

Wildlife Program – Bi-weekly Report

October 1 to 15, 2022

LANDS DIVISION

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Rulemaking to Protect Bighorn Sheep: A new permanent rule (WAC 220-500-045) will replace the emergency rule currently in effect. It is intended to protect bighorn sheep from disease transmission from domestic sheep and goats. The rule restricts visitors from bringing these domestic animals, e.g., pack goats, onto wildlife area units specified in the code. Note, this does not affect existing grazing permits for domestic sheep e.g., on the L.T. Murray Wildlife Area (WLA). The public comment period for this rule is open until Dec. 1, 2022. There are opportunities to [comment and/or participate in the public hearing](#) for this rule.

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Lands Partnership and Project Coordinator: The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has hired a new statewide position to help advance the goals of the ten-year Recreation Strategy for WDFW-managed Lands. Erin Browning is based in Region 4 out of the North Bend office. Her work will focus on building collaborative relationships to deliver recreation infrastructure projects including signage and trails. She also will develop a volunteer program to place “ambassadors” at busy boat ramps and trail heads. Erin’s first day will be October 17.

E-Bikes Report: In spring 2021, the Washington Legislature passed senate bill 5452, which directed WDFW and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to lead a public engagement process to help inform where and which type of e-bikes may be allowed on WDFW and DNR-managed lands. The two departments reported the findings from this process in a report delivered to the legislature on Sept. 30. Reference the legislative report. Learn more in our [blog post](#).

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Wildlife Area Planning: Planning is underway at the Skagit, L.T. Murray, and Methow WLAs. On Oct. 4-5, the Methow WLA planning team met in Winthrop for two days to continue scoping for a plan that will incorporate a new recreation planning framework.

REGION 1

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Kettle's Lynx Camera Collection: Wildlife Biologist Turnock coordinated the collection of cameras deployed in the Kettles for lynx monitoring. The cameras were collected prior to the popular modern firearm season and will be re-deployed after the cessation of hunting seasons to monitor lynx occupancy and reproduction through the winter.



Bull moose observed in the Kettles during camera collection

Biologist Turnock is downloading photos from 40 cameras retrieved last week in the Kettles to send to Professor Dan Thornton at the Washington State University (WSU). All manner of species were detected on the cameras including lynx, bobcats, coyotes, wolves, bears, moose, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pine marten, elk, cows, domestic goats, people, dogs, badgers, yaks, red-tailed hawks, snowshoe hare, cottontails, ravens, squirrels, skunks, and bats.



A moose cow calf pair on a game camera in the Kettle range

Bighorn Harvest and Ground Surveys: Biologists Atamian and Lowe inspected and pinned a ram harvested from the Lincoln Cliffs herd.



Biologist Stewart located, identified, and recorded bighorn sheep within the Black Butte, Mountain View, Tucannon, and Wenaha populations. These data are collected to better understand the basic demographics of the herds, develop long-term trends in lamb survival, and detect mortality events reasonably soon after they occur.

Chronic Wasting Disease Check Stations: Wildlife Biologists Prince and Turnock gathered supplies and set up the self-service Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sampling station at the Colville district office. The station is for hunters that want to leave their harvested or salvaged deer or elk head for sampling of chronic wasting disease. Hunters are asked to fill out a data sheet, cut off the deer or elk head and antlers, and put the head and data sheet into a bag and garbage can for testing.



District Biologist Prince secures the letters C, W, and D to the self-serve CWD station

Biologist Lowe and Regional Director Pozzanghera, along with two volunteers, staffed the Deer Park hunter check station on Highway 395 for opening weekend of the modern firearm deer season. There were 65 hunters that came through the check station over both days with 17 harvested deer (14 white-tailed and three mule deer). Samples were collected from 13 of those for chronic wasting disease surveillance.



Biologist Lowe collects lymph nodes for CWD surveillance while Regional Director Pozzanghera and a volunteer label samples and record hunter data

Private Lands Biologist Gaston, Natural Resource Technician Nizer, and WSU volunteers managed a deer check station in Washtucna, Washington for opening weekend of deer modern firearm season. The check station was available to hunters in the area to sample deer lymph nodes for chronic wasting disease.



Mule Deer being sampled at the Washtucna check station, pictured is Natural Resource Technician Nizer and a WSU volunteer

Assistant District Biologist Vekasy and CWD Technicians Moberg and Garcia staffed new deer and elk CWD sampling stations in Walla Walla and Asotin. Collection of samples was relatively light, but most of the hunters who stopped were not aware of the new effort to collect samples but were very supportive of the effort and we should see increased collection success in the future. We collected 13 samples at the Walla Walla station and 11 samples in Asotin. Wildlife Area Manager Dingman worked at the Last Resort Campground collecting CWD samples from hunter harvested deer during the opening weekend of the general deer rifle season.

Bats: Biologists Atamian and Lowe were joined by Inland Northwest Wildlife Council (INWC) members Curry and Barlow for the biennial clean out of the bat condo on the Little Spokane. Four 55-gallon trash cans of guano were removed from the condo. Surveys from this summer indicate the maternity colony using the structure is around 7,000 bats.



Biologist Atamian lowering a floorboard of the condo to remove the guano piled up inside



Biologist Lowe sweeping out the inside of the condo and INWC member Curry holding the tarp to catch the fall out



Baffles inside the bat condo

Fish Program Assistance: Sherman Creek Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Daro Palmer and Northern Region 1 Access Area Manager Daniel Dziekan assisted regional Fish Program staff members with rehabilitation efforts at Williams Lake in Spokane County, over two to three days. Dziekan used his work truck and multiple dump trailers to shuttle trash such as rinsed, empty containers to the dump. Palmer used his small tractor to move supplies, crush, and load trash for the dump trailers, and to stack usable leftover pallets for transport to Sherman Creek Wildlife Area for future use.



Dziekan's truck and trailer with trash



Palmer's tractor and used pallets

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Hunt by Reservation Only Program: Private Lands Biologist Gaston signed up a new landowner for 5,000 acres of hunting access in Whitman and Garfield counties. The landowner will enroll a total of six different properties which will be loaded into the Hunt by Reservation Only system. New properties are expected to be loaded up and available in time for the modern firearm deer season.

Private Lands Biologist Gaston uploaded seven new Hunt by Reservation Only properties onto the WDFW website. The properties opened up hunting access for big game or upland hunting opportunities this week. A total of 5,500 acres were opened up for public hunting access.

Access Agreement: Private Lands Supervisor Earl entered a new Hunting Only By Written Permission contract for Garfield County for +2,600 acres and submitted it for approval in Novatus.

Chief Joseph and Asotin Creek Recreation Access Sites: Greg Heimgartner cleaned access areas across the district. He reports Heller Bar area as being very busy with anglers and the shooting range extremely busy as well due to the extended closure. He assisted Wooten WLA staff members with installation of a new sign.



A full Heller Bar parking area

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area: Natural Resource Worker Jensen cleaned up trash in the campgrounds and around the lakes. He also worked on cutting vegetation back from the access road into Rainbow Lake and Campground 3 and cleared the vegetation from the Wooten Shooting Range. The WDFW entry sign on the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area was reinstalled after being repaired.



WT Wooten Wildlife Area entry sign was repaired and reinstalled

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Domestic Goat Testing: WDFW Biologist Stewart assisted Asotin County Conservation Commission Technician Autumn Patterson, and WDFW Wildlife Area Manager Kari Dingman, in testing 15 domestic goats for *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (Movi), educating the landowners on the risk of contact with bighorn sheep, and scribing the data for future use. Additionally, Dingman and Stewart located and collected data on the Tucannon bighorn sheep population which is experiencing a rapid decline.

Leadpoint Pack: Natural Resource Technician Barron attended the district Leadpoint recommendation meetings on teams. Barron swapped out the battery on the radio activated guard (RAG) box deployed in private pasture. Barron and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill conducted a depredation investigation on a dead cow discovered in the Leadpoint pack territory. Cow mortality was determined to be a confirmed wolf depredation. Carcass was removed following the investigation and disposed of at a carcass sanitation pit.

Smackout Pack: Barron attended the district Smackout recommendation meeting on teams. Barron swapped out the battery on the RAG box deployed in private pasture. Barron and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill conducted two depredation investigations: one calf mortality and one injured calf. The calf mortality was determined to be an unconfirmed depredation. The injured calf was removed from the pasture and determined to be a confirmed wolf depredation. Barron and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Bennett investigated another injured calf and determined the injuries to have been sustained in a confirmed wolf depredation.

Natural Resource Technician Barron attended the district Smackout pack update to discuss next steps. Barron and Janowski and Wildlife Conflict Specialist Samsill responded to a report of a dead calf discovered in a private pasture. The calf was investigated and determined to have died from a confirmed wolf depredation event.

State Line Elk: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Kolb followed up with a Walla Walla County producer following their corn harvest. The producer experienced near total loss on multiple corn plots last year from elk damage. This year, a 30-foot sudan grass buffer was placed on the outer perimeter of the corn crops and the producer experienced very minimal damage. The producer is planning on planting additional sudan grass buffers next year to build upon the successes from this growing season.

Allotment and Pasture Checks: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade spent two days this week checking United States Forest Service (USFS) Pataha and Little Butte allotments. Producers are actively working to remove cattle from their USFS allotments.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

4-O Ranch Wildlife Fires: On Sunday Oct. 2, 2022, Wildlife Area Manager Bob Dice was notified of a fire on the West side of the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area. Upon arrival, the barn at the Mace place was found burned to the ground. A second fire was discovered by DNR a short distance from the barn fire on a wooded hillside. An elk carcass was next to that fire. Bob assisted DNR with digging line around the second fire. WDFW Enforcement officers and a DNR fire investigator are investigating the cause of the fire.



Burned barn at the Mace Place on the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area



Small fire on the 4-O Ranch Wildlife Area with an elk carcass nearby

Shrub Planting: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley worked with the Walla Walla Conservation District in planting trees and shrubs on a Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) habitat planting project in Walla Walla County.

Fall Wildflowers: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Finch noted the proliferation of wild forbs blooming in the former grass lawn, now restored to native vegetation, at Swanson Lakes WLA headquarters.



Blooming globe mallow in mostly dormant Swanson Lakes HQ yard

Farm Bill: Biologist Baarstad worked with several landowners in Lincoln County regarding fall seeding requirements for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) contracts.

Mowing: Private Lands Biologist Thorne Hadley mowed walking paths at a Feel Free to Hunt site where several older hunter hunters expressed the difficulty of accessibility at a particular site.

Providing Education and Outreach

Washington State University Wildlife Lab: Wildlife Conflict Supervisor McCanna and private lands staff members taught a wildlife trap and transfer lab two different days at WSU. This was the 28th year McCanna has taught this lab. It is great to see the diversity and number of students (50+) pursuing a wildlife degree and future career.

Chronic Wasting Disease Flyers: Wildlife Conflict Specialist Wade posted CWD flyers at multiple United States Forest Service kiosks to help hunters and the public better understand CWD and ongoing CWD sampling efforts.

Conducting Business Operations and Policy

Turkey Enhancement Grant: Private Lands Biologist was awarded a \$5,000 grant for turkey habitat enhancement on a property in Whitman County. The property is part of the burn recovery area from the 2020 Pine City-Malden Fire. The property is enrolled in the Hunt by Reservation Only program to allow turkey, deer, and upland bird hunting opportunities. The property will be enhanced with tree plantings and forb seedings as part of a joint project with the Pine Creek Conservation District to restore the natural habitat.

REGION 3

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO:

Managing Wildlife Populations

Fisher Monitoring: Biologists Bernatowicz and Wampole established fisher monitoring sites in the Okanagan-Wenatchee National Forest Area. Sites are a part of a greater co-operative survey effort aimed to evaluate fisher occupancy rates across the southern cascade region. Sites feature an automatic scent dispenser, bait bone, hair snag and remote trail camera.



Scent/Bait Station with Gray Jays

Wildlife Returning to the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area: While conducting herbicide spraying on the burned areas of the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area, Assistant Manager Winegeart, and Natural Resource Technician Blore saw Bighorn rams munching on new vegetation.



Bighorn rams taking advantage of post Vantage Hwy fire green-up

Rice Paddies and Johnson Unit Maintenance: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin completed mowing and have been filling up wildlife area wetlands including the Rice Paddies and Johnson unit for the waterfowl season. The Rice Paddies wetland cells are close to full, and Johnson is beginning to see some water flow after Bridgeman Pond and Morgan Lake finally filled



Southwestern cell of Rice Paddies is full and seeing hunter visitation



The central cells of the Rice Paddies are nearing full capacity



The inlet channel to Johnson has water flow, and soon the wetland will be filling.

Windmill Ranch Unit and the Serpent Wetland Maintenance: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Rodgers has completed mowing the Phase 1 and Phase 3 wetlands in the Windmill Ranch unit and the serpent wetland in the Mesa Lake unit and they have been reflooded in preparation for waterfowl season.



The Phase 1 wetland is full and ready for waterfowl season



Phase 3 is full and already being used by waterfowl

Providing Recreation Opportunities

Horse Heaven Hills Deer: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received a request from a large row crop farm in southern Benton County for youth deer hunting opportunities. Several youths who drew special permits for antlerless deer were contacted and offered a unique hunting opportunity.

Modern Firearm Deer Opener: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand patrolled Rattlesnake Hills area during the modern firearm deer season opener. Several hunters were contacted with one nice buck being checked. Many hunters reported seeing good numbers of deer, but high winds hampered success.

Sunnyside Volunteers: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area volunteers have assisted on several projects lately including repainting a duck blind on the Johnson wetland and repainting eco-blocks in parking lots to cover graffiti. Assistant Manager Ferguson and Natural Resource Technician Wascisin have also been busy mowing hunter pathways around the Sunnyside Unit in preparation for the upland bird hunting season.



Hunting blind on Johnson with previous paint scheme



Volunteer Chris Oatis repainting the Johnson blind with a more subtle camouflage. Wildlife area staff will also be outfitting blinds with new grass mat coverings and camouflage netting



Assistant Manager Ferguson repositioning moved barrier rock and clearing out kochia at McGee lot



McGee lot after clearing majority of kochia and volunteer Curtis Lamott painted over graffiti

Providing Conflict Prevention and Education

Wenas Elk Fence: Manager Hughes met with adjacent landowners that the Wenas elk fence rebuilding has potential to affect. Assistance Manager Taylor and Hughes have been coordinating with a new project manager for rebuilding the elk fence. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding has been awarded to rebuild a remaining eight miles that burned in the Evans Canyon Fire of 2020.

Neighboring Wenas Landowner Access: Manager Hughes and Habitat Biologist Nelson met with a neighboring landowner near Manastash. The landowner owns property surrounded by adjacent private property and the Wenas Wildlife Area. They currently are accessing their property by driving along a green dot road to a point where they illegally go off the road to access their ground through the wildlife area. The landowner wants to gain legal access to their property. Nelson provided the landowner with feedback on things to think about if they look into gaining easements through private property to put in a road over Manastash Creek. Manager Hughes is working on developing a temporary one-year permit for them to legally access their ground through the Wenas. The permit will be given with the conditions that it is temporary, and they will need to work with the neighboring landowners to develop a road with easement to access their property permanently.

Rattlesnake Mountain Elk: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand continued to monitor irrigated tree fruit, wine grape and row crop areas for elk activity and damage situations. Landowners are reporting a few observations, mostly during early morning hours in orchards. No reportable damage has occurred.

Tri-Cities Airport Deer: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand received and responded to a report of three deer trapped within the Tri-Cities Airport in Pasco. Attempts to haze the deer by United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services have failed, so agency kill authority permits were issued, and all three deer were removed. The deer were field dressed immediately and the meat was donated to a non-profit charity in Walla Walla.

Kahlotus Deer Damage: District 4 Wildlife Conflict Specialist Hand completed and delivered Damage Prevention Permits for landowners in the Kahlotus area to assist with hazing migratory deer in their winter wheat crops.

Conserving Natural Landscapes

Wenas Black Canyon Trough Update: Assistant Manager Taylor, Technician Stoltenow, and Technician Rodriguez checked the status of the water trough installed in Black Canyon earlier this summer. The trough has been well used by wildlife and several new game trails have been established leading to the trough, as well as a multitude of other signs pointing to wildlife being in the area.

Wenas Fall Spraying and Mowing: Technicians Rodriguez and Stoltenow, assisted by the WDFW West Side Spray Crew, sprayed for Diffuse and Russian Knapweed throughout the Roza and Bull Pasture restoration sites. Roza has been targeted for years in the fall and we have been seeing the Knapweed going down throughout the whole area. The Bull Pasture Restoration Site will be seeded Fall of 2023 into native grasses. The area is currently in a two-year fallow. Technician Stoltenow mowed the McCabe restoration site to remove Russian Thistle to prepare for a fall seeding of the area.

Wenas Grazing Assessment: Manager Hughes and Assistant Manager Taylor conducted a mid-evaluation site assessment on a temporary grazing lease on the Wenas. No major issues with the lease have been occurring. The area did burn in the Evans Canyon Fire in 2020, it is recovering from this burn. The grazing being done is very light utilization and the permit is continuing to foster a relationship with the neighboring landowner.

Windy Point Forest Restoration: Forester Hartmann inspected thinning work in progress and oversaw the delivery of a gate to be installed on the project.



Loading machine “shoveling” cut trees in Unit 2 off a steep slope to a location where the wheeled skidder can relay the rest of the way to the landing



Contractor truck loaded with gate pieces from WDFW’s Yakima Screen Shop

Rock Creek Pre-Commercial Thinning Projects: Forester Hartmann showed prospective contractors 101 acres of pre-commercial thinning units in the Rock Creek drainage. Forester Hartmann also completed layout on pre-commercial thinning units in the Gold Creek drainage, bringing that project to 448 acres.



Looking down into a pre-commercial thinning unit at Rock Creek



Looking up into a pre-commercial thinning unit at Gold Creek

Volunteers planting Pines on Colockum: Colockum Wildlife Area Manager recently checked on the success of a tree planting effort on the Colockum by a local volunteer. This volunteer recently took it upon himself to grow and plant Ponderosa Pine seedlings in areas burned by the 2013 Colockum-Tarps Fire. Lopushinsky found good survival of the tree seedlings, probably due to the good spring rains in 2022.



New pine seedling planted in fall 2021 by Wenatchee area volunteer Shawn Ballard

Post Vantage Highway Fire Land Assessment: All month so far, L.T. Murray WLA staff members have been out on the Whiskey Dick Unit assessing the land conditions and developing restoration plans, as well as working with cultural resource advisors and conducting weed spraying operations. Restoration planning and work will continue until winter sets in and then will recommence in the early spring.



Great basin wildrye in the Vantage Hwy Fire footprint showing just enough life to say “I’ll be okay come spring”

Providing Education and Outreach

Early Learning Childhood Coalition Forest Critters Night: District 8 staff members, Biologist Wampole, Manager Bates, and Habitat Specialist Nelson brought pelts, skulls, tracks, and scat to the Forest Critters Night at the Early Learning Childhood Coalition. The night focused on exposing and educating young children to local wildlife species such as cougars, bears, skunks, coyotes, and wolves through interactive opportunities.

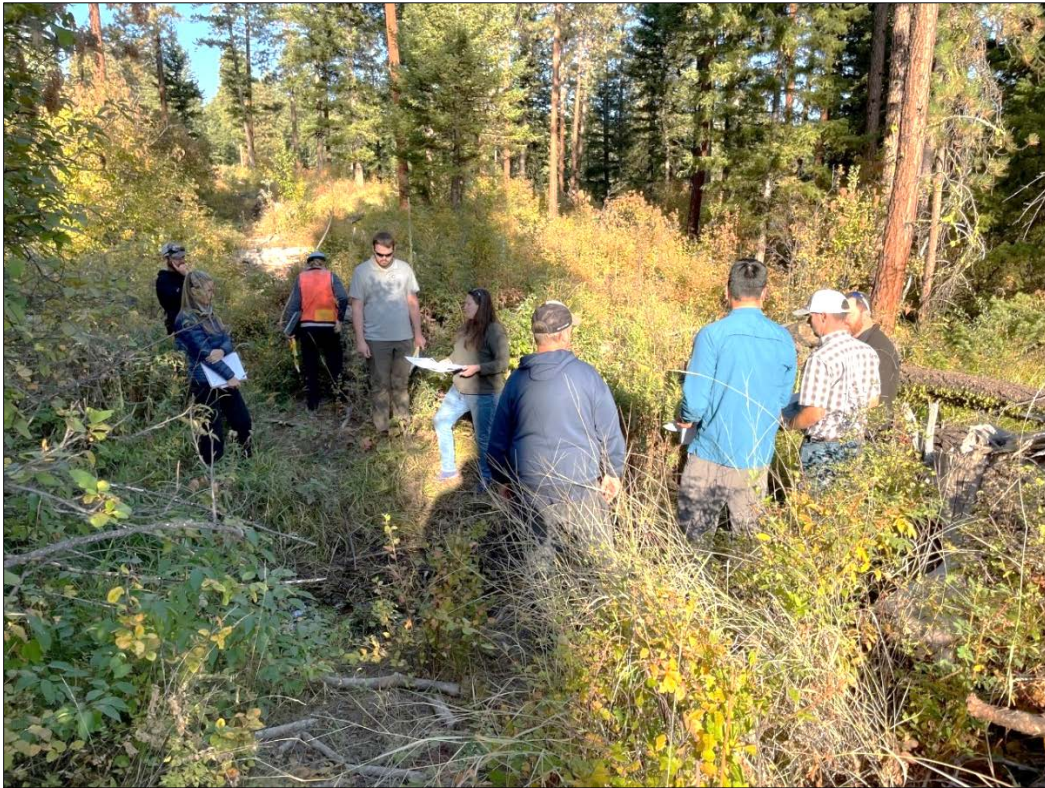
Windmill Unit Rattlesnakes: Sunnyside Snake River Wildlife Area Manager Kaelber has observed many rattlesnakes at the Windmill Unit in the last two weeks. Hunters and recreationists should use caution when hiking through vegetation and along trails especially in the afternoons. The recent warm weather has kept snakes out and active.



A rattlesnake at the North Windmill Unit access site

Other

Stemilt Basin Irrigation Easement Site Meeting: Colockum Wildlife Area Manager Pete Lopushinsky and WDFW Habitat Program staff members Ken Muir and Amanda Barge joined Stemilt Growers personnel and contract engineers to look at a proposed irrigation pipeline installation on an existing irrigation easement in the Stemilt Basin. When WDFW acquired these lands from DNR they came with several undeveloped easements for installation of utilities for adjacent private cherry orchards.



WDFW staff and Stemilt Orchards employees inspect a small stream crossing in preparation to install irrigation pipeline across it, Colockum Wildlife Area