

Two Birds in Grant County Test Positive For First West Nile Virus in State **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Two birds collected this summer from the North Potholes Reserve near Moses Lake are the first birds to test positive for West Nile virus in the state this year. An American white pelican and a mallard duck have tested positive for West Nile virus. Though not typically used for monitoring West Nile virus activity, these birds are among the 326 bird species nationally that have been found to carry the virus. The dead birds were discovered by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife while investigating why an unusual number of birds had died at the reserve in Grant County. State Fish and Wildlife officials sent the birds to the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center for testing. According to the center, American white pelicans are particularly susceptible to the virus.

West Nile virus is unpredictable and there's no way to know how much activity will be seen in a given year. Last year was the state's most active with 38 human infection cases including the first death from the virus. It was also detected in numerous dead birds, horses, and mosquito samples. "We haven't seen West Nile activity as strong this year as we have in previous years, but that doesn't mean we're out of the woods," said Gregg Grunenfelder, environmental health division assistant secretary for the Department of Health. "Mosquitoes are still out there so it's important people continue to take steps to avoid mosquito bites." While it's getting late in the mosquito season, people should continue to protect themselves against [West Nile](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) (www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) by avoiding mosquito bites, at least until the first cold snap that reduces the mosquito populations. Start preparing for the off-season by removing standing water around your home. Clean out gutters, keep water fresh in birdbaths and pet dishes, and fix leaky outdoor sprinklers and faucets. As hunting seasons get under way, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recommends hunters follow U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [guidelines](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/HuntingSafety) (www.cdc.gov/Features/HuntingSafety) to avoid diseases transmitted from animals to people. That includes wearing gloves while handling game, safely field-dressing game, and using proper cooking and storage procedures. This time of year, hunters should also take precautions to avoid mosquito bites. The state Department of Health [encourages people to report dead birds](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) through October using the online dead bird reporting system (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html).