity as well. Currently, of the estimated 35 breeding enclosure adults, nearly 80% are from one of three genetic “clans” and while each of these clans was very genetically healthy, we are considering augmentation with wild rabbits from our Washington populations.

Genetic monitoring through University of Idaho shows the current level of genetic diversity in our enclosure and wild populations to be healthy and comparable to most other pygmy rabbit populations in the Great Basin. Though we are slowly trending towards a greater level of relatedness among them. Coordinator Gallie proposed augmenting the enclosure population with a small number (five) of rabbits harvested from the Sagebrush Flat wild population to bolster the genetic diversity. This was supported by the Science Advisory Team. We will aim to harvest recently emerged kits in the wild early as possible when predators normally take their share.



A pygmy rabbit kit caught on game camera in the Beezley Hills population



Crew members setting up release pen fencing on the Rimrock Meadows site in Douglas County

Sage Grouse Surveys: Private Biologist Braaten continues searching for and surveying sage and sharp-tailed grouse leks in Douglas County.



Providing Recreation Opportunities

Blue Lake (Oroville) Pedestrian Loop Trail: Okanogan Lands Operations Manager Haug met with a local trail construction contractor for a pre-construction, in-development, and post-construction meeting during the installation of the Blue Lake loop trail near Oroville. The work was completed in late March and provides users with at 2/3-mile trail overlooking the lake and newly developed Blue Lake water access area funded through the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) Washington Wildlife Recreation Program – State Lands Development category. Some additional work is required to finish the entire project, which includes some sign installation. This trail will provide users early opportunities for access into some great shrubsteppe habitat and panoramic views of a unique landscape.



Newly constructed Blue Lake (Oroville) trail – Photo by Haug

Methow Recreation Events: Several popular events have already occurred or are about to occur on the Methow Wildlife Area. During the last week of April, the Back Country Horsemen hosted their spring ride in parts of the Methow Unit. Methow Trails hosted their long running Sunflower Relay in a portion of the Big Buck. This week, the Washington Outfitters Guide Association is hosting their popular Ride to Rendezvous, which will cross parts of the Methow and Rendezvous units. Later this month, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers will help the Methow Wildlife Area via a large volunteer event centered on improving mule deer winter range.

Sinlahekin Campground Renovations: Sinlahekin staff members have been placing barrier rock at various campgrounds on the Sinlahekin unit. The barrier rock has been placed in areas to minimize off road and better define improved campsites. In many of these areas there was old, barbed wire fence that was used as a barrier. It has been removed. This has been part of the Recreation Conservation Office (RCO) Campground Renovations grant that will be due at the end of June. Staff members have a few more sites to install barrier rock and gravel. They will continue this work through the upcoming weeks when sites are not occupied with campers.



Barrier rock placement within Hunter's Camp on the Sinlahekin – Photo by Wehmeyer



Barrier rock protecting restored field and shrubsteppe adjacent to the Blue Lake Campground

— Photo by Wehmeyer

Repurposing Hunting Blind from Drumheller: Biologist McPherson and Specialist Walker moved a blind that was originally at Drumheller on Rocky Ford to Mansfield Pond. The blind did not meet ADA standards, so it has been repurposed as a first come first serve hunting blind at the south end of Mansfield Pond. The south end of Mansfield Pond has firm bottom and typically will stay open even with colder temperatures.



Specialist Walker working on blind at Mansfield Pond — Photo by C. McPherson

Road 7 Barrier and Gate: Biologist McPherson and Specialist Walker designed and constructed barrier with a swing gate made from ecology blocks at Road 7 parking lot. Road 7 has been a notorious dumping location. The parking area is much larger than is necessary and allows for some seclusion for nefarious activities. The parking area has been reconfigured to continue to meet recreational demand while making it more difficult for dumping to occur. At a minimum, this project is expected to make it much easier to remove dumped materials by keeping it out of the riparian zone. The gate was installed to maintain vehicle access to a monitoring well installed by Bureau of Reclamation.



New barrier and gate at road 7 parking area – Photo by C. McPherson

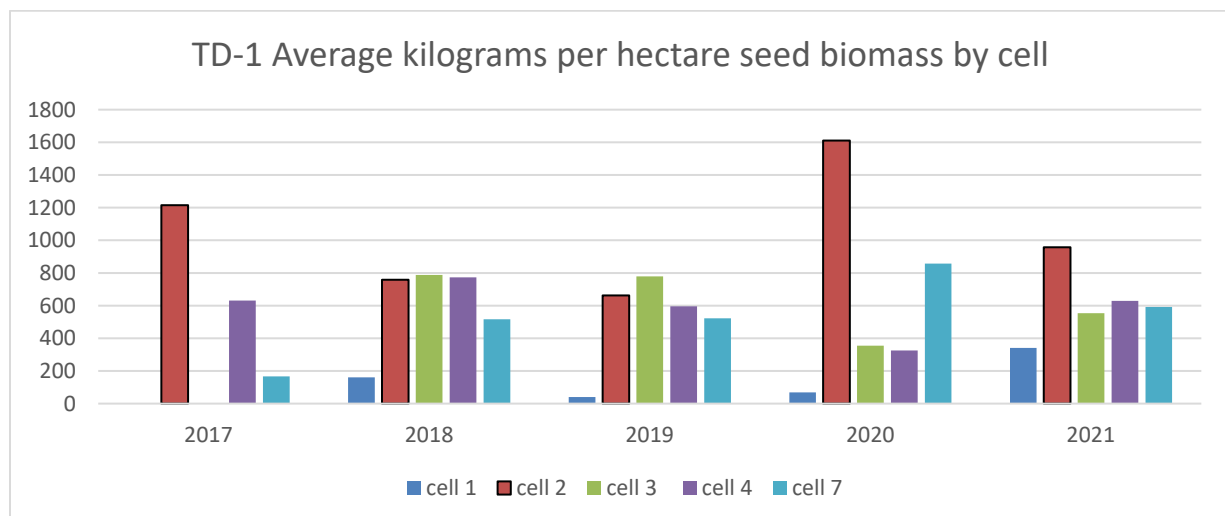
Barb-wire Fence Removal at TD-01, TD-02, and TD-04: Biologist McPherson had the Washington Conservation Corps crew roll up several miles of downed barb wire at TD-01, TD-02, and TD-04 projects. Fence that was removed were in remote locations. Once fence was rolled, Biologist McPherson shuttled wire with quad to truck to transport back to the Wildlife Area office for disposal.



Large load for short run back to the truck – Photo by C. McPherson

TD-04 Russian Olive Removal: Biologist McPherson coordinated with Washington Conservation Corps crew to start removing Russian olives with stump cut treatment at the TD-04 project area. TD-04 has several seasonal wetlands but wetlands are ringed by Russian olives stands. By eliminating the Russian olives wildlife area staff members will be able treat tall emergent vegetation making wetland habitat more valuable to wildlife species.

TD-01 Seed Biomass Survey: Biologist McPherson submitted 2021 writeup and data to Pacific Northwest Aquatic Monitoring for peer review. New versions of protocols and methods for seed biomass surveys were both finalized. In 2020, Biologist McPherson could see that some basins were producing less seed biomass and were ready for heavy tillage and supplemental planting. In 2021, basins that received tillage and planting did in fact benefit from those activities. Through 2021 data Biologist McPherson can see that portion of cells 4 and 7 are due for tillage and supplemental planting.



Waste Tires: Wildlife area staff members and the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew members have been collecting tires that have been dumped over the past couple years. The pile has been growing very large and taking up a lot of room. Biologist McPherson contacted the Department of Ecology waste tire collection and scheduled a pickup. Specialist Walker and Biologist McPherson stacked and counted tires to be pickup up as soon as possible.



500 plus dumped tires collected from various parts of the wildlife area – Photo by C. McPherson

Farm Pond Parking Lot Chopped Vehicle: Biologist McPherson, Specialist Walker, and WCC crew loaded and removed chopped vehicle and several car doors from the Farm Pond parking lot. Biologist McPherson had to schedule a junk vehicle inspection with Grant County Sherriff. After the inspection and receiving a junk vehicle form, we can dispose at Moses Lake Iron and Metal.



Dump trailer full of chopped car pieces – Photo by C. McPherson

Lower Crab Creek Garbage: Enforcement reported a large amount of garbage off Lower Crab Creek Road. Biologist McPherson coordinated with the WCC crew members for cleanup of dumping. The volume of garbage was large enough for the crew members to spend a few days cleaning the area equaling in several dump trailer loads.

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Turkey Trouble: Specialist Heilhecker spoke to a landowner concerned with turkeys roosting in their trees. Landowner stated they have 60-80 turkeys making a mess each night as their droppings land on the roof of their buildings. The turkeys avoid the area during the day. This is in the same neighborhood where the turkeys were knocking out the power this past winter as they left roosting trees and hit powerlines. Consequently, the Okanogan Irrigation District harvested several turkeys using landowner kill permits. With turkey hunting season opening this month, Specialist Heilhecker encouraged the landowner to allow hunting. The landowner was going to speak to the adjacent orchardist regarding hunting opportunities. While hunting may not keep the turkeys out of their trees, it will help to reduce the number of roosting turkeys. Specialist Heilhecker also asked the landowner to encourage everyone in the neighborhood to stop feeding all birds.

Sheep Fence Construction Completed: Over the last two years, Specialist Bridges has worked with a private domestic goat owner to improve fencing for his goat herds. This improved fencing will help exclude Swakane bighorn sheep, from being able to interact with this domestic herd of goats. This is important because domestic herds can transmit diseases to wild herds, and now the bacteria *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (Movi) has been identified as the primary cause of severe pneumonia outbreaks in bighorn sheep herds, with high mortality rates in lambs. Movi is spread through direct nose to nose contact between wild/domestic animals, and aerosol transmission of respiratory droplets through the air. By improving the already existing fencing, we have drastically reduced the ability for disease to transmit to wild herds and ensuring a future for the Swakane bighorn sheep herd. Thanks to the Wild Sheep Foundation and Wenatchee Sportsmen's Association for providing critical support to the success of this important project.

Agency Coordination: Specialist Heilhecker spoke to U.S. Forest Service employees in the Tonasket and Methow Valley districts regarding wolf den locations. She also set-up a meeting with the Department of Natural Resources for next week. Specialist Heilhecker notified producers who have a confirmed den in or near allotments their livestock graze.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Methow Wildlife Area Noxious Weeds: With spring green up upon us, noxious weeds are starting to present themselves. Assistant Manager Repp has proactively been treating Scotch thistle at the Golden Doe Unit and will soon be transitioning to Houndstongue and Tansy ragwort treatments in the coming days. Additionally, the Methow Wildlife Area is seeking weed contractors to aid in herbicide treatments as part of shrub-steppe restoration efforts at various locations. Repp has worked with a contractor and identified two large fields that the contractor will treat. Both fields are part of a shrub-steppe restoration grant. One field is an abandoned agricultural field in the Golden Doe and the other is an old pasture at the base of Lewis Butte.

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Noxious Weed Control: Sinlahekin staff members were able to spend a day on the Chiliwist Unit controlling Scotch thistle. The plants are in the rosette stage, and they are more easily identified at this time of year due to their contrast in color and phenology at this time. Many of the plants are found in areas where native wavy leaf thistle also occurs on the wildlife area unit. Staff members will continue to spend time on the wildlife area spot spraying Scotch thistle in the next few weeks.



Staff members treating Scotch thistle next to our native wavy-leaf thistle – Photo by Wehmeyer

Sinlahekin Cooperative Prescribed Burn: Lands Operations Manager Haug, Sinlahekin Manager Wehmeyer and NCW Prescribed Burn member Anderson participated in the first cooperative burn in nearly 20 years near the Highlands 20 Fire Camp on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. The prescribed fire included mostly Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) staff members but both Bureau of Land Management and WDFW staff members assisted within the approximately 127-acre prescribed burn unit that contained all jurisdictions. WDFW Prescribed Burn Manager Eberlein provided significant assistance in the drafting of the burn plan and staff members also helped prep the unit for burning. Lands archeologists also aided with getting the project off the ground. We are hopeful that this is the first of many cooperative projects to address forest health in Washington.



Burning through ponderosa pine and DNR staff members discussion operations on the fire line – Photo by Haug

Scotch Creek Riparian Restoration Project: Staff members cut and removed the weave from one of the existing beaver dam analogs (BDA), as the dam was no longer functioning, causing the stream to become incised under the dam. The dam was re-woven, using a pillow style weave. This type of weave, places limbs both upstream and downstream from the dam to prevent incising under the dam. It is also more effective at capturing sediment and slowing water speeds. The limbs used in the weave were cut and collected off the Chopaka Unit and hauled to the project area at Scotch Creek.



Newly woven BDAs, with limbs pointing both upstream and downstream – Photo by Dupont



Photo point 10/22/2020 and then on 3/22/2022 (same photo point, different camera) – Photos by Dupont



A series of two BDAs installed in 9-mile creek on the Charles and Mary Eder unit by the Colville fish program, spring 2021. The purpose of the BDAs is to slow water flows and recharge the ground water table. Recharging the ground water will increase flows, later in the summer, improving steelhead spawning habitat in the lower portions of the creek – Photo by Dupont

Scotch Creek Shrub Plantings: Staff members planted choke cherry seedlings into an existing water birch planting to increase diversity. Both choke cherry and water birch provide an important food source for sharp-tailed grouse in the winter.



New staff member Chandler planting choke cherry seedlings. Welcome aboard, Chandler! – Photo by B. Dupont

General Conservation Reserve Program Douglas County Outreach – Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation: Private Lands Biologist Braaten continues to communicate with landowners regarding ongoing general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signups and Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) CRP in Douglas County. Landowners are considering breaking out CRP ground to farm due to lack of incentives, and low rental rates. Outreach to landowners continues even with little information from FSA. There are 90,000 acres in General CRP applications with only 44,000 acres under 25% county cap. The state CRP waiver was also denied which makes it more difficult. A potential of 46,000 acres could be rested, farmed, or grazed by landowners who won't be offered a contract. General CRP deadline was also extended to October 1 to get offers in for the 44,000 acres available.

Private Lands Habitat Plots: Biologist Cook applied herbicides to kill current vegetation on a circle corner that is to be planted this fall with native grasses. The goal of this project is to provide dense nesting cover and potentially some brood rearing habitat for pheasants, while a nearby unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area currently provides winter cover. Cook visited later to see a good kill on downy brome currently on the site. Biologist Morris assessed a habitat plot that was installed over 10 years ago. The plot contained great animal diversity, including pheasants, California quail, Hungarian partridge, mule deer, and various passerine and small mammal species. Morris mowed grass in areas of the habitat plot to reduce competition for shrubs and trees, which will improve their growth. Mowing was also so more rocky mountain juniper trees can be added to improve thermal cover and forage for wildlife in the area.



Young juniper trees and shrubs before (left picture) and after (right picture) grass mowing

Habitat Plots: Biologist Morris planted and watered 100 Rocky Mountain junipers to supplement an old habitat planting. The junipers will improve wildlife cover and forage values, creating higher quality wildlife habitat. Already established plants in the habitat plot support various animals including nongame, small game, large game, and invertebrate/pollinator species.



Bee visiting wax currant flowers at a habitat plot in Northern Grant County

Providing Education and Outreach

Field Day with Oroville School District Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Class:

Staff members joined the Oroville School District Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) class along the Similkameen River and Tonasket Creek to harvest live stake cuttings. Species collected included willow, red-osier dogwood, and water birch. The students will take the cuttings back to the school green house and propagate them, for future stream restoration projects.



Oroville teacher Vanderwal, WDFW staff member Medina, and a student bundling and labeling live stake cuttings along the Similkameen River – Photo by Dupont



Oroville student collecting willow and water birch cuttings along Tonasket Creek on the Charles and Mary Eder Unit. The cuttings will be propagated in the school green house and used for restoration on this site along Tonasket Creek – Photo by Dupont



A willow bundle laid in the soil of a cut bank along Tonasket Creek on the Charles and Mary Eder Unit in spring of 2021 to provide bank stabilization. Despite, drought conditions, the bundle propagated – Photo by Dupont

Scotch Creek Event with Tonasket Elementary: Lands Operations Manager Haug, Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Manager Dupont, Medina, and volunteer members worked with staff members from the North Central Educational Service District (NCESD) and Tonasket and Oroville Elementary. They held a Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math (STEAM) field trip to the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area, Beaver Dam Analog Project. Over two days, Tonasket and Oroville Elementary Schools brought nearly 100 students to the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. The purpose of these visits was to take their classroom science learning into the field for an authentic science experience. Students worked alongside scientists to collect data, engineer water retention devices, plant and identify important plant species and paint their observations all in their efforts to learn more about how science is helping conserve the state-endangered sharp-tailed grouse in Okanogan County.

Scotch Creek Wildlife Area staff members installed Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs) as part of an RCO-funded, state lands restoration project along a stretch of Scotch Creek in fall of 2020. Students learned from regional WDFW staff members the purpose of the BDAs is to slow the water flow of the creek and increase water retention to support the growth of water birch. The water birch is an important plant species for winter survival of the endangered sharp-tailed grouse. Haug gave a short presentation on sharp-tailed grouse and Wildlife Area Manager Dupont discussed the construction and use of BDAs (Bryan and Oscar built a mock BDA where students could weave materials into). Students spent their day rotating through different stations. At the planting station students learned to use a dichotomous key to identify native plants commonly found in the shrubsteppe.

Students also explored stream transects with Colville Confederated Tribe Fish and Wildlife Department's Matt Young and Oly Zacherle where students used scientific tools to calculate the volume of water in the stream before and after a BDA as well as looked at ground water levels. Half the group rotated out to then do insect collection and identification. They also built their own water retention devices using recycled bottles and natural materials to see if they could slow the flow of stream water. This station was led by Kim Kogler of the Okanogan Conservation District. Finally, students had an opportunity to put their observations to paper in a station led by retired art and science teacher, Dan Brown. Students used watercolor to capture the scenery as well as a feather from a sharp-tailed grouse.



Photos from the STEAM event on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Photos by Haug



Lands Operations Manager Haug doing his best Mike Schroeder impression at the STEAM event on Scotch Creek Wildlife Area. Scotch Creek technician Medina holding up Colville artwork depicting the sharp-tail grouse and their cultural importance – Photo by Haug

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Local School District(s) Outreach: High school students from Okanogan High School visited the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area and assisted with fence inventory, repair, and garbage cleanup at Fish Lake Campgrounds. These same students will also visit the Chiliwist Unit of the wildlife area in the next month to assist with more fence inventory. Oroville High School Students also came out to the Sinlahekin for a field day to learn more about the area. They spent time leaning about the different plant species that are fire dependent and why we use prescribe fire as a land management tool. Thank you to Okanogan Conservation District collaborating these field days with the local high schools. These days have been an excellent learning opportunity for the students and allow them to get out in the field and learn more about these lands and our management of the area.



Oroville High School students learning about prescribed burning on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area – Photo by Wehmeyer



Okanogan High School students inventorying fence on the Sinlahekin – Photo by Wehmeyer

Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board - Methow Tour: Lands Operations Manager Haug, Prescribed Burn Manager Eberlein, and Methow Wildlife Area Manager Troyer participated in a tour of forest restoration sites in the upper Methow Valley with the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board (UCSRB). The group that consisted of most the UCSRB board, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), DNR, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and staff members from Representative Newhouse's office, traveled to WDFW treatments in the Bear Creek area near Pearrygin Lake. The tour was advocated for through Okanogan Co Commissioner Hover who sits on the UCSRB board. The tour aimed to seek understanding of the needs of partnering agencies with regards to forest health treatments and how those treatments tie into the recovery of state and federally listed salmon and steelhead.



DNR's Highlands district manager Townsend discussed the importance of fuels treatments in the wolf creek area following last year's Cedar Creek fire – Photo by Haug

Leopard Frog Outreach: Biologist Grabowsky presented the northern leopard frog reintroduction and recovery project to the joint Southwest Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (SWPARC) and Northwest Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) meeting on April 8. This meeting was a great opportunity to present the project since the implementation in 2019. Several biologists from other fish and wildlife departments around the western United States expressed interest in maintaining communication and sharing updates on various amphibian reintroduction projects.

CRP Training: Private Lands Biologist Braaten assisted Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff members in training new planners with CRP status review process, how to complete transects, how to fill out forms, and how to assess fields. Twenty field staff members (partners and NRCS staff) attended annual training in Douglas County. Private Lands Biologist Braaten worked with private landowners to gain access to CRP fields for this training.



Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Methow's Wildlife Area Advisory Committee: After years of inactivity, the Methow Wildlife Area reinvigorated its Wildlife Area Advisory Committee (WAAC). The first official WAAC meeting was held last week and was well attended by all members who represent a wide array of stakeholders throughout the Methow Valley. The Methow WAAC is comprised of a diverse collaboration of local citizens, governments, tribes, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This kickoff meeting mostly covered introductions, WAAC roles and ground rules, a brief history of the wildlife area, unit overviews, and concluded with an open Q & A discussion. The WAAC will play a pivotal role in advising the Methow Wildlife Area in its wildlife area management and planning efforts.

Scotch Creek Facilities Improvements: Scotch Creek staff members removed the deteriorated wood floor out of a storage building, built new shelves, moved a beam, removed the old light fixtures, and installed LED lights, ran a water line for an outside spigot, added a circuit in the electrical panel, and installed a heater. The remodeled storage will be used to store herbicides, grass seed, ATVs, and other miscellaneous equipment and supplies.



New chemical storage area for Scotch Creek HQ – Photo by Dupont

Chopaka Irrigation System: Staff members hauled ecology blocks to the Chopaka Unit. The blocks were placed at the last tower of all three pivot irrigation systems. The end towers will be strapped to the blocks to prevent them from blowing over during windstorms.



Staff members worked with Chopaka sharecropper Wahl to unload and set the ecology blocks in place at the end of each pivot – Photo by Dupont

Charles and Mary Eder Agriculture Lease: Staff members began prepping the irrigation system to be charged with water by closing all the drains and adding air to a few of the pivot tires. One pivot tire was in poor shape and needed to be replaced. Staff members made other minor repairs to the irrigation system on such as motors on the wheel lines were serviced and repaired, broken sprinklers were replaced, and the system mainline was filled with water. All the center pivots were started and filled with water. The system is functioning and ready for the new lessor to take over the agriculture lease.

Lands Operations Manager Haug with Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Manager Dupont have been working with Water Rights Specials Knudsen and Property and Acquisition Specialist Woodruff on gathering all the details pertaining to the development of a new agricultural lease on the Charles and Mary Eder Unit of Scotch Creek. Knudsen and Woodruff have been doing an amazing job compiling water information and developing a path forward. Dupont has already drafted the lease documents and waiting to issue a public request for bids once the group is comfortable moving forward. This lease preparation only arose after the Eder family reduced their life estate significantly, a generous gift to the department.

Methow Headquarters Fire Wise Work: Maintenance Mechanic Wottlin, with the help of several Rx burn team members has been ‘fire wising’ the Methow Wildlife Area headquarters. The crew members cleared a swath of dense brush and a series of aspen trees that had a strong lean toward our HQ buildings. In the event of a fire, this area would have been extremely vulnerable and very difficult to defend due to the density of the vegetation and its proximity to high value structures.



Busy campground at Fish Lake during the opening day of fishing season last weekend. Many sites continued to be full into the following week – Photo by Wehmeyer

MT2 Lead Management Meeting: Lands Operations Manager Finger led a discussion with agency staff members (including Hunter Safety Program, Land Managers, Regional Program Manager's, and the Safety Office) and MT2 Firing Range Services to learn about the process of lead recovery and best management practices for target shooting ranges. Finger organized the meeting in hopes that a coordinated approach would be more efficient, more effective, and provide greater guidance to wildlife area staff members who will ultimately be responsible for maintaining these facilities. Finger will be leading a follow up discussion next week to debrief on what was learned and share thoughts about our next steps.

Sand Dunes Road County Commissioners: Lands Operations Manager Finger participated in a meeting with Grant County Commissioners Carter and Jones, Public Works Director Castro, Regional Director Hoenes, and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson to discuss a proposal to authorize ATV use along Sand Dunes Road. This proposal would make it much easier for local residents to access the ORV park by using county roads. Local staff members are concerned about this proposal due to the difficulty of keeping ATVs within the existing boundaries of the ORV park. To help us make our point, a member of the public, in search of a way to fish without having to exit their vehicle, puts on a display blatant disregard for rules.



Travel Management Cultural Resources Working Group: Lands Operations Manager Finger led the first of six upcoming Cultural Resources Working Group meetings to discuss all undesignated roads within the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project area. The group will be working through 119 townships, from north to south, reviewing proposed roads designations and determining the scope of work necessary to meeting cultural compliance and implement roads designations. The group was about to complete Banks Lake Unit, which is one of the more culturally rich areas of discussion. The work will be used to support a Federal Lands Transportation Grant proposal in the next phase of this project. The Cultural Resources working group review is expected to take about 1 year.

Windy Springs: Lands Operations Manager Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Eidson provided access assistance to Ecology staff members and archaeologists in the Sun Lakes Unit to develop methodologies to assess wetland and cultural resources damages in this unique situation. Impacts such as this are widespread, across thousands of acres in this very rugged and broken landscape. Cultural resources are very rich here and the wetlands are very unique.



Surveying unpermitted excavation damage on WDFW-managed, USFWS-owned lands with archaeologists Kelly and Sloma and wetland/water quality experts from Ecology – Photo by Finger



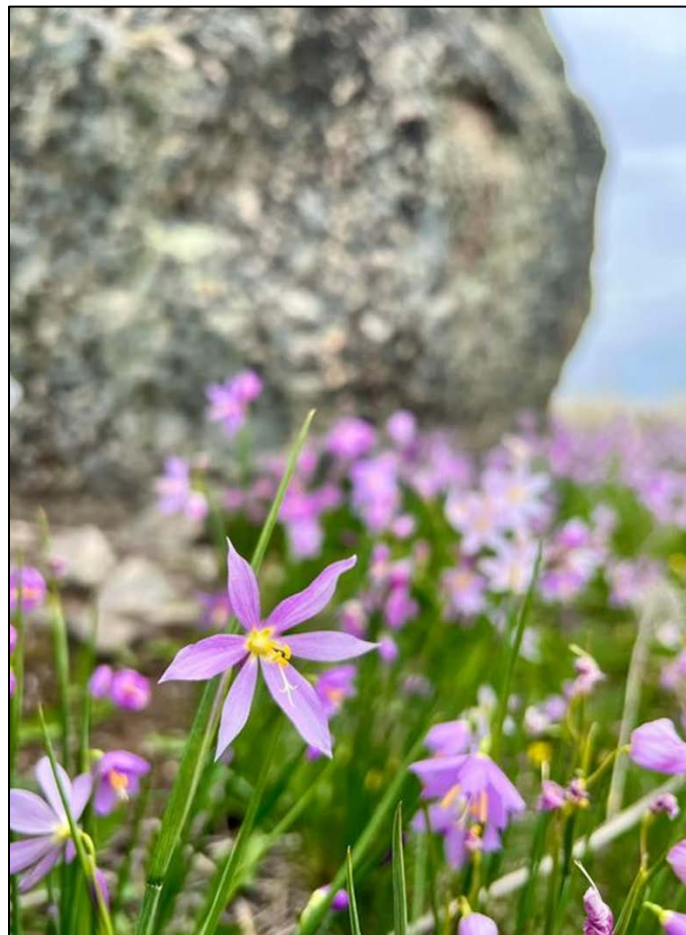
Lunch break – A snowy owl enjoys a northern harrier hawk lunch on the way north – Douglas County, WA – Photo by Braaten, WDFW



Sandhill Cranes using cell F at the Winchester Regulated Access Area – Photo by C. McPherson



Looking for turkeys on the Big Bend Wildlife Area – Photo by Finger



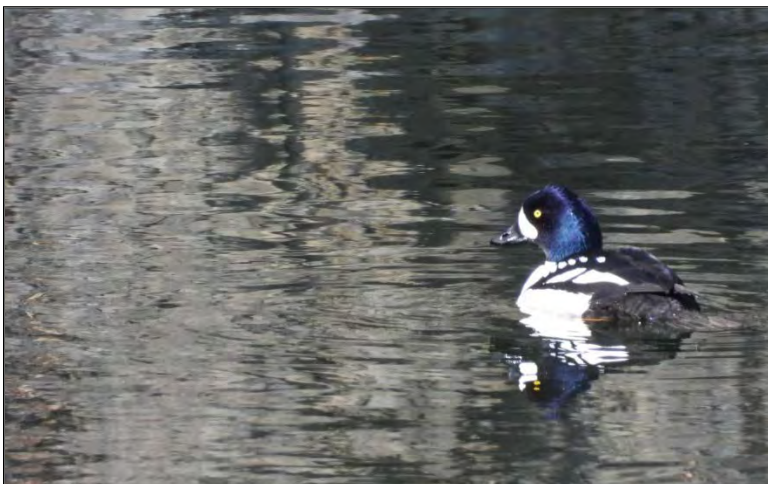
Spring is here – Pocket of grass widow in bloom in Douglas County! – Photo by Braaten



Common merganser hen – Photo by Troyer



Common goldeneye drakes and hens – Photo by Troyer



Barrow's goldeneye drake – Photo by Troyer



Ring-necked drakes – Photo by Troyer



Old shack on the Charles & Mary Eder Unit – Photo by Haug



Spring in the Chiliwist Unit looking south – Photo by Wehmeyer



Early spring sunset east of Tonasket – Photo by Haug



Dusky grouse near Fish Lake – Photo by Haug



View from DNR lands north of Fish Lake looking into the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area – Photo by Haug



Fields of arrow-leaf balsamroot on the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area – Photo by Haug



Early morning over the Similkameen River valley near the Similkameen-Chopaka Unit – Photo by Haug

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

L.T. Murray Bird Box Repair: Assistant Manager Winegart coordinated with the Kittitas Audubon Society for potential bird box maintenance and repair.

Robinson Golden Eagle Nest: Biologist Bernatowicz surveyed the Robinson Golden Eagle nest prior to the May 1 opening of the area. When the nest is active, the road below the nest is closed. This year, the nest was empty, but was likely active earlier based on sign at the nest. This is likely the 20th straight year the territory nest has failed. Most failures are prior to the opener.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Road Use Data: Biologist Daling uploaded 2021 data from road counters placed across the Wenas Wildlife Area. Once data was collected the counters were wiped, reconfigured, and placed out once more to collect data for 2022. The data will help wildlife area staff members gauge usage on various roads across the wildlife area.

Wenas Sheep Company Range: Biologist Daling built target holders for use at the Sheep Company Shooting Range, as the usual Master Hunter volunteers were currently unavailable. Biologist Daling made 120 target holders and delivered 20 to the range.



90 targets holders stacked and ready for delivery to the Sheep Company Shooting Range

Wenas Wildlife Area Cleanup: Kittitas County Field and Stream Club led their 19th annual Durr Road Cleanup Event on the north end of the Wenas Wildlife Area. Meanwhile, the Wenas Valley Muzzleloaders helped organize a cleanup of the south end of the Wenas Wildlife Area at Sheep Company Road. Combined, the two teams (40 people total) cleaned up about three tons of trash throughout the wildlife area! Volunteers raked up shell casings, broken glass, nails, and other small debris to clean up the shooting area at each site. Dumped couches and mattresses were also hauled away. Wenas Wildlife Area Manager Hughes, Technician Stoltenow, L.T. Murray Assistant Manager Winegeart, and Enforcement helped out with both clean ups.



30-yard dumpster getting filled off Durr Road during the cleanup

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Kittitas County: Conflict Technician Leuck has been hazing elk in the Parke and Caribou Creek areas daily. He has also hazed elk at other locations in the county in the last two weeks.

Conflict Specialist Wetzel discussed elk issues with a hay grower in Cle Elum. A local herd of elk that stays in the Lower Peoh Point area appears to be growing in number.

Yakima County: Conflict Specialist Wetzel repaired an elk fence north of Tampico. A rock jack replacement structure was tested to see if it would work better than wooden rock jacks or digging post holes.



Section of failing rock jacks on elk fence north of Tampico

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Mellergaard Fencing: Manager Hughes, Assistant Manager Taylor, Biologist Daling, Technician Stoltenow, and Technician Rodriguez prepped and removed barbed wire throughout the Mellergaard Unit along Durr road. The wire was in various states of up on t-posts, on the ground, and in or on vegetation. The wire was removed to reduce the risk of injury to wildlife, and wildlife area users.



Wire rolled from Mellergaard using mechanical roller. Wire will be staged here and removed in one large load once it has all been rolled. Manager Hughes and Technician Rodriguez rolling wire

Wenas Umptanum and Observatory Thinning Proposal: Manager Hughes and Forester Nequette presented a proposal to the Regional Management Team regarding thinning two areas on the Wenas Wildlife Area off Umptanum road and the Observatory Road. They are planning to do a field visit with the district team for additional input on the project, as they continue to plan. Roughly 400 acres is proposed to be thinned within the two areas combined. The project will lower the severity of future wildfires, restore the area to its historic habitat of a ponderosa pine savannah, and provide greater habitat for wildlife. Currently the area is overgrown and extremely dense with ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and Grand fir.



Overgrown section proposed to be thinned at Observatory

Hoover Acquisition: Manager Hughes participated in several meetings regarding the Hoover Acquisition. Hughes met with a surveyor from the Capital Asset Management Program who is working on gathering information for three boundary line adjustments that are taking place with the sale. Hughes, Property Acquisition Supervisor Woodruff, and Lands Agent Carbary met with the appraiser and the landowner to go over the details of the acquisition more. The water rights were discussed in greater detail. WDFW will be retaining the water rights and working with the county on putting in a pipe to funnel water back into Wenas Creek. Hughes additional met with the landowner and her assistant to go over additional questions she has for how they will work together after the sale. Everything is coming together for the sale to go through this coming summer.



Pine Canyon recovering from the Evans Canyon Fire. This area will be acquired from WDFW through sale

Quilomene Wildlife Area Restoration: Assistant Manager Winegeart and Natural Resource Technician Nass put in around 40 t-post and 80 hotwire pigtails to protect 23 acres of the Quilomene Unit's Green Gate Subunit that burned in the 2021 Vantage Highway Fire. The area was planted with native grasses in the fall of 2021 and cattle grazing is planned for a neighboring property mid-April and for the seeded area May 1.



Nass installing t-post around seeded area at Green Gate Subunit



Nass assisted Assistant Manager Winegeart to install temporary fencing to exclude cattle from the re-seeded burn area in the Vantage Pasture, Quilomene, before the grazing period begins next month



Parke Cr. Restoration site in the Quilomene during site preparation in 2011 (left) and in 2022 (right) after installation of cattle ex-closure fencing in 2020 and years of weed control for musk and Canada thistle and knapweed



Parke Cr. Restoration site in the Quilomene during site preparation in 2011 (above) and in 2022 (below) after installation of cattle ex-closure fencing in 2020 and years of weed control for musk and Canada thistle and knapweed

Quilomene Vegetation Monitoring: Assistant Manager Winegeart and Natural Resources Technician Blore performed pre-grazing vegetation monitoring in the Vantage pasture.



Basin Wildrye pre-grazing utilization monitoring site in Vantage pasture



Hedgehog cactus on the Quilomene Unit

Ragland Restoration on the L.T. Murray: Natural Resources Technician Blore disked and harrowed the Ragland restoration area and applied herbicide on the access road to keep the field fallow.



Disking and harrowing at Ragland site

Providing Education and Outreach

Wildlife Area Clean-up: Assistant Manager Winegeart represented Department of Fish and Wildlife on the Wenas Wildlife Area during the 2022 annual Durr Road trash clean-up event.



Kittitas County Field and Stream Club sign-in booth at the annual Durr Rd trash clean-up volunteer event

Other

Scorpion Spotted: While replacing elk fence near Pine Mountain, Conflict Specialist Wetzel found a scorpion *Vejovis boreus* (Girard) crawling in the snow. Some taxonomists say the species is *Paruroctonus boreus*, but it is definitely not the rare and darker wood scorpion *Uroctonus morax*, found only in most woods along the Columbia Gorge in Washington.



The shy Northern scorpion Vejovis boreus or Paruroctonus boreus

Eagle Depository: Conflict Specialist Wetzel packaged and mailed seven bald eagles and two golden eagles to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service depository in Colorado. The eagles were collected over time from vehicle strikes, lead poisoning, electrocution, and unknown various other causes of death.

REGION 4

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Island Marble Butterfly Management: The new District 13 Wildlife Biologist License, in coordination with Headquarters staff members, has been getting up to speed on Island Marble Butterfly (IMB) management by developing relationships and providing technical assistance to the many players in IMB conservation. This includes offering guidance to IMB Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances enrollees regarding annual self-reporting requirements, participating in annual partner meetings, conducting IMB host plant vegetation assessments on Department of Natural Resources property, and assisting the National Park Service (NPS) with transect surveys where multiple IMB adults were detected!



Licence and NPS staff members glassing host plant habitat for IMB at American Camp National Historical Park – Photo by J. Combs

Nesting Herons at Wiley Slough: District Wildlife Biologists Moore and Waddell assisted the WDFW Habitat Program and Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Meis with questions about herons nesting along Wiley Slough at the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit. Approximately five nests at this newly established heronry are in trees in or adjacent to the site where improvements to the existing dike will begin in 2023. The dike requires repairs to address overtopping, seepage, and stability concerns to prevent flooding and damage to nearby infrastructure and farmlands.

WDFW proposes to raise the elevation of the dike, raise the level of protection at the tide gate over Wiley Slough, and modify access roads, ramps, and turnarounds along the dike. The total project length is approximately 5600 linear feet. Any removal of trees or other vegetation at the project site will occur after the 2022 heron nesting season.



A pair of herons nesting along Wiley Slough at the Skagit Wildlife Area Headquarters Unit –

Photo by R. Waddell

Elk Survey in King County: District 12 King County Area biologists Smith and Anderson, with assistance from District 11 Pierce and Thurston County area biologist Butler, conducted a survey scoping flight for elk in Game Management Unit (GMU) 460. The flight included areas of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River and north into industrial timberlands of the GMU. Visibility on the ground in some of the thicker U.S. Forest Service lands ended-up being better than anticipated. The biologists noted elk, bear, and a common loon while in flight. Future efforts will focus on refining how to survey across a suburban/rural/timberland/wildland interface. Elk survey flights in District 12 have not occurred for two decades or so. District 12 wants to thank District 11 Biologists Tirhi and Butler for their partnership in development.



Biologist Smith signaling "got it" during flight over Middle Fork Snoqualmie

Species of Greatest Conservation Need – Western Purple Martin: Biologists Anderson and Smith worked with the Fish program to retain a boat for use in assistance with maintaining the Seattle waterfront [purple martin](#) colonies that are all out on pilings in tidally influenced areas (Duwamish, Terminal 91, Shilshole being major sites; a few other land-based sites scattered amongst that expanse that volunteers and partners maintain). It went well with tides. The group of WDFW and volunteer members noted 12 or more martins come in to check out the new, cleaned SuperGourds; as well as likely night roost in them. These could not be maintained without volunteer efforts and kind borrow of boat from the Fish program.



Volunteer members with WDFW helping maintain a large purple martin colony in the Duwamish Waterway with WDFW assistance in accessing at high tide via boat

Urban American White Pelican – State Threatened and Species of Greatest Conservation Need: While maintaining another Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), purple martins and their gourds, the group had eight [American white pelicans](#) fly over the Duwamish. Most stayed up higher in direct flight north, over Kellogg Island and Elliott Bay, directly past Seattle. However, one came down to Kellogg Island area of Duwamish seemingly to “check things out.” A very large and active Caspian tern colony is adjacent to area on an industrial building that has a flat roof. The thought is the tern feeding activity and presence of that colony may have attracted the pelican; perhaps a food reconnaissance given so much tern activity and tern feeding.



An American white pelican in flight, over the Duwamish Waterway on 04/17/22. This bird is not an urban species and rarely seen west of mountains. However, nonbreeding birds have recently taken to Deer Lagoon up on Whidbey (2021). Perhaps some over here on the west side again this year? – Photo by WDFW D12

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Water Access Program: Water Access Program staff members Derek Hacker, John Evans, and Tom Wampler have been working long hours preparing lowland lakes water access sites in preparation for the fishing opener on April 23.



Rainbow trout getting planted at a WDFW water access site at Lake Armstrong ahead of the April 23rd opener

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Coyote Coexistence Panel: District Wildlife Biologist Anderson along with representatives of Audubon Washington, Woodland Park Zoo, University of Washington, and Seattle University participated in a [virtual community presentation](#) and question-answer panel regarding local coyote populations and urban coyote conflict reduction and coexistence techniques.

Bellevue Master Naturalist Class: Biologist Anderson provided the annual, two-hour class that touches on urban wildlife, natural history, habits, conflict scenarios, regulations, and conflict reduction techniques for the 2022 crop of [master naturalist](#) participants.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Leque Island Adaptive Management: Projects Coordinator Brokaw, Habitat Program staff members Chuck Stambaugh-Bowey and Kirk Lakey, Stillaguamish Tribe staff member Jason Griffith, and Tulalip Tribe staff member Derek Marks hiked out to the mud flats south of Leque Island to talk about potential methods to increase the pace of channel development in the mud flats south of the restoration area. New channels are forming in the mud flats due to the increased volume of tidal water in the restoration area, which is creating new fish habitat. We hope that these new channels will connect to the restoration area eventually as an additional means for fish to access the restoration site.



WDFW, Tulalip, and Stillaguamish staff members discussing channel development in the mud flats near Leque Island

Providing Education and Outreach

Sound Water Stewards Tour: Projects Coordinator Brokaw, Skagit Wildlife Area Manager Meis, and Habitat Biologist Lindsey Desmul led a group of 25 members of the Sound Water Stewards volunteer group on a tour of the Leque Island restoration area. It was raining sideways and difficult walking through the muck, but the group maintained their enthusiasm through the entire trip.



The Sound Water Stewards group toured Leque Island to see the restoration features

WDFW Earth Day Department Efforts: Biologists Anderson and Smith participated in Earth Day outreach efforts with Public Affairs. The King County area biologist relayed they were in field maintaining loon nesting platforms to provide area for common loon – a state listed species and species of greatest conservation need related to the Washington State Wildlife Action Plan.



One of a pair of common loons noted at a territorial lake while 2022 nest platforms were launched

Conducted Business Operations and Policy

New Natural Resource Worker Hire: Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Manager Boehm would like to introduce Natural Resource Worker Dinsmore to the WDFW family. Dinsmore started with the Department April 16, 2022, as the Snoqualmie Natural Resource Worker, a career seasonal position. Dinsmore brings with him a host of field and equipment skills, eager and great attitude, and a very personable character. He will be working mainly in the Duvall area units but will be involved in projects at all locations. Please welcome Dinsmore when you see him. I also want to thank everyone involved in their efforts to fill this position on a permanent basis.



Dinsmore, Snoqualmie Natural Resource Worker