

Brave fall weather to hunt elk, catch salmon or dig razor clams

Local News

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Big-game hunters are shifting their sights from deer to elk, while bird hunters look forward to new flights of ducks and geese. Anglers, meanwhile, are reeling in an assortment of coho, chinook and chum salmon from waters around the state, and crab fishing is reopening in Nov. 1 in two areas of Puget Sound.

Temperatures are dropping and more rain is in the forecast, but that is welcome news for many hunters around the state, said Don Don Kraege, waterfowl manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Hunters did well during the first couple weeks of the season because the weather distributed the birds throughout the area," Kraege said. "There's more blustery weather in the forecast, and that should continue to improve hunting prospects on both sides of the Cascades."

Those same conditions, including an early snowfall in the mountains, has also helped to improve success rates for deer hunters during the modern-firearm season, said Dave Ware, WDFW game manager. That season wraps up by the end of October, followed by general elk-hunting seasons running Oct. 31-Nov. 8 in eastern Washington and Nov. 7-17 on the west side of the state.

For more information about upcoming elk hunts, see WDFW's *Big Game Hunting* pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/hunter/hunter.htm>. Bird hunters can check the *Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Season* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/water.htm> for area-specific hunting regulations.

Anglers may be more interested to know that chum salmon are gathering at the mouth of the Hoodspout Hatchery in Hood Canal, catch rates for hatchery steelhead are improving on the Snake River and hatchery coho are still biting well on the Cowlitz and Klickitat rivers.

In addition, two areas of Puget Sound are set to reopen Nov. 1 for late-season crab fishing and two razor clam digs are tentatively scheduled for later in the month. Starting Nov. 1 at sunrise, recreational crab fishing will reopen in Marine area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and most of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) seven days a week. (The portion of Marine Area 9 south of a line from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point will remain closed for the season.)

More razor-clam digs are scheduled Nov. 4-7 and Nov. 14-17, subject to the results of marine toxin tests. Final word on those digs will be available on WDFW's shellfish hotline (866-880-5431), website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/>) and local news media.

For more information about fishing, hunting and wildlife-viewing opportunities available around the state, see the regional reports below:

North Puget Sound

Fishing: Anglers are still hooking a few coho in the region's rivers and streams, but chum will soon be taking center stage. Meanwhile, some anglers fishing areas of Puget Sound have been reeling in blackmouth and will soon have the option of dropping a crab pot in select areas.

Starting Nov. 1 at sunrise, Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and most of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) will reopen for **sport crabbing** seven days a week through Jan. 2, 2010. The portion of Marine Area 9 south of a line from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point will remain closed for the season.

Crab fishing also will remain open seven days a week through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu) and 13 (south Puget Sound), where the fishery has continued uninterrupted since summer. Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal), currently open Wednesdays through Saturdays, will close for the season at 6 p.m. Oct. 31.

Sport crabbing will not reopen this year in marine areas 6 (Strait of Juan de Fuca), 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island), where the summer catch reached the annual recreational quota.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. Fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. For more information about recreational crabbing in Puget Sound, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab> .

While on the Sound, why not fish for **blackmouth** ? Effort has been low, but anglers have hooked a few of the resident chinook in central Puget Sound. Anglers fishing Marine Area 10 have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Beginning Nov. 1, opportunities for blackmouth will increase, as marine areas 8-1, 8-2 and 9 open for chinook. Anglers fishing those marine areas will have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. Anglers are reminded that Marine Area 7 closes to salmon retention Nov. 1.

In the rivers, the **coho** season is winding down and **chum salmon** will soon be arriving in greater numbers. There are reports of anglers still catching a few coho in the region's streams but, overall, fishing has been slow.

Lake Sammamish is also an option for freshwater salmon anglers, who have a daily limit of four salmon, and can retain up to two chinook. All sockeye must be released, and fishing is closed within 100 yards of the mouth of Issaquah Creek.

Lake Washington also is open for salmon, but only for a few more days. Anglers fishing the lake, which is open through Oct. 31, are allowed four coho per day (minimum size 12 inches) from waters north of the Highway 520 Bridge and east of the Montlake Bridge.

Before heading out, anglers should check the regulations for all freshwater and saltwater fisheries in WDFW's Fishing in Washington pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Hunting: Wet and windy weather has made for good **waterfowl** hunting early in the season, said Don Kraege, WDFW waterfowl manager. "Hunters did well during the first couple weeks of the season because the weather distributed the birds throughout the area," he said. "There's more blustery weather in the forecast, and that should continue to improve hunting prospects on both sides of the Cascades."

More and more snow geese and dabbling ducks continue to arrive in the area, Kraege said.

"It's still early in the migration, but the numbers of birds should continue to increase as we head into November," he said.

Goose hunts are open through Oct. 29 in the region, and then start again Nov. 7. However, **snow**, **Ross** and **blue geese** seasons in Goose Management Area 1 (Skagit and Snohomish counties) will run from Oct. 17 through Jan. 31 without a break. The duck hunting season also is open through Jan. 31.

Kraege reminds hunters who want to participate in the **Snow Goose Quality Hunt** program on Fir Island and in the northern Port Susan Bay area that they must have written authorization to hunt for snow geese in Goose Management Area 1 and written authorization to hunt the quality hunt units. Hunters also must possess a Washington small game hunting license and a state migratory bird validation, as well as a federal migratory bird stamp.

For more information on how to participate in the quality hunt program, which is a cooperative project

with several local landowners and residents, visit WDFW's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/snow_goose .

Upland bird hunters have until the end of November to bag **pheasant** . Pheasant hunters should note that the department will release pheasants this fall at the **Skagit Wildlife Area's Samish Unit** rather than the Headquarters Unit, where a substantial portion of land is no longer suitable for pheasant hunting. WDFW is temporarily moving its pheasant release program to the Samish Unit because an estuary restoration project has returned portions of recreational land on the Headquarters Unit to intertidal habitat for fish and wildlife. Pheasants will be released several days a week on the Samish Unit through Nov. 7.

The early modern firearm season for **deer** runs through Oct. 31. Up next for hunters is the modern firearm season for elk, which gets started Nov. 7 in select game management units. Other hunts open in the region include, **cougar, grouse, California quail** and **bobwhite** seasons. **Bear** hunts are also open, but the season closes Nov. 15

Hunters can find more information on hunting season prospects at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/prospects> . Before going afield, hunters should check the *Big Game Hunting* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/hunter/hunter.htm>) and the *Waterfowl and Upland Game* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/water.htm>) for details.

Wildlife viewing: More and more birders are making their way to the region to view **snow geese** , which also continue to arrive in increasing numbers. About 80,000 snow geese winter in western Washington each year. Most of those snow geese congregate in the Skagit Valley, and can be found in the area from mid-October through early May.

Several birders have even spotted some blue geese among this year's flock. The **blue geese** , rare visitors to western Washington, were reported numerous times in a field on Fir Island. One birder spotted seven blue geese, along with 18 **cackling geese** and a juvenile **white-fronted goose** . "They formed their own tight little group within the larger flock," according to the report on the Tweeters birding website (<http://www.scn.org/earth/tweeters/>). "I have never seen so many blue geese in one spot."

Meanwhile, birders throughout the nation are beginning to make preparations for the annual **Christmas Bird Count** , scheduled Dec. 14, 2009 through Jan. 5, 2010. Specific counting dates have already been announced in several areas of western Washington, where birders turn out by the hundreds to count and categorize the birds they see to benefit avian science. Those interested should watch the Audubon website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/> for details.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Fishing: Anglers targeting chum and coho in Puget Sound and area streams will soon have some other options to consider. A late-season Dungeness crab fishery will get under way Nov. 1 in select areas, and two razor clam digs are planned later in the month.

Starting Nov. 1 at sunrise, recreational **crab** fishing will reopen in Marine area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), and most of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) seven days a week through Jan. 2, 2010. The portion of Marine Area 9 south of a line from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point will remain closed for the season.

Crab fishing also will remain open seven days a week through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu) and 13 (south Puget Sound). However, only a few more days remain to catch crab in Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal), which is open Wednesdays through Saturdays through Oct. 31. Sport crabbing will not reopen this year in marine areas 6 (Strait of Juan de Fuca), 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1, 8-2 (east of Whidbey Island) and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island), where the summer catch reached the annual recreational quota.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. Fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across.

Recreational crabbers are required to send in a winter catch card or report their catch online by Jan. 15. People failing to submit their winter reports will receive a \$10 fine when they apply for a 2010 Puget Sound crab endorsement. For more information about recreational crabbing in Puget Sound, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab>.

Meanwhile, **chum** salmon are gathering in front of the Hoodspout Hatchery facility in southern Hood Canal, where the fishery has been open since Oct. 16. Although it's the early part of the run, the numbers are building, said Mark Cylwik, WDFW hatchery specialist. "The run normally peaks just before Thanksgiving, so November is a good month to enjoy some chum fishing," Cylwik said. A recent creel check on the Hoodspout shore showed 20 anglers with 10 chum. To avoid competition with tribal beach nets, Cylwik recommends fishing on days other than Tuesdays and Thursdays, when the Skokomish Tribe has been conducting its fishery. Anglers can call (360) 877-5222 for a recorded message about Hoodspout fishing conditions.

The mouth of Kennedy Creek near Shelton also is known for attracting chum, but so far the run has been light. A creel check conducted Oct. 24 showed 39 anglers with seven fish. Other traditionally good November chum rivers are the Skokomish and Nisqually rivers, where salmon fishing is currently under way. Starting Nov. 1, anglers can target chum in several other streams, including the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers in Jefferson County and Minter Creek in Pierce/Kitsap Counties. Because retention rules and fishing regulations vary on the many rivers and streams throughout the region, anglers are advised to check the 2009-2010 *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> before heading out.

On the Chehalis River in Grays Harbor County, participation and catch rates have slowed as salmon head out of the mainstem and into the tributaries, said Scot Barbour, WDFW fish biologist.

Twenty-four anglers recently checked at the Fuller Bridge on the river had five **hatchery coho**, while 11 anglers checked near Montesano had two.

"The Wishkah and Satsop rivers are good bets right now and lots of people have been fishing the Humptulips," Barbour said. "But this time of year, success depends on the weather and the height of the river. Anglers need to hit the rivers when they're high enough to bring in salmon, but not so high that they're unfishable."

Barbour reminds anglers that only hatchery coho with a clipped adipose fin and **jack chinook** and **coho** may be retained on a number of area rivers, including the Chehalis, Elk, Johns, Satsop, Wishkah and Wynoochee rivers in Grays Harbor County and the Skookumchuck River in Thurston County.

Anglers fishing in the Quillayute system - which includes the Bogachiel, Sol Duc, Calawah and Dickey rivers - can keep two adult salmon, plus two additional **adult hatchery coho** as part of the six-fish daily limit. No wild coho may be retained.

In the South Sound, anglers fishing in marine areas 11 and 13 (Vashon Island to South Puget Sound) may retain **wild chinook** as part of their two-fish daily limit, but will be restricted to one chinook starting Nov. 1. Also starting that day, anglers may retain **wild coho** caught in Marine Area 13.

Anglers are advised to check the 2009-2010 *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> before heading out.

Meanwhile, anglers looking for some late-season **trout** fishing might consider a trip to Black Lake in Thurston County, where 2,500 one-pound rainbows will be stocked in time for the Oct. 31 weekend. "In the past this late fall plant has resulted in good catch and effort through the winter," said Larry Phillips, WDFW fish biologist. "In addition to these fish, anglers often encounter large hold-over fish from last spring's planting, as well as wild coastal cutthroat."

On the coast, many of the 30,250 **razor clam** diggers who participated in the Oct. 16-19 season opener on five ocean beaches took home their 15-clam limit. More digs are tentatively scheduled Nov. 4-7 and Nov. 14-17, subject to the results of marine toxin tests.

For a change of pace, anglers may want to venture out some evening and try jigging for **squid**, which generally make their way through Puget Sound in fall and winter. Good bets include the Les Davis Pier in Tacoma and the Elliott Bay pier in Seattle.

Squid fishing is open year-round with a daily limit of five quarts or 10 pounds. Best success usually occurs at night. Legal gear includes a baitfish jig, a maximum of four squid lures or a hand dip net. Each angler must have a separate container. Squid fishing is closed in Hood Canal (Marine Area 12). More information on squid fishing is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/squid>. Information on fishing piers is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/piers/>.

Hunting: The early modern firearm season for **black-tailed deer** wraps up Oct. 31. Up next for hunters is the modern firearm **elk** season which opens Nov 7-17 in select game management units. "The Williams Creek area south of Raymond is our best elk area," said Greg Schirato, WDFW regional wildlife manager. "Another good area to look for elk is the North River unit south of Aberdeen."

The late-buck, black-tailed deer hunting season starts with a modern firearm hunt that runs Nov. 19-22 in western Washington. Following that four-day hunt, archers and muzzleloaders will take to the field Nov. 25 for the late deer and elk season, (Nov. 26 for late-muzzleloader deer season).

Hunters planning to participate in any hunting season should check WDFW's 2009 *Big Game Hunting* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/hunter/hunter.htm> before heading out.

The statewide season for **ducks, coots** and **snipe** resumed Oct. 24 while **goose-hunting** reopens Nov. 7 in Management Area 3. Goose management area 2B (Pacific County), under way since Oct. 17, is open Saturdays and Wednesdays only.

Hunters may also pursue **pheasant, quail** and **bobwhite** through Nov. 30. An extended pheasant-hunting season runs Dec. 1-15 at Skookumchuck, Fort Lewis, Kosmos, Scatter Creek, Belfair, Whidbey Island (except Bayview) and Lincoln Creek release sites. The statewide **forest grouse** hunting season continues through Dec. 31.

Additional information about bird-hunting seasons is available in the *Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game* pamphlet, <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/water.htm>.

The general **black bear** season will close Nov. 15, while **cougar** hunting in the region is open through March 31, 2010. Hunters are allowed one cougar and two bear during the season, but only one bear may be take in eastern Washington.

Hunters should be aware that the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has suspended garbage service at eight DNR campgrounds on state trust lands in Clallam and Jefferson counties. DNR asks the public to pack out what they pack in. Campgrounds include Bear Creek in Clallam County and Hoh Oxbow, Coppermine Bottom, Cottonwood, South Fork Hoh, Willoughby, Minnie Peterson and Upper Clearwater in Jefferson County.

Wildlife viewing: Each weekend throughout November, visitors can walk the Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail for an up-close look at thousands of **chum salmon** returning to local streams. Located just above the Kennedy Creek estuary on Totten Inlet, the trail is off U.S. Hwy 101 between Olympian and Shelton. The stream is one of the most productive chum salmon streams in Washington. While there visitors can find numerous species of migrating shorebirds or hike around

the estuary. More information on the Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail is located at <http://www.spsseg.org/> .

Birders venture to many places looking for common and rare bird sightings, including sewage treatment plants (STP) that often host numerous species. Recent visitors to the Hoquiam STP found several rarities as well as birds typically found in the area. Reports on the Tweeters website (<http://birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/TWET.html>) included sightings of an **orchard oriole**, **clay-colored sparrow**, **chestnut-collared longspur** and **palm warbler** among the more typical song sparrows, **golden-crowned sparrows**, **chickadees**, **kinglets** and **Hutton's vireo** .

Southwest Washington

Fishing: Hatchery **coho** salmon are still providing most of the action on the lower Columbia River, although bank anglers fishing for sturgeon immediately below Bonneville Dam are also catching fish. About one in 10 took home a keeper during the week ending Oct. 26.

From the Wauna power lines near Cathlamet upstream, anglers can keep one **white sturgeon** daily measuring between 38 and 54 inches fork length on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only. Anglers are reminded the statewide annual limit is five fish per license year (April through March). Meanwhile, anglers looking for **hatchery coho** have several good options to choose from, both above and below Bonneville Dam. The hotspot is still the Klickitat River, where bank and boat anglers have been taking home an average of one fish apiece. Fishing pressure has been heavy throughout the lower river, and boat anglers have been doing well trolling prawn/spinner rigs just off the mouth.

Fishing also continues to be productive in the Cowlitz, North Fork Lewis and Kalama rivers, said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. The Elochoman and Washougal rivers would also be good bets, he said. As of Oct. 21, nearly 35,000 adult coho had returned to the Cowlitz salmon hatchery, the highest count by that date since at least 1990.

"We are now fairly confident that total coho returns to the Columbia River Basin will meet or exceed the pre-season forecast of 700,000 fish, making it the biggest run since 2001," Hymer said. "The great thing is that the fish are still biting fairly well. The rain has really recharged fishing throughout the system."

Anglers fishing the Cowlitz River have also been intercepting some **chinook**, **steelhead** and **sea-run cutthroat** (especially near the trout hatchery). Hymer noted, however, that all adult chinook salmon intercepted on the Cowlitz River from Blue Creek upstream to Mill Creek must be released. For other regulations in effect on the Columbia River and its tributaries, he recommends that anglers check the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) before heading out.

One new emergency rule listed there allows Columbia River anglers to retain up to three adult coho salmon from the Rocky Point/Tongue Point line upriver to the Highway 395 Bridge in Pasco. Those fishing the mainstem Columbia near the mouth of the Lewis River should also be aware that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will begin blasting and dredging the shipping channel around Warrior Rock on the north end of Sauvie Island on Nov. 1. All watercraft will be prohibited from entering a 1,500-yard safety zone around the site without permission. Boaters who wish to enter the safety zone can contact the Coast Guard at VHF 13 or VHF 16 for specific instructions. For additional information, see <http://www.crci-project.info> .

Ready for winter? Hymer noted that four **winter-run steelhead** recently turned up in the trap at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery, a portent of another fishing season ahead. That fishery usually starts to ramp up around Thanksgiving, he said. "Talk about a quick transition," he added. "I'm still trying to get used to the fact that summer's over and fall is here."

Anglers who want to make the most of the current season might want to try Swift Reservoir, which

will remain open to fishing for **game fish** and **salmon** through Nov. 30. Fishing has been reported to be excellent for rainbows averaging 12-13 inches with some up to 20 inches. Hymer also suggests fishing Silver Lake near Castle Rock for **crappies**. Anglers have reportedly been doing well there too in recent days, he said.

Hunting: The final days of October found hunters taking aim at a variety of species around the region, including **deer, cougar, ducks, geese, coots** and **snipe**. Heavy rains have eased after the mid-month openers for those species, contributing to decent success rates for those hunts.

Deer hunting with modern firearms closes at the end of the day Oct. 31, but the other hunts will continue - with some variations - in the weeks ahead. Hunters can also look forward to the start of the modern-firearm season for **elk**, which runs Nov. 7-17 in selected game management units throughout western Washington.

David Anderson, WDFW wildlife biologist, noted that elk hunters in southwest Washington generally have one of the highest success rates in the state. "Conditions are looking pretty good this year," Anderson said. "We didn't have a severe winter and the recent snowfall is helping to move elk down from the higher elevations."

He strongly recommends that hunters check WDFW's *Big Game Hunting* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/hunter/hunter.htm>) for rules about specific areas before heading out. Bird hunters are similarly advised to check the *Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Season* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/water.htm>) for area-specific hunting regulations. As outlined in those pamphlets, ongoing hunts for cougars and geese will expand into additional areas in the days ahead:

Cougar season: The general-season cougar hunt in Klickitat County will begin Oct. 31. The season began two weeks earlier in most other areas of the state, but was delayed in Klickitat County and five other counties to accommodate a permit hunt with the use of dogs later in the year.

Goose season: Goose hunting will open Nov. 14 in Goose Management Area 2A, which includes Wahkiakum County, Cowlitz County and part of Clark County. That area opens later than other areas to protect dusky geese. See Page 17 of the *Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Season* pamphlet for more information.

Wildlife viewing: Migrating waterfowl are now reaching peak levels in southwest Washington, providing prime viewing opportunities for people throughout the region. **Swans, geese, ducks** and other **waterfowl** of all descriptions are on display throughout the Vancouver Lowlands, including seven subspecies of Canada geese ranging from common **cacklers** to less-common **Aleutian geese**.

With hunting seasons under way in many parts of the region, some birders have called WDFW to ask whether they should wear hunter-orange clothing while in the field. "It's not a legal requirement for bird watchers," said Bill Tweit, a WDFW policy analyst and avid birder. "But it only makes sense to let hunters know where you are when you're sharing the same area, since we are partners in outdoor recreation."

Meanwhile, birders throughout the nation are beginning to make preparations for the 110th annual Christmas Bird Count, scheduled Dec. 14, 2009 through Jan. 5, 2010. Specific counting dates have already been announced in several areas of southwest Washington, where birders turn out by the hundreds to count and categorize the birds they see to benefit avian science. Those interested should watch the Audubon website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/> for details.

Fishing: Steelhead fishing on the Snake River continues to heat up as temperatures cool. Joe Bumgarner, a WDFW fish biologist, said limited creel checks indicate good catch rates in various river sections. Anglers who were recently checked in the Wallula area, from the Washington-Oregon state line to the mouth of the Walla Walla River, averaged just under 11 hours of fishing per steelhead caught. From Ice Harbor Dam to Lower Monumental Dam, anglers averaged just under 12 hours per catch, and from Lower Monumental to Little Goose Dam, slightly more than 11 hours per catch. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife recent creel checks on the Lower Grand Ronde River showed an average of just over nine hours of fishing per steelhead caught on the Washington section, from Bogans Oasis to state line.

Bumgarner reminds Snake River system steelheaders that barbless hooks must be used and all wild steelhead must be kept in the water and released immediately. Because of the abundant return of hatchery-marked steelhead (clipped adipose or ventral fin with healed scar), up to five can be retained daily.

Many streams, rivers and lakes throughout the region close to all fishing Nov. 1. Waters that remain open year-round and are currently providing good catches of **rainbow trout**, include Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam.

Hunting: Joey McCanna, WDFW upland game bird specialist, said field checks of **pheasant** hunters over the season opening weekend in Whitman County - from Penawawa Canyon on the Snake River boundary on the south end to the Revere Wildlife Area on the northwest end - indicate that a total of 63 hunters had bagged 43 young-of-the-year pheasants and 13 adult pheasants, for an average of just under one bird per hunter. "In areas with good cover, hunters were getting several shots at birds," McCanna said.

The best areas to hunt pheasants are usually along river and stream drainages, from Rock and Union Flat Creek and the Palouse River to the Snake, Touchet, Walla Walla, and Tucannon rivers. Agricultural areas with good habitat conditions - brushy hillsides and draws - are prime, but of course hunters need to seek permission to access private land. Acreage enrolled in WDFW's "Feel Free to Hunt" and "Register to Hunt" programs can be a good bet, and hunters need to scout out those program signs in the field. McCanna notes that more than 22,000 acres in the south end of the region were recently posted "Feel Free to Hunt."

Game-farm-raised rooster pheasants have also been released on the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area in Ferry County, the Fishtrap Lake site on the Lincoln-Spokane county line, and several other release sites in the south end of the region. Details are posted on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/ewapheas.htm>.

The **modern firearm elk** season runs Oct. 31 through Nov. 8 in several units throughout the region. The southeast district is traditionally the best, with the greatest numbers in the Blue Mountains, but only spike bulls can be harvested.

"Calf survival has improved in recent years, but is still 15 percent below optimum levels, which does have a negative impact on the number of spike bulls available for harvest," WDFW Biologist Pat Fowler said. "The Wenaha sub-herd (GMU-169) still remains below historic population levels, which hurts overall hunting opportunity in the Blue Mountains. But hunters can expect prospects to be similar to previous years."

WDFW Wooten Wildlife Area Manager Kari Dingman said elk hunters should come prepared because there is snow in the upper elevations of the Blue Mountains.

Central district units 124-142 are open for any elk, bull or cow, but private land access must be secured for most hunting. WDFW district wildlife biologists Howard Ferguson and Mike Atamian

recently helicopter-surveyed elk in and around Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge in the Cheney (130) unit and counted a total of 260 elk - 35 bulls, 146 cows, and 79 calves. That total was down compared to previous years of the same aerial survey, but they also saw a herd of about 100 elk just outside the survey area. Including those animals would bring the count above the yearly average of 316. The biologists are currently attempting a ground count and composition of the herd.

Ferguson reminds hunters the refuge is not open to elk hunting this year, but might be by next fall.

For now, private property access permission must be obtained.

WDFW biologist Dana Base says elk are fewer and farther between in the northeast district, but the population does not appear to have been as heavily impacted by the last two winters as white-tailed deer. "Finding elk is the biggest challenge here," he said. "There's so much closed canopy forest where they can effectively hide and sit out the season."

Base said that the modern firearm hunting season for **white-tailed deer** continues through Oct. 30 in units 101-124. Checks of deer hunters just north of Deer Park off Hwy. 395 indicate an average number of hunters and good harvest rates, compared to past years. On Oct. 25, 138 hunters were checked with 15 deer for an 11 percent success rate. Last year on the same weekend, 136 hunters had seven deer for a 5 percent success rate. Late white-tailed deer hunts in units 105-124 will run Nov. 7-19.

Wildlife viewing: Frosty mornings and even snow in some areas are reminders to backyard birdwatchers that now is the time to stock supplemental feeding stations and provide ice-free water sources to enjoy close-up wildlife viewing. WDFW wildlife biologists advise keeping backyard bird feeding stations clean and bird-friendly. For more details check

http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/winter_feed.htm .

Northcentral Washington

Fishing: Methow River hatchery **steelhead** fishing recently expanded, thanks to greater numbers of wild fish moving upriver. Now open is the section from the second powerline crossing upstream from Pateros to the first Hwy. 153 Bridge. The daily limit is four adipose fin-clipped, hatchery-origin steelhead, with a minimum size of 20 inches.

The regulations state that anglers must retain any of these fish they catch, since the open area expansion is intended to reduce the number of excess hatchery-origin steelhead on the spawning grounds. Increasing the proportion of naturally produced spawners is expected to improve genetic integrity and stock recruitment of upper Columbia River steelhead through perpetuation of steelhead stocks with the greatest natural-origin lineage, said Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist.

Anglers are required to release all steelhead with an intact adipose fin. Any steelhead caught with an intact adipose fin may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately. Any steelhead with one or more round holes punched in the caudal (tail) fin must also be released.

Selective gear rules apply, no bait is allowed and a night closure is in effect. Boats with motors are not allowed.

Hunting: WDFW **waterfowl** specialist Mikal Moore reports that the waterfowl hunting season opener in the Columbia Basin had mixed success. "Before the cold weather moves in and **ducks** start to focus on field feeding, hunters should concentrate on shallow water ponds with abundant seeds," he said.

Good bets include Gloyd Seeps Wildlife Area off Road 16 and Stratford Road, the Winchester and Frenchman Regulated Access Areas, small potholes associated with the North Potholes Wildlife Area, the Columbia Basin National Wildlife Refuge's Marsh Unit 1, and Baile Memorial Youth Ranch and Windmill Ranch Regulated Access Areas near the town of Mesa, Moore said.

Moore said **goose** hunters will find thousands of small Canada geese staging in the Stratford Area, feeding on nearby wheat fields. "The birds are taking off to feed at first light and returning to Stratford Reserve around 10:30 a.m." she said. "Mixed in with the Canada geese are a few hundred lesser snow geese and the occasional tundra swan."

WDFW Columbia Basin district wildlife biologist Rich Finger predicts goose hunting will ramp up in November when early season migrant Canada geese (Lesser and Taverners) begin to scatter from their initial staging area at Stratford Lake to alfalfa or grain fields within feeding distance from Moses Lake and the Columbia River.

Finger reminds waterfowlers of lands enrolled in the Corn Stubble Retention Program for public hunting. Fields are typically identified and enrolled during November and locations vary by year. Call or visit the Ephrata regional office for details.

Deer hunting ended Oct. 25 in the region. WDFW Okanogan district wildlife biologist Scott Fitkin reports greatly improved success rates measured at the traditional Chewuch deer hunter check stations in the Methow Valley.

"Check station data from both weekends of the season indicated nearly identical hunter pressure compared to last year," Fitkin said. "But the success rate improved by 88 percent over what we observed last year, despite the issuance of fewer antlerless permits. Later season dates and cooler, wetter weather likely improved the success rate. The average age of harvested bucks was the highest in years, and the body condition of harvested animals appeared to be consistently excellent." No reports in yet on how **pheasant** hunters are faring since the season opened Oct. 24. Hunters who want to take advantage of game-farm-raised rooster releases should see

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/ewapheas.htm> for site details

Wildlife viewing: WDFW waterfowl specialist Mikal Moore says birdwatchers will find thousands of small **Canada geese** staging in the Stratford Area, feeding on nearby wheat fields.

"The birds are taking off to feed at first light and returning to Stratford Reserve around 10:30 a.m." she said. "Mixed in with the Canada geese are a few hundred lesser **snow geese** and the occasional **tundra swan** ."

Frosty mornings and even snow in some areas are reminders to backyard birdwatchers that now is the time to stock supplemental feeding stations and provide ice-free water sources to enjoy close-up wildlife viewing. WDFW wildlife biologists advise keeping backyard bird feeding stations clean and bird-friendly and recommend checking out all the "do's and don'ts" details at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/winter_feed.htm .

Southcentral Washington

Fishing: Paul Hoffarth, WDFW district fish biologist, reports Columbia River **steelhead** fishing in the Tri-Cities area has been picking up in the past week.

Although the steelhead and salmon sport fishery above the wooden powerline towers is closed, the steelhead fishery below the powerline towers is scheduled to continue through April 15, 2010.

"In the Ringold area this past week bank anglers averaged one steelhead for 6.6 hours of fishing and boat anglers averaged one steelhead for 4.8 pole hours, or 2.5 steelhead per boat," Hoffarth reported.

Hoffarth noted that through Oct. 25, an estimated 1,509 steelhead have been caught between the Highway 395 bridge at Pasco/Kennewick and the wooden powerline towers. Of these, 982 hatchery steelhead were harvested and 344 wild steelhead were caught and released.

The three-hatchery steelhead limit for the Columbia River from the Hwy 395 bridge at Pasco/Kennewick upstream to the old Hanford town site wooden powerline towers reverts back to a two hatchery steelhead limit Nov. 1.

Perry Harvester, WDFW regional habitat program manager, says some standard techniques are being used for the steelhead.

"Trolling lighted Brad's Wiggler plugs work at night, and using dyed shrimp with purple/pink/black jigs in various combinations under a float work day or night," he said. "Plugs and

spinners can work during the day as well, but appear less effective than lighted plugs at night. In areas with faster moving water, drifted eggs or shrimp work, too."

Harvester also reports there are still bright **coho salmon** in the Klickitat River and in the Columbia River off the mouth of the Klickitat. The catch limit within that reach of the Columbia River was recently raised to three adults.

Jim Cummins, WDFW fish biologist, reports a few of the region's year-round lakes have recently been stocked with hatchery **rainbow trout**. He notes most rivers and streams are closed after Oct. 31. The exception is the Yakima River catch-and-release fishery, which should continue to provide opportunity this fall until colder weather sets in.

Hunting: Mikal Moore, WDFW waterfowl specialist, reports the Yakima Basin is providing excellent **duck** hunting since the season opener Oct. 17.

Jeff Bernatowicz, WDFW district wildlife biologist, reminds **pheasant** hunters, whose season opened Oct. 24, that the Millerguard release site for game-farm-raised rooster release has moved to the Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area. "Target shooting became a safety problem at Millerguard," he explained. The new Whiskey Dick pheasant release site is located near Whiskey Dick Mountain, with best access from the Interstate 90 exit 115. Go north 1.2 miles through Kittitas until Patrick Ave., turn right on Patrick for 0.2 mile, left on No. 81 Road, one mile to Vantage Hwy., right on for 6.6 miles to an unmarked gravel road entrance.

The **modern firearm elk** season opens Oct. 31 and Bernatowicz reminds hunters that game management units (GMU) 328 (Naneum), 329 (Quilomene), 334 (Ellensburg), and 335 (Teaway) have been changed to a "true spike bull" regulation.

A true spike bull is one with both antlers without branching originating more than four inches above where the antlers attack to the skull.

"The change was made because most of the yearling bulls were being harvested during the general elk season," he said. "The low recruitment has left the Colockum herd well below bull escapement objectives."

Bernatowicz also notes an error in the hunting rules pamphlet - GMU 330 (West Bar) is not open to general season elk hunting.

As for prospects, Bernatowicz expects bull harvest to be down. "Our elk calf ratio data collected in February and March was consistently low across the range," he said. "In the Colockum herd, with a total of 4,000 elk, we have 20 calves per 100 cows and just five bulls per 100 cows. In the Yakima herd, with a total of 9,200 elk, we have 30 calves per 100 cows and 17 bulls per 100 cows. Since calves surveyed in March are spike bulls in the fall, chances of taking one this season are down."

Michael Livingston, WDFW biologist, says elk hunting in the southeast district is limited to lands surrounding the west and south boundaries of the Hanford Reach National Monument (GMU 372).

"Hunts are geared toward addressing crop damage on surrounding wheat farms, vineyards and orchards," he said. "Access is extremely limited to either a couple pieces of state land north of Prosser and Benton City and private land through special permit drawings." Livingston said the best way to secure access is to apply for a special permit through the Landowner Hunt Program. If selected, permit holders are guaranteed a one-day guided hunt.

Most permits are limited to antlerless opportunity for youth hunters, but a few if any elk permits are issued each year. Surveys in January 2009 yielded a total herd estimate of 639 elk with 49 bulls and 15 calves per 100 cows. The high bull ratio is typical for this herd since they can seek refuge on the federal Hanford lands during hunting season. The calf count was below average and was likely a result of the stress the cows experienced from a wildfire that burned in August 2007.

Wildlife viewing: Frosty mornings and snow in some areas are reminders to backyard birdwatchers that now is the time to stock supplemental feeding stations and provide ice-free water sources to enjoy close-up wildlife viewing. WDFW wildlife biologists advise keeping backyard bird feeding stations clean and bird-friendly and recommend checking out all the "do's and

don't's" details at http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/winter_feed.htm