

Wildlife Department Seeking Volunteers to Facilitate Elk Hunt on St. Helens

Local News

Posted by: kbkw

Posted on : August 10, 2012 at 5:30 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is seeking volunteers to participate in a cooperative effort that has provided hunters access to 250,000 acres of private timberlands near Mount St. Helens in the last five years. As in previous years, the Weyerhaeuser Company is prepared to give hunters holding special elk permits additional motorized access to a large portion of the St. Helens Tree Farm, provided that enough volunteers can be found to ensure a safe and orderly hunt. WDFW is seeking dozens of volunteers to help in that effort during special elk-permit seasons scheduled from September through January. Key tasks for volunteers include orienting hunters, staffing access points and maintaining safety buffers between hunters and active Weyerhaeuser operations, said Sandra Jonker, regional wildlife manager for WDFW.

“The success of this program depends on our ability to recruit a dedicated team of volunteers to help us facilitate these permit hunts,” Jonker said. “The amount of timberland that can be opened to hunting is directly proportional to the number of volunteers that sign up, so participation is vital to the continuation of this program.” Jonker noted that the program attracted about 50 to 60 volunteers per year since 2007. To participate in the St. Helens Land Access Program, volunteers can sign up at: WDFW’s website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/about/volunteer/sainthelens/>. WDFW Region 5 Office, 2108 S.E. Grand Boulevard, Vancouver, Wash., (360-696-6211). Bob’s Sporting Goods, 1111 Hudson Street, Longview. Participants will be required to attend one of three orientation sessions, scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. at the following times and locations: Aug. 23 – Natural Resources Building in Olympia, Room 175 A & B, 1111 Washington St. S.E. Sept. 12 – WDFW Regional Office in Vancouver, 2108 Grand Blvd. Oct. 10 – Cowlitz Public Utility District Office, 961 12th Ave., Longview. Volunteer organizations, led by the Southwest Washington Land Access Coalition, have secured funding to reimburse volunteers for mileage accrued for participating in the program. Other partners in the program include Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Cowlitz Game & Anglers, Yacolt Burn Sportsmen Club, Washington State Archer Association, Eyes In the Woods, Vancouver Wildlife League and the Washington State Bowhunters. The partnership between WDFW, Weyerhaeuser and the volunteer organizations is designed to expand hunter access to areas of the St. Helens Tree Farm that lie within Game Management Units 520 (Winston), 524 (Margaret), 550 (Coweeman) and 556 (Toutle). Jonker said the access program – combined with the issuance of additional special hunting permits – has helped to increase harvest levels over the past several years throughout the Mount St. Helens elk herd. That is a key goal under the department’s management plan for the herd, the largest of 10 elk herds in the state. “The department’s management plan calls for reducing the herd size to bring the number of animals into balance with available habitat,” Jonker said. “We really appreciate the role Weyerhaeuser and all the volunteers have played in this joint effort.” The Mount St. Helens Elk Herd plan, adopted in 2006, is available on WDFW’s website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/pub.php?id=00771>.